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 #4

August 27, 2025

SUMMARY

Stakeholder Committee Participants:

- Matt Herman, North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board
- Tina Low, North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board
- Steve Trippe, Lower Russian River Wastewater Citizens Advisory Group (CAG)
- Dan Fein, CAG
- Chad Davisson, Graton CSD and Forestville Water District
- Kyla Brooke, Local Realtor
- Todd Hunsdorfer, County of Sonoma
- Rich Holmer, CAG
- Brenda Adelman, Russian River Watershed Protection Committee
- Matt McDermott, Forestville Water District

Members of the Public:

- Brian Grant, CAG
- Dave Coleman, Brelje& Race Consulting Engineers
- Andrew Cary
- Bart Deamer
- Craig Cochran
- Cynthia Strecker
- Elizabeth Cary
- Jim Stallman
- Pete Lescure, Lescure Engineers
- Mark Pedroia
- Michelle McDonnell
- Nick Thayer
- Olga Gishizky
- Sarah Yardley
- Tia Resleure

Staff, Consultants, and other Agencies Present

- 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
- Mona Doughtery, North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board
- Aaron Fulton, Sonoma Water
- Ann DuBay, Sonoma Water
- Cassandra Stinson, Sonoma Water
- Ché Casul, County of Sonoma

Stakeholder Committee Members Absent:

- Alexis Ver Berkmoes, Private Citizen
- Debbie Ramirez, D5 Municipal Advisory Council
- Don McEnhill, Russian Riverkeeper
- 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. Staff will follow up with all Committee members on whether the November 12, 2025 Committee meeting will be held in-person or virtually.

Welcome and Introductions

Kent Gylfe, Sonoma Water Director of Engineering, thanked participants for attending and provided opening remarks to the Stakeholder Committee (Committee) on behalf of Sonoma Water and the Russian River County Sanitation District (District).

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 fourth meeting was to review refined regionalization alternatives for the Study with incorporated cost analysis information and discuss unsewered community cluster analysis.

Review Study Scope of Work and Timeline

Parastou Hooshialsadat, Sonoma Water, provided an overview of the Study scope of work and timeline. The purpose of the Study is to assess the feasibility and benefits of combining four existing districts within the West County, evaluate the potential for regional projects to serve unsewered communities, assess the amount of recycled water available for reuse, and evaluate the benefits of regionalization on climate adaptation and resiliency. Currently, the Study is focused on analyzing unsewered communities; the next step is focused on assessing the amount of recycled water available for reuse.

Parastou noted that this is the forth Stakeholder Committee meeting. The next meeting is scheduled for November 12, 2025, and will focus on recycled water benefits. The draft feasibility study will be submitted to the North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board in November 2025. The final Project Advancement Report is expected to be completed in the third quarter of 2026.

Refined Evaluation of Study Alternatives

Kathryn Gies, West Yost Engineers, provided an overview of refined regionalization alternatives for the Study based on Committee feedback, the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) and an economic/cost analysis. After considering feedback and available analysis, staff and the consultant team narrowed the list of alternatives to the following:

- Alternative 1a: Develop and improve two separate regional facilities at the District (including Monte Rio/Villa Grande flows) and at the Forestville Water District(FWD)/Graton County Sanitation District (GCSD)
- Alternative 1c: One facility directing all flows to Forestville/Graton wastewater treatment plant(s).
- Alternative 2a: Export all West County flows to Windsor wastewater treatment plant.
- Alternative 2b: Export all West County flows to the Santa Rosa wastewater treatment plant.
- Alternative 3b: Export District and Monte Rio/ Villa Grande flows to the Windsor wastewater treatment plant; and treat Forestville and Graton (including Occidental flows) flows to a Forestville/Graton wastewater treatment plant.

Alternatives 1a, 2a, and 3b were preliminarily identified by the Committee as preferred alternatives.

Kathryn also provided a refined cost analysis for all refined alternatives including both capital expenditures and a 20-year operations and maintenance costs. The table below provides an overview of projected costs.

