

Sonoma County Water Agency (Sonoma Water)/Russian River County Sanitation District (District)

West County Water Quality and Recycled Water Supply Feasibility Study (Study)

Stakeholder Committee Meeting #6

January 12, 2026

SUMMARY

Stakeholder Committee Participants:

- Tina Low, North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board
- Steve Trippe, Lower Russian River Wastewater Citizens Advisory Group (CAG)
- Kyla Brooke, Local Realtor
- Todd Hunsdorfer, County of Sonoma
- Rich Holmer, CAG
- Brenda Adelman, Russian River Watershed Protection Committee
- Dan Fein, CAG
- Parastou Hooshialsadat, Sonoma Water
- Andrea Rodriguez, Sonoma Water
- Kent Gylfe, Sonoma Water
- Carlos Diaz, Sonoma Water
- George Lincoln, Sonoma Water
- Kathryn Geis, Consultant
- Sam Magill, Consultant
- Ann DuBay, Sonoma Water
- Aaron Fulton, Sonoma Water

Members of the Public:

- Charles Reed
- Mark Pedroia
- David Upchurch, Graton Community Services District
- Ryan Stapelton, Forestville Water District

Staff, Consultants, and other Agencies present

Stakeholder Committee Members Absent:

- Chad Davisson, Graton CSD and Forestville Water District
- Matt Herman, North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board
- Alexis Ver Berkmoes, Private Citizen
- Debbie Ramirez, D5 Municipal Advisory Council
- Don McEnhill, Russian Riverkeeper
- Matt McDermott, Forestville Water District
- Nathan Quarles, County of Sonoma

NOTE: Meeting materials and a recording of the discussion are available online at

<https://www.sonomawater.org/westcountystudy>.

Action Items and Assignments

1. Stakeholder Committee (Committee) members will provide comments to staff on the Draft Final Study by close of business Friday, January 16th.
2. Staff will reach out to all Committee members to schedule final Committee meetings in Q2 and Q3/Q4, 2026.

Welcome and Introductions

Carlos Diaz, Sonoma Water Deputy Director of Engineering, provided opening remarks on behalf of Sonoma Water and the District. The DRAFT Study was released for public comment in early/mid December 2025. This meeting will be used to garner additional comments from the Committee; the Study will be sent to the North Coast Water Quality Control Board (North Coast Water Board) for review in early February 2026. Additionally,

Carlos provided an overview and updates on the recent wastewater spill from the District treatment facility on January 6, 2026. An investigation is still ongoing regarding the cause of the release. Meeting participants were encouraged to ask any questions; the following discussion was recorded:

- Rich Holmer asked if the cause of the release has been identified, why so much water was entering the system (since houses weren't being flooded) and whether backflow preventers in homes and the collection system would have limited the spill.
 - Carlos responded the cause of the spill is still under investigation. This event was not related to high flood waters, but may have been caused by significant infiltration and inflow (I & I) from recent rainfall. The system is equipped with backflow preventers.
 - Steve Trippe noted the District has previously said the major wastewater issue in the region is caused by aging collection systems and lift stations as opposed to the plant itself. The failure at the treatment plant is a significant concern given that the Study relies on the existing facility in its preferred alternative(s). The facility may not be a viable long-term solution to wastewater solutions in the West County.
- David Upchurch asked if flood flows can enter through toilets in low-lying areas during major flood events or if backflow devices prevent the sewer from entering the house.
 - Carlos confirmed the system does have backflow preventers to reduce this risk.

After opening remarks, Sam Magill, Sacramento State University College of Continuing Education, reviewed the meeting agenda and led introductions. He explained the purpose of the sixth meeting was to review the comprehensive regionalization alternatives for the Study, public comment received to date, and receive additional comments from all meeting participants.

Review Study Scope of Work and Timeline

Parastou Hooshalsadat, Sonoma Water, provided an overview of the Study scope of work and timeline. The Study is the key deliverable from the current phase of work. The second phase will focus on stakeholder engagement and the development of a Project Advancement Report (Report). This Report will focus on concepts supported by the Committee and community members; additional Committee meetings will be scheduled in Q2 and Q3/Q4 2026 to review and discuss the Report.

Overview of DRAFT Study and Public Comment Received to Date

Kathryn Gies, West Yost Engineering, provided a brief overview of the DRAFT Study, including its conclusions in Chapter 9. The full DRAFT Study can be found online at <https://www.sonomawater.org/westcountystudy>. The Study is focused on wastewater treatment options and conveyance needed to support regionalization, including the incorporation of unsewered communities in the project area. Following the Study overview, the following discussion was recorded:

- Rich asked if the Study team reached out to the Sonoma Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) for input on governance of potential new wastewater districts in the West County.
 - Kathryn responded that governance is not in the scope of the Study, which focused on technical feasibility of regionalization alternatives. Parastou added that governance will be addressed in more detail in the Report.
- Steve noted the Monte Rio/Villa Grande Study included recommendations and cost allocations for collection and wastewater treatment systems, and asked if the Study could include this information. The existing District facility doesn't seem like a viable option for regionalization alternatives in the Study.

- Kathryn noted the Study identifies two local alternatives to address regional wastewater needs. If the District facility is not viable, Study Alternative 1c (all treatment at a new Forestville/Graton facility) becomes the preferred solution.
- Kyla Brooke commented the serviceable lifespan of many wastewater facilities is 10-20 years according to the Study; modern septic systems will likely last longer than that. Has the Study looked at just upgrading existing septic systems instead of a new regionalized system? Individual septic systems would also prevent the type of large-scale failures like the recent District spill.
 - Kathryn confirmed the 20-year lifespan is fairly standard for analysis purposes, but major infrastructure components last much longer. Some equipment like pumps would need periodic replacement.

