



PROJECT ADVANCEMENT REPORT

Required by Order R1-2023-0049 as an enhanced compliance action (ECA)
West County Water Quality and Recycled Water Supply Feasibility Project

Prepared for Sonoma Water by Sacramento State College of Continuing
Education

October 28, 2026

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Executive Summary

Summary of Project Purpose

Western Sonoma County, often referred to as West County, extends inland from the Pacific Coast and includes communities along and around the lower Russian River. Some of these communities are served by local sewer systems, while others rely on onsite wastewater treatment systems (OWTS), such as septic systems. Much of the region's sewer infrastructure was built with federal and state funding made available following legislation passed in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Today, this infrastructure is aging and has contributed to unauthorized discharges into the Russian River. Older or poorly maintained septic systems can also contribute to water quality problems. At the same time, more recent regulatory requirements may limit some property owners' ability to replace existing septic systems, creating additional wastewater management challenges for the region. As a result of storm-related wastewater discharges in 2019 and subsequent investigation by the North Coast Water Board, the Russian River County Sanitation District (RRCSD) was required to execute an [Enhanced Compliance Action \(ECA\)](#) that explores regionalized approaches to wastewater treatment in West County. The [West County Water Quality and Recycled Water Supply Feasibility Study \(Feasibility Study\)](#) is the outcome of that directive. This Project Advancement Report (PAR) seeks to distill information from the Feasibility Study and stakeholder outreach to date to provide one potential path forward for improving wastewater management in the West County. A brief overview of the PAR structure is provided below.

Section 3: Feasibility Study Findings

The goal of the Feasibility Study is to identify and evaluate alternatives for a regionalized wastewater treatment system in West County that would improve system reliability, increase climate resiliency, and reduce environmental impacts from unintended discharges. The study is structured around a systematic, two-phase process. The first phase identified, screened, and evaluated eight alternatives for regionalizing wastewater treatment across the four existing West County wastewater agencies. These four existing agencies are as follows:

- Russian River County Sanitation District (RRCSD)
- Forestville Water District (FWD)
- Graton Community Services District (GCSD)
- Occidental County Sanitation District (OCSD)

After an initial screening, three potential alternatives were excluded, leaving five preferred alternatives for the second phase of analysis. The second phase further evaluated each alternative to determine the infrastructure needed to receive, treat and recycle wastewater from nearby unsewered areas. Following this analysis, Feasibility Study alternative 1a was selected as the preferred option for regionalization. Section 3 of the PAR examines the Feasibility Study findings and recommendations in more detail.

Section 4: Overview of Stakeholder Committee and Outreach Efforts

As part of the Feasibility Study, Sonoma Water engaged Sacramento State University's College of Continuing Education to conduct stakeholder and community outreach. Initial interviews with regional agencies, community-based organizations, and West County residents were conducted to better understand opportunities and concerns associated with a regionalized approach to wastewater management. Based on this outreach, a Stakeholder Committee was formed to review Feasibility Study findings, discuss potential solutions, and provide input throughout the study process. All Stakeholder Committee meetings were open to the public and promoted through the project website, social media, and email communications. Additional outreach included engagement with existing wastewater service providers and regulatory agencies. Section 4 describes these outreach efforts and their outcomes in greater detail.

Section 5: Project Implementation Roadmap

After reviewing outcomes from the engineering analysis as well as stakeholder and community feedback, Sonoma Water/RRCS D staff (further referred to as "staff") developed a potential implementation roadmap based on a modified version of Alternative 1a, a two-treatment-hub approach that would maintain treatment in the Guerneville and Forestville/Graton areas. Section 5 describes funding and governance needs, as well as a possible implementation schedule for specific components of this system including improvements to existing RRCS D facilities, the consolidation of small systems at GCSD, FWD, and OCSD, and connecting unsewered communities.

Section 6: Conclusions and Recommendations

The PAR seeks to combine information from the Feasibility Study, stakeholder engagement outcomes, and initial feedback on the implementation roadmap with suggested next steps for a regionalization effort. Section 6 describes key conclusions and recommendations from this effort.

Section 1: Introduction

Western Sonoma County's forests, farms, and scenic small towns stretch inwards from the Pacific Coast along the Russian River and its tributaries. The communities distributed throughout the region are year-round homes for the region's residents and highly desired destinations for tourists. This distinctive landscape creates challenges for sewage collection, treatment, and disposal: until the middle of the last century, most West County communities relied on septic systems, cesspools and other onsite wastewater treatment systems (OWTS) for wastewater disposal.

In the 1950s, the Occidental and Forestville communities and the County of Sonoma came together to create sewer districts (the Occidental and Forestville County Sanitation Districts) and build collection systems and wastewater treatment plants (WWTP). The Occidental County Sanitation District (OCSA) is now managed by Sonoma Water while the Forestville system is operated by the Forestville Water District (FWD). Similarly, the area that would become the Russian River County Sanitation District formed boundaries in 1949, but a formal wastewater management district was not established until the 1970s. Following the passage of California's Porter-Cologne Water Quality Control Act in 1969 and the national Clean Water Act in 1972, state and federal funds flowed to local communities to support the development of regional wastewater treatment solutions. Between 1976 and '79 the community of Graton used these funds to form the Graton County Sanitation Zone which included both a collection system and treatment plant. In 1983, Guerneville worked with the County of Sonoma to construct the RRCSD Guerneville wastewater treatment plant, using a combination of federal and state Clean Water Act grants matched by funds from local obligation and revenue bonds. The RRCSD is now managed by Sonoma Water; the Graton system is operated by the Graton Community Services District (GCSA). Combined, these four agencies serve a population of roughly 10,500 people.

For decades, these collection and treatment systems have supported economic development within these communities while improving public health and water quality by reducing the amount of harmful sewage entering the Russian River and its tributaries. These sewer systems are now 40 – 70 years old, leading to increased maintenance and operations costs and, in some cases, specific cases of sewage spills or unauthorized discharges. Although numerous spills at the Guerneville WWTP plant have occurred since RRCSD was founded, the largest unauthorized discharge to date occurred in January 2026, resulting in more than 5.5 million gallons of untreated effluent discharging into the Russian River. Sewage discharges from OWTS during high water and rainy events are also not uncommon, and as systems age, a fear exists that further discharges are likely if not inevitable. Unauthorized discharges from WWTPs and aging or failing on-site treatment systems pose environmental and human health

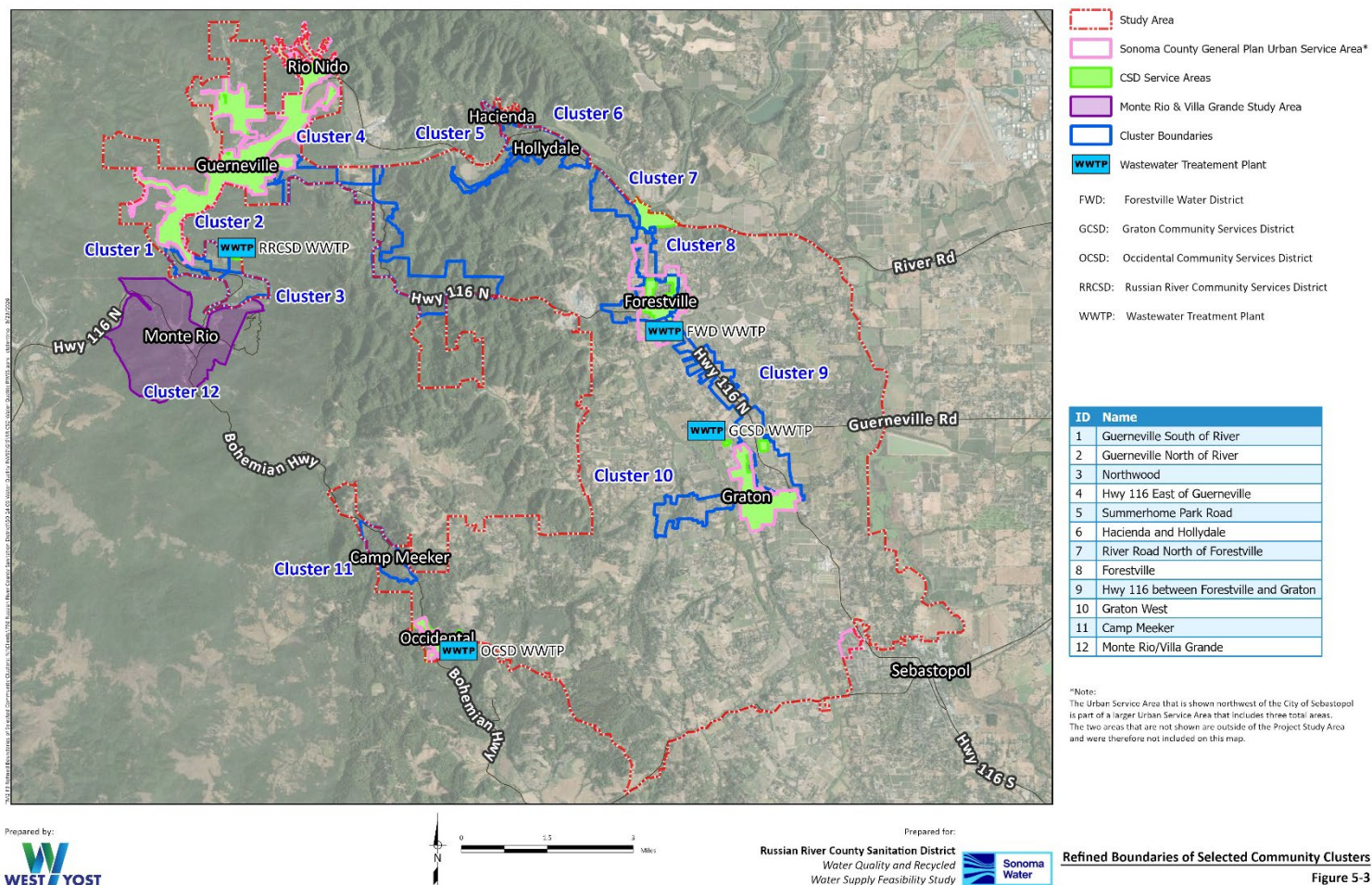
hazards. While unauthorized discharges from WWTPs historically occur during high water events in the rainy season from October-April, failing OWTS may discharge waste throughout the year.

At the same time, wastewater treatment standards and regulations have become more stringent, federal funds have slowed, and state funding has become largely dependent on voter-approved bond measures. As a result, local residents have had to shoulder much of the cost of maintaining, operating, and improving this aged infrastructure. In smaller communities like Occidental – with only around 100 ratepayers – this means residents pay among the highest sewer rates in the state, despite partial subsidies from Sonoma Water.

Concurrently, river communities that were once largely populated during the summer by vacationers are now filled with year-round residents. As West County's population has grown, pockets of residential development have emerged outside the boundaries of the region's sewer districts and "urban service areas". These boundaries, defined by Sonoma County's General Plan, would need to be updated to allow for the update of aging infrastructure and expansion of wastewater services to communities not currently served by an existing district. Sonoma County began its update to the General Plan in 2026.

Sewage treatment challenges such as these are not unique to west Sonoma County. Similar issues exist throughout California, leading the California State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board) to establish programs and funding to help unsewered communities join sewer districts and to help districts "regionalize" through consolidation of small districts or by larger districts absorbing small districts. Locally, several areas are taking steps toward consolidation, including the transition of the South Park County Sanitation District to the City of Santa Rosa and the Town of Windsor taking responsibility for wastewater services in the Airport-Larkfield-Wikiup Sanitation Zone.

This statewide trend poses an important question: Could regionalization benefit West County sanitation systems by increasing efficiency and providing a larger population base to share costs, compared with continuing to maintain the current four systems? Would a larger regional system(s) be able to collect and treat wastewater from unsewered communities?



1: Feasibility Study Project Area

The [West County Water Quality and Recycled Water Supply Feasibility Study \(Feasibility Study\)](#) investigated these questions and answers with a qualified “yes.” Specifically, the Feasibility Study identified several potential benefits if the smaller systems are combined and sewage is treated locally, compared with significantly more expensive option of transporting sewage to larger regional wastewater systems outside of West County. The project area, including relevant wastewater service boundaries, is provided in the map below.

The Study identified the most viable approach as a regional system that treats wastewater at two hubs: one in the Forestville/Graton area, the other in Guerneville. Over time, these two hubs could provide treatment to 12 clusters of currently unsewered properties, representing a population of roughly 7,500 people. Further discussion of this preferred option appears in Section 3 below.