Cost Component	Alternative 1a: Two Local Facilities	Alternative 1c: One Facility at FWD	Alternative 2a: Export to Windsor	Alternative 2b: Export to the Laguna WWTP	Alternative 3b: Treat at GCSD/FWD; Export RRCSD to Windsor
CapEx	$84.1 M	$251.1 M	$296.1 M	$273.5 M	$312.5 M
20-Year Present Worth OpEx	$9.5 M	-$56.0 M	-$14.9 M	-$14.9 M	-$13.2 M
Total 20-Year Project Cost	**$93.6 M**	**$197.7 M**	**$281.2 M**	**$258.6 M**	**$299.3 M**

Please note that costs listed above do not include conveyance or treatment related to unsewered communities, or potential needs to expand recycled water infrastructure. These additional costs are currently under evaluation and development.

After the presentation of alternatives, the following discussion was recorded (staff responses are provided as sub-bullets where available):

- Dan Fein asked if additional costs for unsewered communities would be similar to/applied to all alternatives.
    - Kathryn responded in many cases they will be similar, but the costs of conveyance from unsewered communities may be higher for some alternatives than others. As noted above, this analysis is currently under evaluation.

Unsewered Community Cluster Evaluation

Kathryn presented an overview of the unsewered community cluster evaluation. A geographic information system (GIS) analysis was conducted by a consultant for the County of Sonoma to score unsewered areas in the West County based on a series of potential opportunities and challenges including:

- Proximity to existing sanitation district service area boundaries (opportunity)
- Proximity to major roads/highways such as highway 116 or the Bohemian Highway (opportunity)
- Slope of parcels (challenge)
- Rating for septic tank absorption (challenge)
- Proximity to 100-year floodplain (challenge)
- Proximity to wells (challenge)

Based on this analysis, a total of twelve clusters were identified for *potential* connection to a regionalized alternative, including the areas:

1. Guerneville South of River
2. Guerneville North of River
3. Northwood
4. Highway 116 East of Guerneville
5. Summerhome Park Road
6. Hacienda and Hollydale (note: Disadvantaged Communities)
7. River Road North of Forestville
8. Forestville
9. Highway 116 East of Graton
10. Graton West
11. Camp Meeker (note: Disadvantaged Communities)
12. Monte Rio/Villa Grande

The next step for analyzing priority unsewered areas includes estimating dedicated collection system costs for each cluster, developing costs for major new or upsized conveyance pipelines to wastewater treatment plants, estimating costs for expanded treatment, and comparing alternatives with unsewered communities.

After the presentation of unsewered community clusters, the following discussion was recorded (staff responses are provided as sub-bullets where available):

- Steve Trippe noted the County has limited information available on unsewered communities and asked where the data for this analysis came from.
    - Kathryn responded the team used geographic and geological information only from the County's Onsite Wastewater Treatment Systems (OWTS) feasibility study. More information on OWTS is available online at https://gis-owts.sonomacounty.ca.gov/.

Discussion: Opportunities and Challenges for Applying Unsewered Community Clusters to Refined Alternatives

Sam provided a series of questions to help guide the discussion on the refined alternatives and unsewered community clusters, including:

- What additional feedback or concerns do you have about the top five alternatives based on the new information around capital and operating costs?
- What questions do you have about the identified Community Clusters? What's missing?
- Which alternatives are most supportive of connecting unsewered communities? Which may be more challenging? Why?

The following discussion was recorded (staff responses are provided as sub-bullets where available):

    - Steve noted that because many of the Monte Rio parcels are very steep, the average cost of septic-to-sewer for a Monte Rio parcel may be higher than the costs in other clusters. The consultants may want to reconsider that number before applying it to other clusters. Kathryn agreed and said the team needs to revisit the assumptions in the Monte Rio/Villa Grande Study.
- Rich Holmer commented the District has a history of illegal discharges, and the idea of discharging treated water to the Russian River may not gain a lot of support from the public.
- Matt McDermott asked if recycled water benefits have been applied to all of the regionalization alternatives.
    - Kathryn responded there appears to be more opportunities for recycled water in the Forestville/Graton area with more vineyards and quarries than the Guerneville area. Any new regional wastewater treatment plant should be near areas where recycled water can be used. The recycled water analysis is currently underway and will be presented at the next Committee meeting.
- Chad Davisson asked if costs to and revenue generated by new recycled water users coming online as a result of the Study will be factored into the analysis.
    - Kathryn confirmed these findings will be incorporated into the Study.
- Pete Lescure noted that several years ago, Lescure Engineering distributed a letter to vineyards about recycled water use to vineyards but didn't get a positive response. He also asked if a larger capacity for both treatment and recycled water use in the Graton area is included in the Study.
    - Kathryn confirmed this will be included in the Study.
- Brenda Adelman commented the District has discharged approximately 2.5 million raw or partially treated gallons of sewage during flood events, and 50% of parcels are in the floodplain. Brenda then asked if these factors were considered in the analysis.
    - Kathry responded no, the Study analysis focuses only on treatment plant options. The Study team recognizes there are significant challenges to collection systems- these challenges are common to *all* alternatives. Costs for collection system upgrades would only be applied to customers of each new or upgraded facility, but that analysis is separate from this Study.