Following clarifying questions, Kathryn provided an overview of public comments received to date on the DRAFT Study. The Study was released for public comment on December 9th, with one comment received from Dave Coleman, Forestville resident and district engineer at Forestville Water District. The comment included several components:

- Report is thorough, but conclusions may not align with realities of operating small WWTP and CSDs.
- Solutions should address ratepayer costs for West County wastewater system; economy of scale is possible by combining small systems.
- Analysis demonstrates that user rates could be less for the combined users of Occidental/Graton/Forestville compared to their respective existing rates, if these systems are combined (Alternative 1a). Further economy of scale is predicted if the flows of Guerneville are added – resulting in a 50% reduction in estimated rates (Alternative 1c).
- Larger economy of scale under the expert regionalization alternatives (Alternatives 2a and 2b) is NOT predicted.
- Rates for each of the West County districts are estimated to be higher with these alternatives.
- Alternative 1B (RRCSD only) was eliminated early in the analysis, but should not have been.
- Expanding RRCSD plant is more practical than building a new FWD plant.
- Alternative 1C (FWD only) would require a new effluent outfall downstream of Steelhead Beach would likely cause community concerns.
- 1B is listed as having a low resiliency score, but there is no documented flood or seismic threat to the RRCSD facility.
- 1B has a low long term regulatory compliance score due to ongoing compliance issues during peak [Russian River] flows. An improved collection and treatment system would address this issue; bringing additional wastewater flows to FWD would increase environmental risk due to the location of the facility from its proximity to tributaries of Green Valley Creek.
- Hybrid Alternative 3b (Guerneville to Windsor and Occidental/Graton/Forestville combined at Forestville) is a preferred alternative. This does not make practical sense as the pipeline from Guerneville would pass through Forestville.

Kathryn noted Alternatives 1a, 1b and 1c represent the greatest economies of scale. The export and combined scenarios (Alternatives 2a-3b) have significantly higher costs and were included in the analysis primarily at the request of the Committee. Alternative 1b (all flows treated at the District) may not be viable based on the recent spill. Additional updates to the Study based on the comment received may include the following information:

- Chapters 2 and 3 likely need to be enhanced to better reflect:

- The District has both current and potential future (under climate change) flood risks (where FWD has none).
- The District has high to very high earthquake liquefaction susceptibility (compared to Forestville with very low risk).
- Space constraints at the District site significantly limit its potential for expansion. Unlikely to be able to construct a fourth clarifier, which limits secondary treatment capacity. Unlikely to be able to accept more flows at some point (even all flows predicted for this study).
- The District is further from larger population areas and not ideal for supporting long-term regional growth.

Discussion: Committee Comments on DRAFT Feasibility Study

Following the presentation discussed above, Sam opened the discussion to additional comments by Committee members and meeting participants. The following discussion was recorded:

- Rich noted he didn't receive the Study until December 19th and requested a comment extension. Additional comments were as follows:
 - Section 9.2 of the Study states that the District facility has excess capacity, but this is only during the dry season. The recent spill demonstrates that it can overflow even in non-flood conditions. This facility is failing and in need of major improvements.
 - Governance and financing are critical for successful implementation of wastewater solutions and are not addressed in the Study.
 - Expanding discharge in winter months is not a good idea. These flows will pass areas used for domestic wells, and may not be in compliance with new standards for PFAS and hormone disruptors.
- Kyla Brooke noted the impacts of regionalization may trigger new assessments for existing properties; this may have a significant impact on property values and taxes. Kyla also commented the Study does not include information on impacts to loans or multi-unit residential housing. Finally, she noted the Study does not include an option for upgrading existing septic systems instead of a regionalized option.
- Dan Fein agreed engineered septic on each parcel may be the best available option in some cases.
- Steve noted the Study did not analyze innovative alternatives such as purple pipe and suggested the Study or Report should look at both cost to individual homeowners and agencies for these types of forward-looking solutions.
- Todd Hunsdorfer expressed appreciation for the quality of work in the Study, and suggested it closely follows input provided by the Committee in previous discussions.
- Carlos provided insight that costs to individual landowners for modern, high-end septic could be substantially higher than a regionalized approach, and suggested there are significant improvements to the District facility that could occur under the Study alternatives. Carlos also acknowledged frustrations stemming from the most recent spill, and suggested implementation of robust Study alternatives will help address those issues in the future.
- Kathryn acknowledged that conclusions in Chapters 8 and 9 of the Study should be updated based on the conversation and the recent spill. She also noted the costs of sending flows to Windsor and the Geysers are likely prohibitive. Discussion of directing flows to the Geysers in particular would require discussions with Windsor.
- Tina Low said the Study alternatives are supposed to meet environmental compliance requirements. The recent spill shows some alternatives may need updating to ensure this compliance. Kathryn

agreed, and noted the District's Master Plan may also need to be revisited as well to include improve equalization capacity for accommodating peak flows.

Closing Comments

Committee members will send comments on the DRAFT Study to staff by Friday, January 16. Staff will also contact all Committee members to schedule the next round of Committee meetings on the Report (**see Action Items 1 and 2**). Kent Gylfe, Sonoma Water Director of Engineering, thanked participants for attending and provided closing remarks.