This proposed solution builds on several efforts currently underway, including:

- A pipeline that is being designed to send Occidental’s untreated wastewater to Graton for treatment;
- Ongoing conversations between sewer service providers in Forestville and Graton to determine opportunities for shared treatment of wastewater, expanded recycled water

storage and use, along with continued discharge of recycled water to tributaries of the Russian River; and

- Nearly \$48 million in federal funding (through the State Clean Water Revolving Fund Program) that has been received by the RRCSD in Guerneville to upgrade the sewer plant's headworks (where sewage enters the treatment facility), as well as its eleven lift (pump) stations and its force mains – all critical junctures to reduce the risk of overflows and improve system reliability.

The last point – the significant funding received by RRCSD – is particularly important in light of the January 2026 sewage spill at the Guerneville WWTP. The spill highlighted previously undefined vulnerabilities of the aging system and impacted stakeholder acceptance of regionalization solutions that include RRCSD. By investing in infrastructure improvements in its collection and treatment systems, RRCSD hopes to build system resiliency, reduce future spills, and rebuild stakeholder trust even as climate change brings larger, more intense storms to the region.

It is important to note the Feasibility Study and this PAR represent an initial planning approach to regional improvement for wastewater management. They are not intended to serve as a full engineering design or final selected alternative, but rather one potential path forward for the benefit of the West County's communities and environment.

As the lead agency for the development of this PAR, Sonoma Water would like to thank West County communities for their decades-long commitment to addressing complex wastewater issues including (but not limited to) the Russian River Watershed Protection Committee (RRWPC), the Lower Russian River Wastewater Citizens Advisory Group (CAG) and most importantly for this effort, the Feasibility Study Stakeholder Committee (Stakeholder Committee). Sustained and focused outreach to these and other groups will be crucial for the successful development and implementation of a regionalized wastewater management system that can serve the West County for decades to come.

Section 2: Summary of Feasibility Study Findings

The Feasibility Study included site visits, interviews, document review, and consultations with both a Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) and the Stakeholder Committee. The Feasibility Study was developed over several months through an iterative process, in which alternatives were evaluated and refined based on input from the TAC and Stakeholder Committee. The process began with a “big picture” look at several options for regionalizing West County sewer services. This resulted in the development of eight alternatives described in Table 1 below.

Alternative	Short Description	Detailed Description
Local Facilities Scenarios		
1a*	Two Local Facilities	RRCSD /Monte Rio/ Villa Grande to RRCSD WWTP FWD/OCSD/GCSD flows to FWD /GCSD WWTPs
1b	One Facility at RRCSD	All West County flows to Expanded RRCSD WWTP
1c	One Facility at FWD	All West County flows to FWD /GCSD WWTPs
Export Scenarios		
2a*	Export to Windsor	All West County flows to Windsor WWTP
2b	Export to Santa Rosa	All West County flows to Santa Rosa WWTP
2c	Export to Windsor and Santa Rosa	RRCSD/Monte Rio/Villa Grande to Windsor WWTP FWD/OCSD/GCSD flows to Santa Rosa WWTP
Combination Scenarios		
3a	Treat at RRCSD GCSD/FWD Export to Santa Rosa	RRCSD/Monte Rio/Villa Grand to RRCSD WWTP FWD/OCSD/GCSD flows to Santa Rosa WWTP
3b*	RRCSD Export to Windsor Treat at GCSD	RRCSD/ Monte Rio/ Villa Grande to Windsor WWTP FWD / OCSD/ GCSD flows to FWD/GCSD WWTPs

Table 1: Initial Feasibility Study Alternatives (* indicates alternatives with the highest initial support from the TAC and Stakeholder Committee)

Following the identification of these eight alternatives, each was analyzed using a series of quantitative and qualitative criteria designed to help select the most viable option for regionalization. Quantitative criteria primarily focused on construction and operating costs over a 20-year period; qualitative criteria are described in Table 2.

Criteria	Description
Reliability/ Ease of Operation	Are the proposed infrastructure components relatively simple to operate and maintain for the West County agencies?
Long-Term Regulatory Compliance	Does the alternative entail a long-term reliable treatment solution for meeting effluent quality requirements? Is there more risk for non-compliance?
Flexibility for Adding Unsewered Communities	To what extent does the proposed alignment allow for connections to unsewered, disadvantaged communities of interest?
Local Recycled Water Benefits	Does the alternative support West County recycled water opportunities?
Environmental	Is there potential for impacts to flood plains, wetlands, endangered species, historical and archaeological properties? Are efforts associated with handling wastes minimized? Is the alternative energy efficient and/ or minimize power usage?
Resiliency	Is the proposed or retained infrastructure vulnerable to flooding, climate change and/or seismic impacts?
Ease of Implementation	Would the project construction be relatively simple, with regard to both treatment improvements and pipelines? What level of governance structure and agency coordination would be required? Can the project be reasonably phased into smaller elements to increase funding resources?

Table 2: Qualitative Scoring Criteria

Each step of this process and an in-depth description of the alternatives and recommendations can be found in the Feasibility Study, as described below.

- Chapter 2 describes the service areas, regulatory requirements, treatment processes, recycled water uses, and challenges and opportunities of the four west Sonoma County wastewater treatment systems in the Feasibility Study area: RRCSD, GCSD, FWD, and OCSD.
- Chapter 3 identifies eight possible alternatives for regionalizing West County sewer services, including consolidating small systems, exporting wastewater to larger regional treatment plants outside West County, and combinations of these approaches. The chapter then narrows the eight alternatives to five based on rankings from both the TAC and Stakeholder Committee.
- Chapter 4 presents a high-level feasibility analysis for each of the five short-listed alternatives to determine the most viable regionalization approaches. The analysis includes an assessment of the costs of constructing pipelines, pumps, and plant improvements; the anticipated 20-year operating costs; as well as several qualitative factors developed in partnership with the TAC and Stakeholder Committee.

- Chapter 5 identifies 12 clusters of currently unsewered properties that could be added to a regional system.
- Chapter 6 reviews challenges and opportunities associated with the use of recycled water for each of the five alternatives.
- Chapter 7 analyzes the resiliency of the four existing WWTPs and unsewered parcels in the West County to flooding and other anticipated climate change impacts.
- Chapter 8 presents a similar analysis to the one described in Chapter 4, but incorporates the additional infrastructure needed to serve the 12 unsewered communities. It concludes that alternatives that treat wastewater locally (rather than exporting wastewater to large treatment plants in Windsor and Santa Rosa) were the most cost-effective regionalization strategies.
- Chapter 9 summarizes the Feasibility Study's findings, identifies key considerations for each agency, and provides recommendations for future work.

Based on the analysis presented in the Feasibility Study as well as input from the TAC and Stakeholder Committee, alternatives 1a and 1c were identified as the most viable options:

Alternative 1a:

In this approach, West County's wastewater would be processed at two treatment hubs: one located at the current RRCSD plant, the second serving the combined FWD/GCSD system. The FWD/GCSD hub would also treat wastewater generated in the OCSD service area. In addition to serving existing customers, the hubs could provide treatment for nearby unsewered community clusters.

This alternative originally envisioned that FWD/GCSD would end its current practice of discharging recycled water into tributaries of the Russian River during the winter and would instead recycle its water year-round through expanded storage and irrigation including possible disposal at local quarries. However, a 'zero-discharge' system such as this requires a significant and costly expansion of FWD/GCSD's recycled water distribution system.

Estimated cost of Alternative 1a: the cost of constructing and operating the proposed system over 20 years is approximately \$796 million as summarized in Table 3 below including both capital costs (i.e., physical construction and improvements) and 20-year, present worth operations and maintenance costs (OpEx).

Estimated Cost Component	Estimated Costs (in millions of dollars)
Capital Costs (physical improvements)	\$716
RRCSD	\$15
FWD/GCSD	\$75
Unsewered Communities	\$626
20-Year, Present-Worth O&M (OpEx)	\$80
Estimated Total 20yearLifecycle	\$796

Table 3: Estimate Capital and OpEx Costs for Alternative 1a

Modified Alternative 1a:

A modification to Alternative 1a would upgrade the FWD/GCSD treatment plant to include biological nutrient removal allowing it to continue discharging recycled water into tributaries of the Russian River during winter months. This approach would avoid the significant expansion of recycled water storage and distribution infrastructure required under the original Alternative 1a. The modified alternative combines the financial benefits of the two-treatment hub approach with some of the qualitative benefits identified for Alternative 1c (described below). While the 20-year lifecycle cost of Modified Alternative 1a was not calculated, the Feasibility Study estimates the construction costs would be substantially lower than under the original Alternative 1a. This revised estimate does not include OpEx. **Modified Alternative 1a was ultimately identified as the preferred approach and serves as the basis for the implementation roadmap presented in Section.**

Under this alternative, the vast majority of capital improvement costs (\$626 million) are expected for the connection of unsewered communities to one of the two WWTP hubs described above. Current population estimates for all unsewered community clusters identified in the Feasibility Study suggest this could result in costs of \$142,886 per home/parcel. **It is important to note** that costs for some unsewered communities may be higher or lower than others based on proximity to existing sewer lines and WWTPs or topography (homes on steep lots with minimal access to planned sewer routes) are necessarily harder to connect than others. Moreover, there is no expectation that homeowners would bear the entire cost of septic to sewer conversion, or that connection will be required as any part of the Feasibility Study and this PAR. As new unsewered communities express support for septic to sewer conversion, specific finance plans and concentrated outreach will be needed to implement the actions discussed in Section 5 below.

Alternative 1c:

In this approach, all West County sewage would be treated at a single, new wastewater treatment plant constructed at the FWD site. Wastewater generated by unsewered communities would also be treated at this plant. The new treatment plant would provide adequate treatment to allow for continued winter-season discharge. All other treatment plants (GCSD, RRCSD, OCSD) would be converted to storage and lift station facilities.

This alternative ranked the highest in seven qualitative criteria (reliability, resiliency, regulatory compliance, environmental, ease of implementation, flexibility for adding unsewered communities, and recycled water opportunities) after review by members of both the TAC and Stakeholder Committee. However, the alternative includes significant costs to the RRCSD's current ratepayers due to the closure of the local treatment plant, pipeline and pump station construction to convey wastewater to the new plant, as well as a portion of the cost from the construction and operation of this new facility at the FWD site. As a result, modified alternative 1a was selected as the preferred option in the Feasibility Study. A cost estimate for alternative 1c is provided in Table 4 below.

Estimated Cost Component	Estimated Costs (in millions of dollars)
Capital Costs (physical improvements)	\$806
RRCSD	\$196
FWD/GCSD	\$48
Unsewered Communities	\$561
20-Year, Present-Worth O&M (OpEx)	-\$2
Estimated Total 20 year Lifecycle Cost	\$803

Table 4: Estimated Capital and OpEx costs for Alternative 1c

Parallel Wastewater Management Improvement Efforts

The regionalization alternatives identified in the Feasibility Study also build on several wastewater infrastructure and planning efforts already underway in West County. These include:

- A pipeline designed to convey Occidental's untreated wastewater to Graton for treatment.
- Ongoing conversations between Forestville and Graton to explore shared wastewater treatment, expanded recycled water storage and use, and continued winter discharge of recycled water to tributaries of the Russian River.

- Nearly \$48 million in federal funding received by the RRCSD to upgrade the treatment plant's headworks (where sewage enters the treatment facility), eleven lift stations, and its force mains – improvements intended to reduce the risk of overflows and improve system reliability.

Planned RRCSD improvements are particularly important following the January 2026 wastewater overflow, which highlighted vulnerabilities in the system during periods of heavy rainfall. Continued investment in the RRCSD collection system will be necessary to improve reliability and support its potential role in a future regionalized system.

The Feasibility Study recommends that future planning, regardless of the regionalization approach selected through further analysis and outreach, account for the potential connection of currently unsewered properties. As the agency responsible for oversight of local OWTS, Sonoma County is the anticipated lead in evaluating strategies for moving these efforts forward, including opportunities to consolidate management and operations across the various community collection systems. Existing wastewater agencies (RRCSD, FWD, GCSD, OCSD) can plan future projects while keeping in mind the need to accommodate potential flows from currently unsewered areas. Lastly, the Feasibility Study recommends the need to better define the costs associated with connecting unsewered properties outside their current service areas. The implementation roadmap in Section 5, based on modified alternative 1a, identifies further cost analysis needs.