- Brenda Adelman asked if the Study team has modeled how much additional treatment capacity is needed to avoid historical challenges/illegal discharges.
    - Kathryn confirmed capacity questions have been analyzed.
- Tina Low asked if information on recycled water amounts is available for each export scenario.
    - Kathryn responded this is being analyzed now; amount and cost information should be available soon.
- Rich Holmer commented that unsewered communities need sealed collection systems with solid matter grinders. Regardless of treatment system capacity improvements, major collection system upgrades will be needed.
- Pete Lescure asked if pressure or gravity collection systems are analyzed as part of the Study.
    - Kathryn confirmed pressure systems are being assumed for cost analysis using the assumptions in the existing Monte Rio/Villa Grande study. Following the outcomes of this Study, an analysis of solid raw sewage vs. liquid only waste will need to be conducted.
- Brenda Adelman asked if the Study assumes unsewered community clusters will be required to connect.
    - Kathryn responded this is ultimately a policy consideration outside the scope of this Study.
    - Rich Holmer responded that connections should be a mandated; US Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) has previously said grants will not be available unless connection is required.
- Rich Holmer asked if coastal communities such as Jenner are excluded from the Study.
    - Kathryn confirmed coastal communities are excluded.
- Todd Hunsdorfer noted the OWTS feasibility study looked at wastewater management solutions beyond hooking up to a sanitary sewer system. Some recommendations included developing governance structures for community-based systems or pursuing more localized alternatives in specific cases.
- Steve Trippe noted if the Monte Rio/Villa Grande study moves towards implementation, pipes will run near additional parcels (some of which may be outside identified community clusters) and asked if these parcels are factored into the Study.
    - Kathryn said there are clear benefits to hooking up as many parcels as possible to defray costs.
- Steve Trippe noted the Monte Rio/Villa Grande study considers three options: onsite septic improvements, community cluster septic systems, and exporting wastewater. The only viable options identified are community-wide systems or export. The study is not complete at this time.
- Brenda Adelman asked how cost estimates are developed given the uncertainties around construction costs from tariffs and interest rates.
    - Kathryn agreed there is a high level of uncertainty. Not enough information is available right now to account for things like additional costs from tariffs.
- Kyla Brooke noted new septic systems or sewer connections could trigger property assessments that label existing structures as “new construction.” These assessments can result in much higher rates; some protection is needed for homeowners to avoid significant tax increases.
    - Kathryn noted “septic to sewer” is a major initiative from the State Water Resources Control Board. This issue is important and needs to be brough to policy makers. Groups like the California Association of Sanitation Agencies (CASA) may be able to provide assistance. More information on CASA is available online at https://casaweb.org.
- Rich Holmer noted that definition of community clusters is dependent on how the overall Study area is defined. Within the existing Study area, the clusters look appropriate.

- Mark Pedroia asked if there is any way to avoid the historical challenges the District has had with illegal discharges in a new Monte Rio system.
    - Kathryn confirmed that a modern pressure system will avoid the stresses of the District's gravity system.

Closing Comments

Kent provided closing comments and noted there have been issues with collection systems in the District. Collection systems throughout the Study area will be a major issue if the Study moves towards implementation, but the overall unsewered analysis is sound. He also noted that a lot of comments were received on recycled water benefits and opportunities; this will be the focus of the next Committee meeting on November 12th at 4pm. Sam noted the next meeting may be held in person at the West County Services Center, located at 16390 Main Street, Guerneville. Staff will follow up with Committee members to determine whether the meeting will be held in person or virtually (**see Action Item #1**).