Benefits of Regionalization Utilizing Alternative 1a and Drawbacks of Inaction

Modified Alternative 1a is one potential path forward for a regionalized approach to wastewater management in the West County. By combining the Graton, Forestville, and Occidental WWTPs, this approach avoids duplicative treatment investments by sharing treatment processes instead of constructing separate, upgraded facilities. It also assumes upgrades to the Guerneville WWTP will be constructed to address known deficiencies *and* create additional capacity for new customers currently utilizing OWTS to join the system, creating economies of scale by expanding the overall ratepayer base. Finally, it will benefit unsewered communities by shifting wastewater management responsibilities from individual homeowners to established utilities, reducing liability for individual property owners as well as the need to replace aging systems in an increasingly complex regulatory environment. Based on the findings of the Feasibility Study and the Monte Rio Villa Grande Wastewater Solutions Feasibility and Preliminary Design Report, additional benefits of regionalization under Modified Alternative 1a include:

Graton Community Services District (GCSD) / Forestville Water District (FWD)

- Avoids duplicative treatment investments. Both GCSD and FWD face significant treatment upgrades to meet future regulatory and capacity needs. A regional approach allows the agencies to share major treatment processes rather than each constructing a separate set of upgraded facilities.
- Creates economies of scale. Consolidating treatment for a larger combined service area allows common facilities, equipment, controls, maintenance activities, and operating resources to serve more customers, reducing the amount of infrastructure required on a per-customer basis.
- Builds on existing physical integration. GCSD and FWD already have intertie infrastructure and coordinated recycled-water operations, so regionalization can expand an existing operational relationship potentially increasing opportunities for recycled water deliveries.
- Allows optimization between the two existing sites. The report's regional concepts use the two sites together—with the FWD facility providing space for treatment improvements and the GCSD site providing significant storage.
- Improves adaptability for future growth and regulatory changes. A single coordinated regional strategy gives GCSD and FWD more flexibility to plan and implement phased improvements or respond to potential future regulatory requirements, reserve space for future treatment processes, and add capacity for currently unsewered parcels. This flexibility may be more limited with two separate plants.

Russian River County Sanitation District (RRCSD)

- Uses available treatment capacity to create economic value rather than leaving it unused. The report identifies the potential capacity at the RRCSD WWTP for treating wastewater from nearby unsewered areas, particularly Monte Rio/Villa Grande and other parcels near the existing service area. Making productive use of available capacity can provide additional revenue to offset costs to existing RRCSD ratepayers that were paid for assets that were previously completed.
- Potentially allows for necessary plant investments to be shared with new customers. The RRCSD WWTP needs condition-related and hydraulic improvements for long-term reliability. If regional customers are added, improvements that provide capacity for both existing and new users can be allocated among those users rather than being funded solely by the existing RRCSD customer base.

- Spreads fixed treatment and operating costs over a larger customer base. Adding nearby unsewered communities increases the number of customers benefiting from the RRCSD treatment system. To the extent that existing capacity can be used, this can distribute fixed staffing, maintenance, administration, and treatment costs across more customers rather than concentrating them among existing RRCSD ratepayers.
- Potentially moderates future rate pressure by growing the revenue base. Adding appropriately structured regional connections creates an opportunity for additional support toward meeting longer-term capital and O&M obligations, including improvements that may be needed to respond to potential future regulatory requirements or to deliver recycled water to a larger customer base.

Unsewered Communities

- Potentially avoids creating and funding a new standalone wastewater-management organization. An OWTS management district would require its own ongoing program for inspections, monitoring, recordkeeping, enforcement, administration, and coordination of individual system repairs or replacements. By connecting to an existing regional wastewater agency, much of that institutional and administrative capacity already exists.
- Shifts specialized wastewater operations to an established utility. A regional connection allows treatment, regulatory compliance, laboratory functions, staffing, emergency response, and asset management to be handled by an existing wastewater agency rather than developed specifically for a relatively small unsewered community. The regional report similarly recommends consolidating management and operations of unsewered community systems because doing so can significantly reduce ongoing O&M costs.
- Reduces the economic exposure associated with difficult or failing OWTS sites. Several other West County communities contain properties where flooding, steep slopes, limited absorption capability, proximity to waterways, and other site constraints can make replacement OWTS increasingly difficult or expensive. A regional sewer connection reduces the likelihood that individual homeowners face unusually high site-specific costs when an OWTS reaches the end of its useful life.
- Allows treatment costs to be shared with a much larger existing customer base and asset base. Instead of the unsewered community independently funding all wastewater-management functions, a regional approach could allow for a purchase of

capacity in an established treatment system and share common treatment assets, staffing, and infrastructure with existing customers.

- Provides a clearer mechanism for major public funding and interagency cost sharing. A centralized sewer project involves substantial upfront infrastructure, but it can be organized as a defined public capital project involving the County, an existing wastewater agency, and the community. The regional report anticipates that connecting unsewered communities will require multi-agency coordination and funding partnerships. This can be advantageous relative to a pathway in which improvements must occur incrementally across hundreds of privately owned OWTS.
- Reduces long-term financial uncertainty for individual property owners. An OWTS-management district may improve oversight, but it does not eliminate the underlying responsibility to maintain, repair, or replace hundreds of individual treatment and dispersal systems. Regionalization converts much of that uncertain, property-specific liability into a more predictable utility-service model with shared infrastructure and planned capital replacement.

Section 3: Stakeholder Engagement Outcomes

Stakeholder Engagement Approach

In the summer of 2024, Sacramento State University's College of Continuing Education was engaged by Sonoma Water to conduct outreach through direct conversations with agencies, community-based organizations (CBOs), and residents associated with wastewater treatment in the Feasibility Study project area, including:

- Representatives from Sonoma County government
- The Lower Russian River Wastewater Citizens Advisory Group (CAG)
- The North Coast Water Board
- Forestville Water District (FWD)
- Graton Community Services District (GCSD)
- Sonoma Water
- Residents of the Lower Russian River corridor within the unincorporated community Guerneville, Northwood, Monte Rio, Villa Grande, and others
- Sonoma Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO)
- Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) such as Russian Riverkeeper and the Russian River Watershed Protection Committee

Following initial outreach to these parties, interviews with community members were conducted to better understand opportunities and concerns associated with a regionalized approach to wastewater management.

The interviews focused on four primary areas; a complete review of interview themes is provided in Appendix B:

- Understanding of current wastewater management challenges
- Potential solutions to these challenges
- Limitations of potential solutions
- Outreach and coordination with other wastewater and recycled water efforts such as the Monte Rio and Villa Grande Wastewater Solutions Feasibility and Preliminary Design Report. Willingness to participate in a West County Feasibility Study Stakeholder Committee (Stakeholder Committee)

RRCSO maintained an active stakeholder engagement process throughout the Feasibility Study. Following completion of the interviews in October 2024, a Stakeholder Committee comprised of local government representatives, West County residents, and wastewater

management/community service providers was convened to provide input on the Feasibility Study.

From October 2024 through August 2026, quarterly Stakeholder Committee meetings were held to present study progress, review technical findings and alternatives, discuss key issues and concerns, and gather input from participating stakeholders. Committee members reviewed proposed regionalization alternatives, participated in the evaluation and ranking of those alternatives, and provided input on costs. They also considered opportunities to serve currently unsewered areas, potential uses for recycled water, and other factors that could affect regionalization. The following is a list of stakeholders who participated in these meetings:

West County Residents
Brenda Adelman*, Russian River Watershed Protection Committee
Alexis Averbuck*, Northwood resident
Kyla Brook*, Local realtor and Lower Russian River Wastewater Citizens Advisory Group (CAG)
Dan Fein*, CAG
Gary Helfrich*, CAG
Rich Holmer*, CAG
Steve Trippe*, CAG
Brian Grant*, CAG
Dave Coleman, Brelje & Race Consulting Engineers
Don McEnhill, Russian Riverkeeper
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
Mark Pedroia
Cynthia Strecker
Alexis Ver Berkmoes
State Water Quality Control Board
Dania Jimmerson
Erica Kalve
North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board
Matthew Herman*
Tina Low*
Charles Reed
Mona Dougherty
Kelsey Cody
County of Sonoma
Ché Casul
Todd Hunsdorfer*
Nathan Quarles

Debbie Ramirez, District 5 Municipal Advisory Council
Mark Bramfitt, LAFCO
Graton Community Services District
Chad Davisson*
David Upchurch
Forestville Water District
Matt McDermott*
Ryan Stapelton
Russian River County Sanitation District and Occidental County Sanitation District
Kent Gylfe, Sonoma Water Director of Engineering
Carlos Diaz, Sonoma Water Deputy Director of Engineering
George Lincoln, Sonoma Water Engineer IV and RRCSD Operations Engineer
Andrea Rodriguez, Sonoma Water Principal Program Specialist
Parastou Hooshalsadat, Sonoma Water Engineer IV
Cassandra Stinson, Sonoma Water Technical Writing Specialist
Aaron Fulton, Sonoma Water Principal Engineer
Steve Koldis, Sonoma Water Engineer IV
Consultants
Ann DuBay
Kathryn Geis, West Yost & Associates, Inc.
Sam Magill, California State University Sacramento
Jonathan Bell, California State University Sacramento

*Regular Stakeholder Committee meetings participants

The project also included outreach to the public and engagement with technical and regulatory partners. As part of the PAR development effort, a public workshop was held on June 17, 2026 to solicit feedback on one possible approach to implementing modified alternative 1a and the associated implementation roadmap. Small group discussions provided input on project implementation, governance, as well as funding and finances. A post-workshop community survey provided an additional opportunity for workshop participants and other community members to provide input on project priorities, concerns, funding, and future implementation.

Sonoma Water also convened a Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) comprised of staff and leadership from existing wastewater service providers in the project area (RRCSD, GCSD, FWD, and OCSD). During these meetings, TAC members reviewed the various alternatives proposed in the Feasibility Study and provided technical input on their viability and implementation. Beyond these efforts, additional outreach was conducted with regulatory agencies and organizations, including Sonoma LAFCO and the State Water Resources Control Board. Meeting summaries, recordings, and a Stakeholder Committee roster are available on the [project website](https://sonomawater.org/westcountystudy) (sonomawater.org/westcountystudy).

Key Themes from Stakeholder and Community Engagement

Stakeholder and community engagement provided important input on both project implementation and the potential opportunities and concerns associated with a regionalized approach to wastewater management. Across the different outreach activities described above, several recurring themes emerged regarding the issues participants considered most important as the project moves forward. The key themes identified through this engagement are summarized below; a detailed list of specific input provided across all outreach venues is provided in Appendix B. Community survey results are provided in Appendix C. **It is important to note that the themes below and the in the appendices represent the individual opinions of Stakeholder Committee and community members.**

Cost and Affordability

Throughout the outreach process, participants consistently raised concerns about the costs associated with potential wastewater solutions and their affordability for residents and businesses. During the initial stakeholder assessment, participants identified cost as the primary factor that could limit general acceptance of potential wastewater solutions. These concerns continued throughout the Stakeholder Committee process and subsequent public engagement. Stakeholder Committee members raised concerns about uncertainties

associated with total project costs, the availability of public funding, and the potential impact on future rates. Participants in the June 2026 public workshop similarly emphasized the importance of affordability and expressed concern about how infrastructure improvements and potential sewer connections could affect individual property owners and businesses.

Environmental Protection and Water Quality

Participants consistently emphasized the importance of protecting the Russian River and surrounding environment when considering potential wastewater solutions. Across the Stakeholder Committee, public workshop, and community survey, participants identified protecting water quality, preventing spills, and reducing the environmental impacts of aging wastewater infrastructure as important priorities. Some Stakeholder Committee members called for solutions that go beyond simply meeting regulatory requirements and provide a high level of environmental protection.

Participants also raised concerns about the potential environmental impacts of the solutions themselves. These included concerns about construction impacts and the effects of converting currently unsewered properties to sewer service. Together, the feedback reflected a desire for wastewater improvements that address existing environmental problems while also carefully considering the potential impacts of new infrastructure.

System Reliability and Existing Infrastructure

Participants emphasized the importance of improving the reliability of existing wastewater systems before adding new demands or expanding service. Concerns focused particularly on RRCSD, where aging infrastructure, capacity issues during heavy rainfall and river flooding, and a history of unauthorized discharges have raised questions about the system's ability to accommodate additional flows. These concerns became particularly salient following the January 2026 spill, with some participants questioning regionalization approaches that would rely on the existing RRCSD system without substantial improvements. Community survey respondents similarly identified reliable wastewater service and preventing sewage overflows and spills as important priorities. As one respondent put it, "Reliability. Please fix OUR system, keep it within the pipes."

Unsewered Communities and Potential Sewer Connections

Participants expressed differing views about whether and under what circumstances currently unsewered properties should connect to a regional wastewater system. Concerns included the cost of decommissioning septic systems and connecting to sewer, ongoing wastewater service costs, potential requirements to connect, and whether functioning septic systems need to be replaced. At the same time, participants identified circumstances that could make

connection more acceptable, including financial assistance, failure or risk of failure of an existing septic system, environmental benefits, and improved reliability. Among survey respondents with septic systems, willingness to connect varied considerably, reinforcing the importance of providing clear information about costs, benefits, and potential requirements as planning moves forward.

Governance and Local Representation

Participants emphasized the importance of maintaining meaningful local representation as decisions about regionalization move forward. Public workshop participants discussed whether governance could be provided through existing entities or would require a new regional structure, while also stressing the need for representation from the different communities that would be served. Participants also noted that determining governance early in the process could be important for securing outside funding. Community survey respondents similarly identified local representation in governance and oversight as an important priority.

Transparency and Continued Community Engagement

Participants emphasized the importance of clear, transparent communication and continued opportunities for community input as the project moves forward. Across the outreach process, participants called for clearer information about project costs, funding, potential impacts, and the benefits and tradeoffs associated with different wastewater solutions. Community survey respondents similarly identified transparency, regular communication, meaningful opportunities for public input, and clear information about costs among their highest priorities for future planning. The feedback also suggests that continued engagement will be particularly important as more detailed information becomes available and individual communities are asked to consider how potential projects could affect them.

Role of Stakeholder and Community Engagement

Stakeholders and technical advisors were involved throughout development of the Feasibility Study. They reviewed and provided input on potential regionalization alternatives, participated in the evaluation and ranking of alternatives, and considered costs, recycled water opportunities, and options for serving currently unsewered areas. This process provided opportunities for community priorities and concerns to be considered alongside the technical analysis as the Feasibility Study was developed and refined.

Broader community engagement continued as the project moved from the Feasibility Study toward development of the Project Advancement Report and potential implementation roadmap. The June 2026 public workshop and subsequent community survey provided

additional opportunities for residents and other community members to respond to the proposed direction, identify concerns and priorities, and provide input on issues that will need to be considered as planning continues. Many of the concerns raised through this broader engagement, including affordability, environmental protection, system reliability, local representation, and transparency, were consistent with issues raised earlier in the stakeholder engagement process.

Outreach Outcomes and Recommendations

The Stakeholder Committee provided invaluable feedback on the Feasibility Study specifically and the regionalization concept more generally. Prior to the January 6, 2026, RRCSD spill, Committee participants were generally supportive of the concept of regionalization, with the caveat that solutions must be cost effective *and* be highly protective of water quality while maintaining local sovereignty in management decisions. They also agreed the engineering analysis in the Feasibility Study accurately defines unsewered communities within the project area, although depending on how project boundaries are defined, the specific number of unsewered parcels will fluctuate.

As noted in Section 3 above, the engineering analysis of a two-hub treatment system (as described in Alternative 1a) utilizing the RRCSD and FWD/GCSD/OCSD facilities shows a total projected cost of \$796 million, with RRCSD's share \$15 million, FWD/GCSD/OCSD's share \$75 million, and unsewered communities' share \$626 million. At the request of Stakeholder Committee members, the final Feasibility Study analysis includes anticipated costs related to septic decommissioning, new collection systems, and connection fees to new sewer lines for unsewered communities. Nonetheless, Stakeholder Committee members cautioned that the uncertainties around total costs, potential public funding (or lack thereof) to conduct septic-to-sewer upgrades, and fluctuating future wastewater rates are likely to raise concerns for the general public, particularly in unsewered areas. They noted that cost will likely be the determining factor for the long-term success of a regionalization effort and cautioned that unsewered individuals may not wish to connect to a sewage system absent significant financial incentives or regulatory orders. Additionally, septic to sewer conversion could trigger new assessments for existing structures, resulting in significant property tax implications for homeowners and businesses.

It should be noted that while cost was consistently identified as the most important factor from the Stakeholder Committee, it was not *the only* consideration. Stakeholder Committee members fully acknowledged the Russian River is the most important asset of and defining feature for all west county communities. Some members suggested that, given the large

investment required to develop a fully regionalized wastewater system, alternatives should be explored to create a “gold standard” for protection of water quality and the environment. Staff acknowledge the critical importance of water quality and environmental protection. All alternatives analyzed in the Feasibility Study are assumed to help involved sanitation entities meet or exceed current regulatory water quality standards. Specific projects within this broader regionalization approach will undergo individual, rigorous environmental analysis as design and permitting efforts move forward.

Based on community and Stakeholder Committee feedback following the January 6 RRCSD spill, stakeholder sentiment towards regionalization shifted significantly. Committee members note that while the RRCSD facility may have the capacity to treat increased flows assuming unsewered communities are connected, the collection system is subject to significant infiltration and inflow (commonly referred to as I&I) issues which can lead to events like the January 6 spill. They suggested that while the engineering analysis supports the use of existing facilities at RRCSD and FWD/GCSD, a history of spills and unauthorized discharges at RRCSD suggest that it may be more appropriate to construct a single new, significantly expanded facility at FWD/GCSD *or to* export wastewater flows to Windsor/Santa Rosa. Additionally, they noted residents in Monte Rio-Villa Grande (the largest unsewered community in the project area) are actively pursuing the formation of a special septic district to avoid connecting to a larger system.

Conclusions from Stakeholder Outreach

Aging infrastructure, an expanded population, and the transition from rural/agricultural to urban usage have exacerbated wastewater issues in the west county for decades.

Regionalizing wastewater management is an important potential strategy for addressing these issues and building resilience to climate change and population growth for decades to come. While the Feasibility Study and development of this PAR represent an important first step in the outreach process to analyze potential paths forward for a more resilient future in the west county, concerns in impacted communities persist on two primary issues:

- Cost (including capital improvement costs, operating expenditures/future service fees, and potential reassessment of property values)¹

¹ The Feasibility Study cost estimates include anticipated costs associated with septic system decommissioning, new collection systems, and sewer connection fees. The PAR is a planning-level document, and detailed property-specific costs, such as sewer laterals, permits, plumbing modifications, septic tank abandonment, and other onsite improvements, must be developed as specific engineering design is conducted for all project elements.

- Environmental protection and sustainability (including the ability of existing facilities to adequately manage and treat existing flows as well as increase capacity for projected future flows by bringing in currently unsewered communities)²

As individual components of a regionalized system are designed, permitted and built, concentrated outreach to all impacted communities will be required to create transparency and build partnerships for successful project implementation. In addition to engineering design for each of these components, robust finance and governance plans should be developed as early as possible. By providing this information to impacted communities, people will have the information they need to understand potential financial impacts or rate changes (for properties with existing sewer service) or adequately assess the benefits or drawbacks of joining the new system (if they are currently unsewered). Specific suggestions for outreach and the development of finance and governance plans are provided in Sections 5 and 6 below.

² The PAR is a planning-level document and does not establish quantitative environmental benefits for individual projects. Specific environmental and water-quality benefits, performance objectives, and applicable regulatory requirements will be identified and evaluated at the project level as individual components of the regionalization program proceed through design, environmental review, and permitting.

Section 4: Implementation Roadmap

This section lays out a *potential* straw proposal as a roadmap for planning and construction of a regionalized approach to wastewater management in the West County based on the following components:

- Governance
- RRCSD Improvements
- Graton Community Services District (GCSD), Occidental County Sanitation District (OCSD), and Forestville Water District (FWD) Consolidation
- Unsewered Community Clusters

The roadmap seeks to organize actions into near term (0-5 years), mid term (5-15 years) and long term (15+ years). This organization has the twofold effect of prioritizing the most critical updates to existing infrastructure, such as upgrading the RRCSD wastewater treatment plant, in parallel with sequential planning activities.

Funding and Finance

The two-treatment hub Alternative 1(a) estimates a total lifecycle cost of \$796 million, with a large majority (\$626 million) coming from unsewered communities that convert from septic to sewer. Given the large investment estimated for complete implementation of the regionalized system, community members cite cost as a significant, if not determinative, factor for the successful implementation of a regionalized system. For example, the Monte Rio and Villa Grande Wastewater Solutions Feasibility Study estimates the total capital cost for individual OWTS for individual properties will likely exceed capital costs associated with connecting to a regionalized system, but operational costs may be significantly less.³ It should be noted this analysis acknowledges OWTS improvements will vary depending on property-specific considerations such as slope, availability of dispersal areas, size of lots, etc. In some cases, the costs of OWTS improvements or replacement may be considerably higher or lower depending on a variety of factors. Moreover, grants and public financing may not be available to individual property owners outside of legally defined entities such as special districts, community services districts, or water districts, and funding from the State Water Board is generally not available for the installation of *new* septic systems through the Clean Water

³Sonoma Water (January 2026). Monte Rio and Villa Grande Wastewater Solutions Feasibility Study and Preliminary Design Report, Sonoma Water, January 2026, pp 52.

State Revolving Fund Program (State Revolving Fund). This is distinct from the requirements in California Water Code §13291.5, which provide financial support for repair, replacement, or upgrades to existing OWTS necessary to meet regulatory requirements.

Conversely, numerous funding options at the state level may be available for a regionalized system. As part of the outreach process, staff from the State Water Board presented the potential for up to \$50 million for individual septic to sewer conversion efforts through Senate Bill 1215 in 2019 and the State Revolving Fund. These funds, administered by the State Water Board's Division of Financial Assistance (DFA), are available to state-designated Disadvantaged and Severely Disadvantaged Communities (DAC and SDAC, respectively). Under SB 1215, each individual DAC may be eligible for the maximum funding amount. It should be noted that the study area includes several disadvantaged communities (DAC), including communities in the lower Russian River area. DACs are defined as census tracts with an annual median household income (MHI) that is less than 80% of the statewide annual MHI; SDAC are communities with an MHI less than 60% of the statewide average. Currently, the State Water Board limits funding for each domestic residence to \$175,000. Although this amount is likely to cover *most* septic-to-sewer conversions including decommissioning an old septic system and connecting to sewer, it should be noted that individual property owners cannot apply unless they are part of a legally defined entity.

In addition to SB 1215 funds, a number of no- and low-interest loan programs may also be available for project planning and implementation, but the exact program or funding source for each component will be defined during the planning process for each component. A list of potential funding sources is provided in Appendix D.

Planning for the ongoing costs associated with properties that undergo septic to sewer conversion present additional long-term financial challenges. Although septic to sewer investments may reduce environmental and public health risks, they could result in partial property tax reassessments that can increase annual property-related costs for homeowners and businesses. These reassessments vary by parcel and depend on the extent of improvements needed, making it difficult for communities to predict long-term financial obligations at the household level. In addition, the operations and maintenance (O&M) costs for new collection systems in formerly unsewered areas may exceed current expenditures for onsite systems, requiring careful evaluation of future rate structures and funding needs. As a result, transparent, early communication about post-conversion costs—including taxes, rates, and assessments—will be essential for communities to make informed decisions about whether and when to pursue sewer connections.

The roadmap assumes that specific funding and financing plans for capital improvements and operating expenses, as well as rate studies, will be required for each component in the tables below.

Governance

To permit the expansion of sewer services in West County, the Sonoma County General Plan needs to formally update and enlarge Urban Service Area boundaries in communities that currently lack access to public wastewater infrastructure. The General Plan update would also need explicit policies supporting sewer expansion, coordinated septic-to-sewer conversion planning, and recognition of regional wastewater solutions. In addition, the General Plan needs to align with Sonoma County Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) processes by integrating requirements related to spheres of influence, annexation prerequisites, and district capacity to serve new areas. Updating General Plan maps, environmental review assumptions, and service-planning frameworks would further establish the authority and conditions under which sewer expansion could occur, providing a clear pathway for transitioning from aging septic systems to modern, environmentally protective wastewater service.

The County of Sonoma's ongoing General Plan update provides an important foundation for long-term wastewater planning, particularly through its role in defining urban service areas—the geographic boundaries within which public services may be extended, including sewer. In many West County communities, these urban service areas are not defined or do not encompass growing pockets of development, limiting homeowners' ability to transition from aging septic systems to a more reliable sanitary sewer service. As the General Plan update considers land-use designations, community growth patterns, and infrastructure needs, it offers an opportunity to evaluate where establishing or expanding urban service areas may support environmental protection, public health, and future wastewater reliability. Clear service area boundaries help determine whether sewer connections are feasible and allow local agencies, LAFCO, and affected communities to plan for potential septic-to-sewer conversions where they are environmentally beneficial, financially viable, and consistent with countywide planning goals.

Notwithstanding necessary changes to service area boundaries, conversations with LAFCO staff indicate LAFCO may be supportive of any governance structure meeting the following criteria:

- The project in question (in this case, wastewater management) is likely to achieve its stated goals (i.e., regionalized wastewater management).
- Significant public support exists for the effort.

- The governing body of the proposed system provides a legally accountable body selected by impacted members of the public.
- The governing body is not duplicative/does not create greater administrative or governance burdens than existing structures such as Community Service Districts or Water Districts.
- Evidence can be provided for a sustainable financial plan for the entity managing/operating the proposed system.

The roadmap below assumes a combination of consolidating some existing wastewater service providers and expanding the sphere of influence of others to include unsewered communities. Numerous recent examples of successful consolidation and/or expansion exist within Sonoma County, with a focus on fire district or sanitation district reorganization. A comprehensive list of recent LAFCO efforts is available online at <https://sonomalafco.org/proposals-and-projects>.

Additionally, Sonoma Water is currently involved in two consolidation efforts: The transition of the South Park County Sanitation District (South Park) to the City of Santa Rosa (city) and the transition of the Airport-Larkfield-Wikiup Sanitation Zone (ALWSZ) to the Town of Windsor (town). The consolidation of these small districts with nearby larger systems is summarized below and illustrative of the type of gradual, planned approach envisioned in the roadmap.

- South Park County Sanitation District – City of Santa Rosa: Sonoma Water currently manages and operates the South Park district, providing sewer services for about 4,500 equivalent single-family dwellings in south Santa Rosa. The district includes the Roseland area, which in 2017 was annexed into the city of Santa Rosa. As part of the annexation process, Sonoma Water and the city negotiated a multi-year process to eventually turn over the operation and management of the South Park district to the city. The agreement was approved by LAFCO and is underway. Currently, wastewater collected in the district is sent to the Laguna Wastewater Treatment Plant operated by the city and collection system improvements are coordinated with the city. In addition, the flat annual sewer rate charged to South Park district customers is slowly being transitioned to the tiered, monthly rate structure used by the city.
- Airport-Larkfield-Wikiup Sanitation Zone (ALWSZ) – Town of Windsor: In 2023, the ALWSZ piloted a recycled water partnership with the town. In the wet season, the zone provided space for the town to store recycled water. The recycled water was returned for use in the town in the dry months. An estimated 45 million gallons of recycled water was stored by the zone and used in Windsor in 2023. This recycled water partnership used existing infrastructure and provided a steppingstone for continued partnership. In February 2024 the Windsor Water District Board of Directors took the

first step toward the potential annexation of a portion of the zone by requesting LAFCO consider an expansion of the Windsor Water District sphere of influence and annexation of a specified portion of the ALWSZ service area. The goal of consolidation is to increase efficiency and use capacity at the town's wastewater treatment plant while making an estimated \$50 million in upcoming capital upgrades at the ALWSZ treatment plant unnecessary to meet state compliance requirements.

Community Engagement and Stakeholder Outreach

Implementation of the roadmap for existing wastewater service providers and unsewered communities will require focused outreach for every component discussed below.

Stakeholder Committee members repeatedly stressed the need to “meet community members where they are,” to build support for costly and time-intensive infrastructure projects. For each roadmap component below, specific communications plans should be developed and implemented to discuss funding/finance options and increase transparency for each project in the most directly impacted communities (i.e., unsewered communities, RRCSD, GCSD/OCSD/FWD). This should include a mechanism for moderated discussions with impacted community members to explain the impact of *no action* from a cost, environmental, and regulatory perspective to develop a baseline understanding of what benefits each project can provide.

Distinct communities within the West County have different needs: what works well in one area may not in others for a variety of reasons such as internet connectivity, age/demographic differences, or ability to participate in protracted engagement efforts. As noted throughout the PAR, projects are unlikely to proceed without significant community support; a robust communications and engagement strategy is critical for developing that support.

Roadmap Overview

This roadmap represents one potential path forward for the implementation of a regionalized wastewater management approach based on the Feasibility Study two-treatment hub alternative 1a as discussed in Section 3. The roadmap assumes that the major physical implementation components associated with RRCSD improvement and a consolidated GCSD/OCSD/FWD can move forward independently; however, actions associated with the connection of unsewered communities are dependent on the completion of infrastructure improvements by these agencies. By creating standalone projects, the roadmap provides flexibility for unsewered communities to join a regionalized wastewater management system as funding and public support emerge.

RRCSD, FWD, GCSD, and OCSD are the only governing agencies being considered for this exercise. No new governance structure is currently proposed. The agencies may expand service areas or merge with one another, which could potentially result in the formation of a new governance agency upon completion of the project. Communities that construct new collection systems could merge with existing agencies or potentially form their own governance structure.

Roadmap color coding

	Governance
	Finance
	Implementation
	Outreach & Communications

Hub -1 Russian River County Sanitation District and Nearby Unsewered Community Cluster

	Action	Lead Agency	Start Time	Duration (Years)	Status
	Complete force main and lift station improvements	RRCSD	2026	4	Underway
	Complete I&I study and prioritization plan for collection system improvements	RRCSD	2026	2	Underway
	Complete WWTP capacity analysis to identify improvements for 5 MGD peak flow	RRCSD	2026	1	Underway
	Develop communications plan for community and stakeholder outreach for near, mid, and long term projects. Communication plan implementation should be carried out across all three phases.	RRCSD	2027	1	
	Work with Permit Sonoma to outline specific service area boundary modification needs and incorporate into the General Plan update.	Varies by Agency/Community	2027	2	
	Execute regionalization MOU and link it with regionalization benefits and pathogen TMDL action plan in the Russian River Watershed to establish overall program structure and implementation team	Applicable Parties	2027	2	
	Outreach to and prioritize unsewered community clusters (high, medium and low) based on readiness and funding potential	Defined by MOU	2027	5	
	Secure funding for and design WWTP capacity and expansion improvements for 5 MGD peak flow	RRCSD	2028	3	
	Secure funding for collection system capacity and I&I improvements	RRCSD	2028	2	

	Individual Board actions for existing districts and County committing to regionalization strategies (Alternative 1a modified)	Applicable Parties	2029	1	
	Evaluate and identify the appropriate existing agency to serve each community cluster	All	2030	2	
	Secure funding for the connection of Cluster 12 (Monte Rio/Villa Grande)	RRCSD and Monte Rio/Villa Grande	2030	2	
	Work with high-priority community clusters to define implementation strategies and governance needs	Defined by MOU, LAFCO	2031	2	
	Design and construct highest-priority I&I improvements	RRCSD	2030	5	
	Construct WWTP capacity and expansion improvements for 5 MGD peak flow	RRCSD	2031	3	
	Complete planning for recycled water irrigation acreage expansion	RRCSD	2032	2	
	Design and construct recycled water expansion	RRCSD	2032	4	
	Coordinate Cluster 12 connection	RRCSD	2032	5	
	Design, and construct connection of Cluster 12	RRCSD	2032	5	
	Expand existing districts for the connections of high-priority community clusters	Defined by MOU, LAFCO	2033	2	
	Modify NPDES permit as needed to include connection of Cluster 12	RRCSD	2035	2	
	Design and construct connections of additional high-priority community clusters	RRCSD, high-priority community clusters	2035	5	
	Work with medium-priority community clusters to define implementation strategies and governance needs	Defined by MOU, LAFCO	2036	2	

	Secure funding for the connections of medium-priority community clusters	RRCSD, medium-priority community clusters	2038	2	
	Expand existing districts for the connections of medium-priority community clusters	Defined by MOU, LAFCO	2038	2	
	Coordinate connections of medium-priority community clusters	RRCSD	2040	5	
	Design and construct connections for the medium-priority community clusters	RRCSD, GCSD, OCSD, FWD, medium-priority community clusters	2040	5	
	Continue implementing long-term I&I improvements	RRCSD	2041	5+	
	Work with low-priority community clusters to define implementation strategies and governance needs	Defined by MOU, LAFCO	2043	2	
	Modify NPDES permit as needed to include medium-priority community clusters	RRCSD	2043	2	
	Secure funding for the connections of low-priority community clusters collection	RRCSD, GCSD, OCSD, FWD, low-priority community clusters	2045	2	
	Expand existing districts for the connections of low-priority community clusters	Defined by MOU, LAFCO	2045	2	
	Coordinate connections of low-priority community clusters	RRCSD	2047	5+	
	Design and construct connections for low-priority community clusters	RRCSD, GCSD, OCSD, FWD, low-priority community clusters	2047	5+	
	Evaluate the potential benefit of a new regional district	Applicable Parties	2050	5	
	Modify NPDES permit as needed to include low-priority community clusters collection systems	RRCSD	2050	2	

Hub 2 — Occidental County Sanitation District, Graton Community Services District, Forestville Water District and near-by Unsewered Community Clusters

	Action	Lead Agency	Start Time	Duration (Years)	Status
	Complete OCSD-GCSD pipeline design	OCSD	2025	2	Underway
	Develop communications plan for community and stakeholder outreach for near, mid, and long term projects. Communication plan implementation should be carried out across all three phases.	GCSD, OCSD, FWD	2026	3	Underway
	Secure funding for OCSD-GCSD pipeline construction	OCSD	2026	3	Underway
	Secure funding and complete evaluation to define necessary capacity, water quality, and seasonal discharge facilities for a combined treatment facility	FWD, GCSD	2027	3	
	Execute MOUs and evaluate governance structure to consolidate FWD and GCSD	FWD, GCSD	2027	1	
	Work with Permit Sonoma to outline specific service area boundary modification needs and incorporate into the General Plan update.	Varies by Agency/Community	2027	2	
	Execute regionalization MOU and link it with regionalization benefits and pathogen TMDL action plan in the Russian River Watershed to establish overall program structure and implementation team	Applicable Parties			
	Outreach to and prioritize unsewered community clusters (high, medium and low) based on readiness and funding potential	Defined by MOU	2027	5	
	Explore governance pathways for development of new agencies and for potential agency consolidations	Defined by MOU	2027	5	

	Construct OCSD-GCSD pipeline project	OCSD, GCSD	2029	2	
	Individual Board actions for existing districts and County committing to regionalization strategies (Alternative 1a modified)	Applicable Parties	2029	1	
	Evaluate and identify the appropriate existing agency to serve each community cluster	All	2030	2	
	Work with high-priority community clusters to define implementation strategies and governance needs	Defined by MOU, LAFCO	2031	2	
	Secure funding for the design and construction of new combined treatment facilities	FWD, GCSD	2030	2	
	Execute MOU to consolidate OCSD and GCSD	OCSD, GCSD	2031	2	
	Design and construct combined treatment facility that can accommodate connections of high-priority community clusters	FWD, GCSD	2032	5	
	Secure funding for the connections of other high-priority community clusters collection	GCSD, OCSD and high-priority community clusters	2033	2	
	Expand existing districts for the connections of high-priority community clusters	Defined by MOU, LAFCO	2033	2	
	Obtain new NPDES permit for the combined treatment facility with connections of high-priority community clusters	FWD, GCSD	2034	2	
	Coordinate connections for high-priority community clusters	FWD, GCSD	2035	4	
	Design and construct connections of high-priority community clusters	FWD, GCSD, high-priority community clusters	2035	5	

	Work with medium-priority community clusters to define implementation strategies and governance needs	Defined by MOU, LAFCO	2036	2	
	Secure funding for the connections of medium-priority community clusters	GCSD, OCSD, FWD, medium-priority community clusters	2038	2	
	Expand existing districts for the connections of medium-priority community clusters	Defined by MOU, LAFCO	2038	2	
	Coordinate connections of medium-priority community clusters	FWD-GCSD	2040	5	
	Design and construct connections for the medium-priority community clusters	RRCSD, GCSD, OCSD, FWD, medium-priority community clusters	2040	5	
	Work with low-priority community clusters to define implementation strategies and governance needs	Defined by MOU, LAFCO	2043	2	
	Modify NPDES permit as needed for the connections of medium-priority community clusters	FWD-GCSD	2043	2	
	Secure funding for the connections of low-priority community clusters collection	RRCSD, GCSD, OCSD, FWD, low-priority community clusters	2045	2	
	Expand existing districts for the connections of low-priority community clusters	Defined by MOU, LAFCO	2045	2	
	Coordinate connections of low-priority community clusters	FWD-GCSD	2047	5+	
	Design and construct connections for low-priority community clusters	RRCSD, GCSD, OCSD, FWD, low-priority community clusters	2047	5+	
	Evaluate the potential benefit of a new regional district	Applicable Parties	2050	5	
	Modify NPDES permit as needed for the connections of low-priority community clusters	FWD-GCSD	2050	2	

Section 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

The Feasibility Study marks a significant milestone toward regionalization in west Sonoma County. Documented environmental challenges associated with existing public infrastructure such as the RRCSD wastewater treatment plant and associated collection system, along with aging/failing septic systems in unsewered communities require a new approach to wastewater management. Stakeholders have noted that without reliable wastewater treatment, the commercial core of Monte Rio is not sustainable, and a risk exists that new septic systems for some parcels may not be physically possible or meet regulatory requirements as old systems increasingly require replacement.

At the same time, community members throughout the Feasibility Study project area have expressed significant concerns about a new, regional system. They acknowledge that while a regionalized system will provide increased environmental benefits, significant upgrades will be needed at RRCSD to accommodate current flows as evidenced by the 2026 spill. Without substantial improvements, these issues will be exacerbated with the addition of new flows from currently unsewered areas. Additionally, some residents believe by creating a regionalized septic system, it could negatively impact the unique character of Russian River communities by increasing growth or force tax reassessment of existing properties, effectively pricing out long-time community members.

Careful investigation of these concerns at a design-level for each component in the roadmap is essential for successful implementation of a regionalized approach. As noted, major portions of this approach, such as improvements to RRCSD or linking OCSD/GCSD/FWD, can take place independently based on community support and available financing. As improvements are made to existing facilities and districts, this approach allows flexibility for unsewered communities (or specific areas within each community such as the Monte Rio commercial core) to connect based on funding availability and community support.

Independently, each component of this regionalized approach provides substantial benefits to individual communities and the environment; when combined, they create a modern wastewater system capable of providing the resilience and capacity needed to address longstanding and emerging challenges in the West County for decades to come.

Appendix A: Background and Supporting Documents

The following documents are available online at sonomawater.org/ westcountystudy or via the links below:

- [Feasibility Study Volume 1- Chapters 1-6](#)
- [Feasibility Study Volume 2 - Chapters 7-9](#)
- [Feasibility Study Volume 3 - Appendices and Technical Memorandums](#)
- [Stakeholder Committee Materials, including Committee meeting summaries with participant rosters, all presentations and recordings, and the Stakeholder Assessment](#)
- **Monte Rio/Villa Grande Wastewater Solutions** - <https://sonomacounty.gov/monte-riovilla-community-meeting-on-waste-water-pilot-x129525>

Appendix B: Stakeholder and Community Outreach

Themes and Outcomes

This appendix provides an overview of key stakeholder engagement outcomes from the Stakeholder Committee, general public, and existing agency staff and leadership for outreach conducted from October 2024-July 2026, including:

- An overview of all major meetings and stakeholder engagement
- Documented outcomes from each major stakeholder engagement
- Conclusions and next steps for outreach

Stakeholder Committee

The Sacramento State facilitator assisting with public outreach formally launched outreach events by conducting a series of interviews with community members, local wastewater service providers, county officials, and regulatory agencies to better understand community perspectives on regionalization. The assessment focused on four primary areas:

- Understanding of current wastewater management challenges
- Potential solutions to challenges
- Limitations of potential solutions
- Outreach and coordination with other wastewater and recycled water efforts

Key findings from each of these areas included the following themes; note these are *not* intended to reflect consensus on the part of all participants, but rather a summary of input provided from interviewees:

Understanding of challenges

- Aging, outdated, and damaged infrastructure is unable to handle current amounts of wastewater
- Climate change has exacerbated an already insufficient wastewater collection system
- A significant portion of residents and businesses in the project area rely on outdated septic systems
- During droughts, reliance on potable water for irrigation and industrial uses can reduce total water supplies and impact water conservation efforts
- Ratepayers may end up paying the fees for unauthorized discharges. Proceeds from fees do not necessarily pay for system upgrades/wastewater mitigation.

Potential Solutions

- Regionalized approach linking four sanitary sewer districts in the Project Area with larger systems in Santa Rosa/Windsor
- Consolidate wastewater collection within unsewered communities and link them to existing districts
- Provide funding through grants or forgivable loans for unsewered residences to replace/upgrade septic systems to comply with current water quality standards
- Increase the availability of recycled water supplies to offset the use of potable water for irrigation and industrial uses in the Project Area
- Reclassify spill types at the Regional Water Board to ensure that funds from penalties/fees are returned to the impacted areas

Limitations of Potential Solutions

- All participants agreed cost is the #1 limiting factor to solution implementation
- The geography and topography of western Sonoma County poses challenges to a regionalized approach
- Perception of rural nature of the west county vs. increased sewer connections leading to more growth
- Prolonged disruption to the two primary transportation corridors from pipeline construction could negatively impact the Project Area
- Connecting unsewered residences could inadvertently “dewater” some vegetation
- Governance issues

Outreach Needs and Coordination with Other Wastewater Efforts

- Coordination with other, ongoing wastewater efforts is key
- Formation of a Stakeholder Committee is very important to ensure local feedback on any solutions
- Western Sonoma County can be a challenging place to find accessible meeting venues. Consider virtual participation for discussions when possible.
- Meetings should be held in the early evening whenever possible to maximize participation

Following completion of the assessment in October 2024, a Stakeholder Committee comprised of local government representatives, west county residents, and wastewater management/community service providers was convened to provide input on the Feasibility Study for Sonoma Water and RRCSD. From October 2024-January 2026, the Committee met six times to discuss Feasibility Study components including (but not limited to) regionalized wastewater solutions for the West County, cost estimates for identified Feasibility Study

alternatives, and potential recycled water opportunities provided by the alternatives. A brief overview of topics discussed at each meeting is as follows:

- October 22, 2024: Staff provided an overview of the Feasibility Study purpose, background, and schedule, as well as a basic charter document to guide the Committee process.
- February 5, 2025: Staff reviewed requirements for the Feasibility Study as outlined in the ECA.
- May 14, 2025: Staff reviewed the eight proposed Feasibility Study alternatives and provided an overview of the evaluation process used to create a preliminary ranking.
- August 27, 2025: This meeting focused on refined evaluation of the alternatives identified above, including cost estimates for each action and an analysis of unsewered communities for connection to a regionalized wastewater system.
- October 29, 2025: A refined analysis of likely alternatives was provided to Stakeholder Committee members, including a detailed cost estimate incorporating recycled water opportunities and community cluster connections. Cost estimates from the Monte Rio-Villa Grande Wastewater Solutions Project, as well as costs associated with the removal of aging/outdated septic systems and replacement with new collection systems were incorporated in the analysis. Members also discussed the timeline for public comment on the draft Feasibility Study.
- January 12, 2026: Staff provided a review of the January 6, 2026 discharge/spill from the RRCSD Guerneville WWTP, reviewed comments received on the draft Feasibility Study to date, and provided an opportunity for additional comment.
- April 22, 2026: Staff provide an overview of the Final Feasibility Study alternatives as submitted to the North Coast Water Board and delivered presentations on potential funding/finance and governance opportunities for a regionalized wastewater system. More information on governance and finance are included in Sections 5 and 6 below.
- August 18, 2026: Staff provided additional opportunity for input on the implementation roadmap discussed in Section 5 and reviewed the schedule for PAR development and public comment.

Complete meeting summaries and recordings of each discussion (including a roster of Stakeholder Committee participants) are available online at

<https://www.sonomawater.org/westcountystudy>.⁴

⁴ *Scroll down to the appropriate date for supporting materials for each Stakeholder Committee meeting. Note the Stakeholder Assessment report is included in the presentation for Meeting #1, October 22, 2024.

General Public Outreach

As part of the PAR development effort, a public workshop was held on June 17, 2026 to solicit feedback regarding a roadmap that described one possible approach to implementing Modified Alternative 1a (see Section 5). Small group discussions provided important input on project implementation, governance of the different wastewater management districts, as well as project funding and finances. Findings from this meeting are summarized below (note that this input does not reflect consensus on the part of workshop attendees; instead it is intended to serve as a summary of responses provided by participants):

Project Implementation

- One attendee suggested that the straw proposal/implementation roadmap should include a more complete vision of the preferred Feasibility Study alternative.
- A plan for Monte Rio-Villa Grande collection system development needs to be more clearly laid out in the implementation roadmap.
- Funding for adding the Monte Rio-Villa Grande cluster could happen earlier than laid out in the straw proposal if the 10% design could be funded and completed by Sonoma Water.
- The PAR should identify all the countywide proposals that have been/will be submitted to the state for State Revolving Fund (SRF) loans.
- The receiving entities (sanitation districts) should be the grant applicants for any state or federal grants.
- Unsewered communities may require a complete picture of the proposed project and associated costs in order to support it. Participants suggested the straw proposal/roadmap presented in Section 5 could consider moving outreach to unsewered communities further down in the process after collection system design is nearing completion.
- Technical assistance such as grant writing support is important for small districts: GCSD and FWD currently don't have capacity to take on this work.
- The implementation roadmap and this PAR should include a discussion of household incomes and how communities may/may not qualify as Disadvantaged Communities (DACs) for the purposes of funding available through the State Water Board.

Governance

- Participants highlighted the importance of creating a governing body with adequate representation for all impacted communities. One option suggested a “project area wide” wastewater governing body with representation determined by the percentage of total flows from each community.
- Although consolidation may be possible in the long run, existing governance entities may be able to make decisions more easily than a new body.
- The recent consolidation of fire districts throughout Sonoma County could serve as a model for future water/wastewater service provider consolidation.
- Many of the participants at the workshop represented unsewered communities. These individuals stressed the critical importance of differentiating between areas with existing sewer service and potential *new* service to unsewered areas. They also stated unsewered areas (particularly Monte Rio and Villa Grande) are already considering an OWTS special district; note that no plan has been formally adopted at this time.
- Determining governance early in the process will be important for securing outside funding and is likely required for state/federal grants (grants are generally issued to public agencies, Tribes, or non-profits).
- Participants commented that a consolidated governance structure may increase system resilience and the ability to share resources between communities or apply for outside funding.

Funding and Finance

- Affordability was the dominant concern. Participants repeatedly raised questions about connection costs, future rates, taxes, assessments, and the potential impacts on residents and businesses, particularly those on fixed incomes.
- Many participants wanted more certainty and transparency around funding. There was significant concern about how much of the project would be funded through grants versus costs borne by property owners, and whether funding would ultimately be secured. Potential impacts to low-cost housing in particular should be clearly defined; some participants believe alternative 1a will result in the removal of low-income housing, with significant impacts to demographics in the West County. Potential re-assessment following septic to sewer conversion could also contribute to increased property taxes (for property owners) and higher rent for tenants.
- Participants questioned whether lower-cost alternatives had been fully explored. Suggestions included repairing existing facilities, improving septic systems, wastewater storage and trucking, and other approaches that might reduce costs while addressing wastewater issues.

- Protecting community character was a recurring theme. Participants expressed concerns that sewer expansion could encourage development, increase costs, and change the rural, small-town character of west county communities. It was also noted that some areas might never have the opportunity to develop further without wastewater infrastructure (e.g. Monte Rio downtown)
- There was significant interest in improving wastewater infrastructure to reduce environmental impacts. Participants supported addressing aging infrastructure, wastewater overflows, and impacts to the Russian River, while seeking assurance that proposed solutions would effectively address these issues.

Outreach to Existing Wastewater Service Providers

In addition to outreach to the Committee and general public, staff convened a Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) comprised of staff and leadership from existing wastewater service providers in the project area (RRCSD, GCSD, FWD, and OCSD). During these meetings TAC members reviewed the various alternatives proposed in Feasibility Study and confirmed are technically viable, and if implemented, would significantly improve longstanding wastewater management issues. A brief overview of topics discussed at each meeting is as follows:

- August 27, 2024: TAC members convened to discuss the overall service area for the Feasibility Study.
- November 26, 2024: Staff provided an overview of preliminary alternatives for the Feasibility Study.
- March 18, 2025: The TAC met to refine and confirm the list of alternatives and develop a Regional Alternatives Technical Memorandum.
- June 1, 2025: TAC members met to define preferred alternatives for the Feasibility Study and begin ranking unsewered communities and priority connections for a regionalized wastewater system.
- September 10, 2025: Staff presented refined unsewered community clusters and presented information on recycled water supply and climate resiliency for Feasibility Study alternatives.
- November 28, 2025: Staff presented the draft Feasibility Study.

Appendix C: Community Survey Results

Which of the following best describes you? (Select all that apply)

The table below summarizes respondent characteristics. Respondents could select more than one role; therefore, percentages do not total 100%.

Which best describes you? (n=19)	Count	Percent
Property owner	16	84%
Resident	15	79%
Owner of a property that uses a septic system	11	58%
Sewer district customer	5	26%
Other (please specify)	4	21%
Community organization representative	3	16%
Business owner	2	11%

Other (please specify):

- Lower Russian River Community Advisory Group (CAG)
- Water District Board member

Which community are you most closely associated with?

Respondent's Community	Count
Monte Rio	7
Villa Grande	3
Rio Nido	2
Graton currently served by Graton Community Services District	2
Graton not served by Graton Community Services District	1
Camp Meeker	1
Occidental not served by Occidental County Sanitation District	1
Guerneville currently served by Russian River County Sanitation District	1
Other (please specify)	1

Other (please specify):

Respondent did not fill out the text box

If you currently use a septic system, how likely is it that you would choose to connect to a sewer system?

The table below shows how likely respondents with septic systems said they would be to connect to a sewer system.

Likelihood of connecting to a sewer system (n=11)	Percent
Extremely unlikely	36%
Somewhat likely	27%
Neither likely nor unlikely	27%
Extremely likely	9%

Did you attend the June 17 community workshop?

Attended June 17 Workshop (n=19)	Percent
No	58%
Yes	42%

As you think about the future of wastewater infrastructure in West County, how high of a priority is each of the following to you?

The table below shows the percentage of respondents who rated each item as a high or top priority, along with the percentage who ranked it among their top three priorities. The rating question identifies issues that were broadly important, while the ranking exercise highlights which priorities rose to the top when respondents had to choose among competing priorities.

Future Priorities (n=14)	High/Top Priority	Ranked in Top 3
Maintaining affordable wastewater costs for residents and businesses	93%	33%
Accessing outside funding to reduce local costs (n=13)	92%	42%
Protecting the Russian River and local waterways	86%	50%
Protecting the character of local communities	86%	25%
Supporting environmental health and ecosystem protection	86%	17%
Preventing sewage overflows and spills	79%	50%
Providing reliable wastewater service	79%	33%
Protecting public health	79%	8%

Preparing for future environmental and climate-related challenges	71%	8%
Supporting the long-term vitality of West County communities	71%	8%
Expanding wastewater service to properties that currently rely on septic systems	36%	17%
Providing infrastructure needed to support growth	36%	8%

Of the priorities you selected, which is the single most important and why? (Open-Ended)

Respondents consistently emphasized protecting the Russian River and the surrounding ecosystem as the project's highest priority, with many viewing environmental protection as the foundation for achieving other community goals. Several respondents stressed the importance of pursuing affordable, creative, and nature-based solutions that protect water quality without creating financial hardship for residents, particularly those on fixed incomes or maintaining existing septic systems.

- Expanding service to unsewered communities, particularly if it involves on-site improvements and a septic management district as options.
- Supporting environmental health and ecosystem protection. If you do this, many of the other issues will fall into place, including reasonable growth and community vitality. Sometimes it's a matter of educating the public as to why this is important and allows them to see that protecting the environment and allowing growth, don't need to be in opposition to one another.
- These priorities are misleading and reflect bias in the survey creator. My priority is to maintain my septic in good working order.
- To me, Protecting the Russian River and Local Waterways and Supporting Environmental Health and Ecosystem Protection are one and the same. If these two things are top priority, and we are able to do these things working in conjunction with nature, instead of against it, the potential of experiencing a thriving ecosystem that the human population can thrive as well, can be achieved with creative solutions that cost less money. Don't laugh! We should be able to come up with something better, that is why I am encouraging my kid to study Environmental studies and urban planning.
- Protecting the Russian River and local waterways is the most important issue to me. There are a lot of things affecting the river in addition to the septic issue eg. agriculture, gravel mining, development, increased demand for water, sewer systems that are already over capacity, etc. The lower river communities have become the target though there a lot of problems up stream.

- Owners of OWTS receive NO financial assistance for maintenance and improvements to their onsite systems. Even if connection is ultimately made to a public sewer system, there needs to be financial assistance to OWTS owners in the interim.
- They are all interconnected but keeping the Russian River waterways healthy is the central concern because the community is built around the river and that is why we are here.
- Protect river
- Protecting our waterways without making it impossible for people on fixed living to keep their homes
- protecting water ways as the russian river is vital to the character and economic vitality of the region.
- High sewer rates are absolutely killing Occidental. We have to get those rates down.
- Reliability would prevent illegal discharges, reduce fines, limit unexpected repair expenses.
- #1-If you accomplish this one, accomplishing several others will follow. If you protect the smallest critters, you will protect the others as well.

Are there other priorities that should be considered but were not listed above?

Several respondents identified additional considerations beyond those listed in the survey, particularly the need for stronger public engagement and clear evidence demonstrating the need for wastewater improvements and their benefits. Others emphasized that wastewater planning should be coordinated with broader watershed and infrastructure issues, including fish habitat, water supply, wildfire risk, transportation, and existing sewer system capacity. A few respondents also expressed concern about expanding the scope of the project before addressing problems with existing wastewater infrastructure.

- Convincing the public that there's a cost benefit for some kind of conversion. Also, there are many that don't believe there are any health issues with the River, and if they are, there's no data that shows that septic are the primary contributor. There's a big public engagement aspect to all of this
- The general topics listed are assumed to include many of the other issues listed and unlisted ones as well.
- Our Board of Supervisors voted to remove the Potter Dam which is going to cause the Russian River to run dry at some point. How does this group of officials plan on maintaining a viable sewer system with no water in the river?
- Restore fish habitat. Figure out a way to let the sand bar form at the mouth to provide an estuary for young fish eg. pump out water so Jenner doesn't flood??
- If sewer construction facilitates growth, then there needs to be assessment of increased risk from fires and there needs to be improvements to other infrastructure including roads and water systems.

- I listed growth because I hear stories about existing homes that cannot get permits for septic and local business that would be open if not for the septic system issues.
- No
- Spills keep happening further up the watershed, making many of the top priorities around protecting environment, ecosystems and health moot
- Fix RRCSD before adding burden to a failing system. Also, the drive to expand into "un-sewered" communities along a pipeline route is making the project larger (costly) than necessary.

How concerned are you about each of the following issues?

The table below shows the percentage of respondents who rated each item as a high or top priority, along with the percentage who ranked it among their top three priorities. The rating question identifies issues that were broadly important, while the ranking exercise highlights which priorities rose to the top when respondents had to choose among competing priorities.

Community Concerns (n=14)	Very/Extremely Concerned	Ranked in Top 3
Lack of transparency in decision-making	79%	36%
Overall affordability (n=13)	77%	55%
Increased monthly wastewater costs	64%	18%
Uncertainty about future costs	64%	0%
Project complexity and implementation challenges	57%	36%
Potential impacts on community character	57%	27%
Uncertainty about future governance structures	57%	18%
Connection or infrastructure costs for property owners currently using septic systems	50%	45%
Potential requirements for septic system owners	50%	36%
Loss of local control over decision-making	43%	18%
Fairness across communities	36%	9%
Potential impacts on businesses during construction	36%	0%
Traffic, noise, and other disruptions during construction	29%	0%
Potential impacts on renters	21%	0%

Which concern stands out as most important to you? Please explain. Do you have any ideas about how it might be addressed?

Affordability emerged as the dominant concern, with many respondents expressing worry that connection costs and ongoing sewer service fees could create financial hardship, particularly for residents on fixed incomes. Several respondents also questioned whether a centralized sewer system is the most appropriate solution, citing concerns about project complexity, local conditions, governance, system reliability, and the potential for large-scale sewer failures. Some suggested that greater state funding, improvements to existing sewer infrastructure, or continued investment in septic system upgrades should be considered before expanding wastewater systems.

- My belief is that safe effective and affordable disposal of wastewater a government responsibility and yet the costs penalties and solutions seem to be pointing directly to property owners as the source for funding. I think the only solution here is some kind of statewide funding pot beyond the current Potts identified. It needs to become a priority for the state legislature and the governor's office and yet they act like they don't know anything about it and the SRF is the only place to go.
- Project complexity and implementation challenges. This is mostly true for the lower RR and not so much for the Graton-Forestville area. Governance structures may be fraught with issues too lengthy to go into now. One issue: limited possibilities that can be easily resolved, especially in lower river area where we have a river plain, hillsides that erode easily, liquified soils, narrow roadways, floods, many, many big trees and a very sensitive environment.
- Our community does not have the economies of scale to reasonably implement a public sewer system. The community has made our position VERY clear. And yet, the Board of Supervisors and their proxies continue to push this issue.
- In the 1990's they were going to build a sewage treatment plant in Sheridan Meadow. It was "approved" by the "voters" or maybe "parcel owners", as I recall. Nothing ever happened. My understanding is that it became too expensive. I attended the Brelje Race led meetings about the sewer feasibility study. It sounded like the project would be incredibly expensive. It was unclear how it would be funded. It seems like septic upgrades and new technology would be more affordable.
- Many local residents rely on Social Security or have fixed retirement income. They should not be forced out of their homes by project costs.
- Costs and requirements for septic system connection when the septic system is working fine.
- The survey language speaks of "maintaining" affordability, as if things are currently affordable. They are not. Not an Occidental. High sewer rights are killing the town. I do not understand why the county charges such high rates and the only idea I have is make them stop. But I don't know how to do that.
- Guerneville has been suffering with the RRCSD for decades. Primary focus must be on restoring RRCSD before branching out to solve other communities sanitation woes.

- Affordability and loss of control or need for say in management of central sewer system. I also care about environment. An occasional failing septic system does far less damage than a big spill from a central sewer and there have been a lot of them.

Are there other concerns that should be considered but were not listed above?

Several respondents emphasized the importance of taking a comprehensive, long-term approach to wastewater planning rather than implementing incremental solutions. Others expressed concern that local decision-makers were not adequately considering community input or addressing longstanding issues with existing wastewater systems, particularly the Russian River County Sanitation District. A few respondents also highlighted the need to better integrate wastewater improvements with broader infrastructure planning and governance.

- I need a comprehensive approach not a bunch of Band-Aids. Also, for at least half of the options presented in one a modified, the Guerneville plant first needs significant improvements, even if it sells its current problems with the current Grant funded work. The recent spill destroyed any community confidence in the ability of the Guerneville plant to handle its own wastewater processing needs much less expand its service area.
- Probably, but i can't think of them right now.
- Local government is not listening to the citizens of the Lower River who do not want this system. Pay attention to the community rather than forcing an uninvited narrative onto people who do not want it.
- Decisions must be made macroscopically. Improvements to one part of our infrastructure must be considered together with other needed improvements.
- RRCSD ratepayers have difficulty influencing decision makers and depend upon regulators (RWQCB) to bring change or move the needle on issues. We feel powerless influencing the Directors.

If you own property served by a septic system, which concerns are most important to you? (Select up to 3)

The table below shows the percentage of respondents who selected each concern as one of their top three concerns.

Septic System Concerns (n=9)	Percent
Cost of connecting to a wastewater system	89%
Ongoing wastewater service costs	44%
Uncertainty about future requirements	44%
Loss of control over my current wastewater system	33%
Timing of required improvements	22%

Other (please specify)	22%
Construction or disruption on my property	11%
Fairness compared to current sewer customers	11%
Potential impacts on property value	11%

Other (please specify):

- Increased property taxes and an end run around prop 13 protections.

Are there specific actions that could help address these concerns?

Respondents most frequently called for greater financial assistance and consideration of alternatives to mandatory sewer connections, including continued investment in improving and maintaining septic systems. Several respondents emphasized the need for clearer, more proactive communication about proposed wastewater solutions, including their potential costs, impacts, and implications for property owners. Others stressed that project leaders must demonstrate the value of any proposed sewer system by addressing concerns about affordability, system reliability, and community support before moving forward.

- The state and the county should consider and create options to make the necessary system improvements whatever they are. It also seems to me that helping people with their septic systems could and should be a state priority rather than focusing solely on septic to sewer. This study as well as the MRVG study both point to the exorbitant relative costs septic improvement to sewer connection that is I assume an arbitrary decision by the state board or someone and we should work to change that perception, perhaps using the data collected from these two studies and any other information that we can gather septic solutions are evolving quite quickly, and Sonoma County is slow to adopt. We should really be focusing on those things as options again particularly because of the exorbitant cost of sewer connection and it's ongoing operational and maintenance costs which are much lower for septic, even enhanced high-end systems. Don't come close to the annual sewer cost others are paying.
- Stop forcing a public sewer system on communities who do not want it. Especially considering the disaster that goes on with the sewer system in Guerneville.
- How do us poor people afford these costs?
- Will assessed valuation of our property be increased due to a sewer connection.
- yes, I think Sonoma Water should put out an email or a blog post or some communication specifically to property owners with septic systems, telling them about the ramifications of whatever solutions are being proposed. I even attended the June meeting and walked away without realizing that the proposed solutions might require me to be hooked up to a sewer. We just spent \$100,000 on a new septic system. We love the independence of being on septic. A public awareness campaign is needed.

- Guerneville's rates were in the hundreds, now near 3,000. My septic property annual sanitation cost is less than 1/10th my sewer home. Convince "us" switching to sewer would be a good decision.

How high of a priority should each of the following be as the project moves forward?

The table below shows the percentage of respondents who rated each item as a high or top priority as the project moves forward.

Priorities as project moves forward (n=12)	Rated High/Top Priority
Clear information about project costs	92%
Protection against unreasonable rate increases	92%
Transparency about decision-making	83%
Regular communication with community members	75%
Opportunities for meaningful public input	75%
Local representation in governance and oversight	75%
Clear explanations of project benefits and tradeoffs	75%
Independent oversight and accountability	67%
Demonstrated protection of the Russian River and local waterways	67%
Environmental monitoring and reporting	58%
Equitable treatment of sewer and unsewered properties (n=11)	55%

What specific actions could project leaders take to demonstrate that community needs, concerns, and priorities are being considered as this project moves forward?

Respondents consistently emphasized the importance of meaningful, ongoing community engagement throughout the project. Suggested actions included providing regular opportunities for two-way communication, improving public access to clear and timely information, and creating formal mechanisms, such as citizen advisory groups, for community members to provide ongoing input. Several respondents also encouraged project leaders to consider a broader range of alternatives and ensure that community perspectives meaningfully influence project decisions.

- There needs to be an overall plan and vision for the entire watershed, particularly in this area of waste water and how it's handled. There are multiple multiple studies that have gone on and continue to go on that look at a piece of the elephant from the perspective of the funding source. I would suggest that the project leaders take a closer look at many of the attendant studies that are being undertaken or have been undertaken, and look beyond state direction as the driver for the solutions.
- Have knowledgeable employee on call at announced times to answer questions from the public on a regular basis. (for instance 3 hours week on-going) Periodic community meeting

(every 3-4 months would be reasonable) Provide written materials that explain main issues and resolution options and allow some community weigh-in.

- This project should be put to a referendum. It is clear that the local community doesn't want it.
- Perhaps provide options instead of a mandatory imposition of a new system.
- more effort to communicate with the Public
- Public forums, OPEN, not regulated (breaking groups into small tables), Two-way communication. A citizen panel of interested property owners who are ambassadors? Please, NOT the MAC Committee process.
- Set up citizens' committee of interested citizens that can give regular input to managers and planners. It should be made up of people who have high interest willing to read documents and give input on some of the details and also represent the needs of the community. it should be focused on the wastewater and environmental issues and not a bunch of other issues.

How concerned are you about potential increases in costs related to wastewater service?

The table below shows respondents' level of concern about potential increases in wastewater service costs.

Concern about potential wastewater cost increases (n=12)	Percent
Extremely Concerned	33%
Very Concerned	42%
Moderately Concerned	17%
Slightly Concerned	8%
Not Concerned	0%

In addition to pursuing federal and state grants and low-interest loans to help pay for project costs, which of the following opportunities should also be considered? Drag the items up or down to rank them from highest priority (top) to lowest priority (bottom).

The table below shows the percentage of respondents who ranked each funding opportunity as their highest priority.

Funding Approach Priorities (n=9)	Percent Ranked 1st
Bond funded by a west county property tax increase, for all property owners in the project area	44%
Bond funded by sales tax increase in unincorporated west county communities within the project area	33%
Incremental and predictable increases in sanitation district rates over time	22%

A special capital-improvement temporary rate increase for sanitation district customers	0%
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If future wastewater improvements result in additional costs to ratepayers, which outcomes would be most important for those investments to achieve? Drag up to five items into the box on the right and arrange them from most important (top) to least important (bottom).

Respondents were asked to prioritize the outcomes they would most want future wastewater investments to achieve if those improvements resulted in additional costs. The table below shows the percentage of respondents who ranked each outcome among their top three priorities.

Desired Investment Outcomes (n=9)	Ranked in Top 3
Preventing sewage overflows and spills	67%
Protecting the character of local communities	44%
Protecting the Russian River and local waterways	33%
Providing more reliable wastewater service	33%
Improving emergency preparedness and system resilience	33%
Improving environmental resilience in a changing climate	22%
Reducing long-term maintenance needs	22%
Improving public health	11%
Expanding service to currently unsewered properties	11%
Other (please describe)	11%
Supporting future community needs and opportunities	0%

Looking at the outcomes you selected, which is most important and why?

Respondents most frequently identified preventing sewage overflows and improving system reliability as the highest priorities, viewing these outcomes as foundational to protecting the Russian River and the surrounding environment. Several respondents emphasized that existing wastewater infrastructure should be repaired and operating reliably before expanding service to additional communities. Others also expressed concern about project affordability, suggesting that broader public funding should be considered to reduce the financial burden on local property owners.

- We need solutions for the unsewered communities in order for that to happen Significant province to the Guerneville plant need to happen first. In the prior section the force choice all encompassing in terms of options and when you boil them down,

they all boil down to the individual property owners in the area., When there is an overall benefit to the county, to the river areas etc. as a primary tourist, destination, what options exist to extend a portion of the costs to that population? As the River area brings people to the county as a whole, what dollars from the county has a hole should go to this effort and others that I'm sure are underway. Please meal planning and putting additional costs on homeowners in this current economic environment will never get the approvals you're looking for. So how do we plan for status quo?

- preventing spills which directly and unequivocally impact the river directly developing resilience in a changing environment in terms of global warming in the long term, these would have the greatest impact on the whole environment also, individual property issues are often resolved if you fix the main problem
- Fix what we have already instead of trying to add more volume to an already overburdened system.
- No more sewage overflows into the river. It is inappropriate to connect unsewered communities to RRCSD until ALL needed corrections are made to the system.
- Reliability. Please fix OUR system, keep it within the pipes.
- Preventing sewage overflows and spills because that will solve several of the other issues. Maintenance and preventing major spills go a very long way in protecting the environment. What's the sense of having people get rid of functioning septic systems if the central sewer system isn't working properly?

Under what circumstances would you be most likely to consider transitioning from a septic system to a sewer system? Please select up to three.

The table below shows the percentage of respondents who selected each concern as one of their top three concerns.

Circumstances for considering transition from septic to sewer (select up to 3) (n=7)	Percent
If most or all connection costs were covered by grants	57%
If my septic system was at risk of failure	57%
If transitioning would help protect the Russian River and local waterways	43%
I would not consider transitioning under any circumstances	29%
If transitioning would improve reliability and reduce maintenance responsibilities	29%
If monthly sewer service costs were affordable	29%
If necessary in order to further develop my parcel	14%
If low-interest financing were available	0%
If there were clear information about costs and benefits	0%

Of the circumstances you selected, which would be most important in your decision and why?

Affordability emerged as the primary factor influencing respondents' willingness to transition from septic to sewer, with several expressing concern about both upfront connection costs and ongoing sewer service fees. Many respondents also indicated they would only consider connecting if their existing septic system failed, while others questioned whether septic systems are a significant enough contributor to water quality issues to justify mandatory conversion. Several responses reflected a broader desire for stronger public support and clearer justification for transitioning to a centralized sewer system.

- In order for this to happen broad public will need to be generated to support it. There seems to be this presumption that a low interest loan is OK. No it is not it's a loan and becomes a liability for the homeowner. Also, all or most in the first sentence is, disingenuous. They are -subjective.
- I do not see the need for a public sewer system when septic systems work just fine for our small rural community. This is a solution in search of a problem.
- I guess I'm not convinced that septic systems are the most deleterious factor in the river's health. Seems like a red herring to me.
- Cost
- I would only connect if my system was failing. Otherwise, operating costs are far out of market, Add connection costs, resulting in WHY would we do this.

What appeals to you most about the possibility of improving wastewater infrastructure in West County?

Respondents most frequently cited protecting water quality, the Russian River, and public health as the primary benefits of improving wastewater infrastructure. Others highlighted the potential for improved system reliability, efficiency, and cost savings, while emphasizing that improvements should remain affordable and avoid placing undue financial burdens on residents.

- I believe we can collectively need improved infrastructure, particularly in light of evolving state and county regulation.
- Greater river protection results in better health for humans and all. Wildlife losses (particularly fish in regards to river) is seldom addressed. Chemicals and medicinals are seldom addressed, but if you get rid of the spills, you also solve other problems at the same time. Clean water needs for all life is essential.
- New leadership
- Efficiency and money savings for users.
- I'm all for improving wastewater infrastructure if it can be paid for without impacting me personally too heavily. I'm NOT convinced that sewer hookups are the best answer.

- Improved water quality
- I don't like being on septic.
- Reducing illegal discharges, controlling costs, limiting fines, keeping the system operational.
- It's a critical need for protecting environment and human health, especially when there is a focus on expanding housing which exacerbates the problems.

What concerns you most about this effort?

Respondents most frequently expressed concern about project affordability, particularly the financial impacts on homeowners, businesses, and ratepayers. Other concerns included confidence in project leadership and governance, coordination with broader infrastructure planning, and balancing infrastructure improvements with protecting the character and natural environment of West County.

- Cost to the individual, a piecemeal approach, a decisions or direction being determined by people aren't affected by this kind of thing. On the cost side, there seemed to be many things that are being explored as 'solutions' are not that viable new taxes, adding people to the rate pairs that are currently not doing anything, but maintaining their own systems and pumping periodically, low interest, loans, etc. again put the responsibility on the landowner, not the coun/ty
- There are too many questions in this survey and calibration of responses is therefore questionable. Also, the timing and length of this presentation was not good.
- People need better understanding of the relationship between a clean environment and health in relation to wastewater. They don't understand that there are more and more unregulated and regulated toxins in our sewage that cause cancer and many other problems. Species are dying and too many people are getting cancer and other diseases at an early age. Child cancer is becoming rampant, etc.Ye
- The effort seems to be coming from Lynda Hopkins with little to no support from the community. Additionally, the track record of the Guerneville sewer system is testimony of why this will not benefit the people of the Lower River.
- That it will cost more money
- The efficacy and the cost.
- There needs to be coordination with County planners, the water district and the County Public Infrastructure Department to address issues relating to growth and impacts to local infrastructure
- Will this actually happen?
- Costs to local business owners
- Finances, Current system is a financial burden for ratepayers. As a landlord, I pass along rate increases to tenants. Burden for them too. Near 9% annual rate increases, no end in sight. Our governance continues to blindly approve increases. I fear more, or expanding, this under-representation.

- Stimulating growth in a natural environment, especially if with typical urban design.

Is there anything else you would like decision-makers to understand as they consider future wastewater infrastructure investments?

Respondents encouraged decision-makers to take a comprehensive, countywide approach to wastewater planning while continuing to support and improve existing septic systems where appropriate. Several emphasized the importance of minimizing costs to residents, pursuing financial assistance for septic improvements, and considering lower-cost, lower-impact solutions that protect waterways without encouraging unnecessary infrastructure expansion.

- I think the county needs an overall approach, with a support and management entity that spans the county and is in place to help people in particular with improving septic, and create a priority for resource generation at the county and state level.
- Look at mutual septic system options by approaching and understanding owners in specific neighborhoods that may be cooperative for these efforts for their neighbors, the community and themselves.
- Yes, the shorter the pipeline, the lower the cost and the less impact of breakdowns on all aspects of maintaining a well run system. We are glad that RRCSD is not being hooked to Graton and Forestville and other even more distant communities. We are very happy you are dropping consideration of hooking systems up to distant communities because of high costs.
- Implement a monitoring program for septic users. Provide a grant program to families who may require septic system upgrades and/or replacement. Stop wasting taxpayer money such as hiring a sewer contractor to tell us we need a public sewer system.
- Please remember that many people are barely able to afford owning their homes as it is. Increasing costs are scary.
- Do not force people out of their
- It would help to limit development along waterways and have larger setbacks.

Appendix D: Potential Funding Sources

This resource is intended to provide a sample of the programs which may assist with wastewater improvement and watershed protection in the West County. Is not intended as an exhaustive list, but rather a showcase of the types and funding amounts which may be available through State, federal, local, and private programs.

State sources

State Water Resources Control Board Clean Water State Revolving (Fund State Revolving Fund)

- Main California funding pathway. Provides both loans and grants.
- Grant/principal forgiveness (PF) available for projects that serve small (<20,000 people) and disadvantaged communities (median household income (MHI) of less than 80% of the statewide MHI).
- Email: CleanWaterSRF@waterboards.ca.gov
- Web: https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/grants_loans/septic-to-sewer-funding.html

State Water Resources Control Board Technical Assistance Funding Program

- Technical Assistance Funding Program. Similar requirements as outlined for CWSRF grants/PF except small community is <10,000.
- Demand high, not all requests accommodated. Priority given to projects that involve:
 - Out of compliance
 - Water delivery issues
 - Drought/contamination impacted communities
- TA includes but is not limited to:
 - Coordination and development of capital improvement projects
 - Facilitation of operation and maintenance
 - Engineering and environmental analysis
 - Legal assistance
 - Leak detection/water audits
 - Compliance audits
 - Financial analysis
 - Technical managerial and financial (TMF) assessments

- Board or operator training
- Email: DFA-TARequest@waterboards.ca.gov
- Web: https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/grants_loans/tech_asst_funding.html

California Department of Housing and Community Development

- Community Development Block Grant Program (CDBG)
- CDBG partners with rural cities and counties to improve the lives of their low- and moderate-income residents through the creation and expansion of community and economic development opportunities in support of livable communities.
- Eligible activities include water and wastewater systems.
- Application window closed; the Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) is posted in early Autumn and closes early the following year.
- Web: <https://www.hcd.ca.gov/funding/cdbg>

California's Infrastructure and Economic Development Bank (Bank)

- Infrastructure State Revolving Fund (ISRF) Program.
- IBank's ISRF Loan Fund program provides low-cost, direct loans to local governments and nonprofits sponsored by public agencies for a wide variety of public infrastructure and economic expansion projects.
- Funds, among other things, sewage collection and treatment projects
- Email: infrastructureloans@ibank.ca.gov
- Web: <https://www.grants.ca.gov/grants/infrastructure-state-revolving-fund-isrf-program/>
- IBank Web: <https://ibank.ca.gov>

North Coast Resource Partnership

- NCRP Regional Water Quality Control Board Wastewater Infrastructure Technical Assistance Grant
- Grant term expired in February 2026 but this may be a source for future local support or funding.
- RFPs and solicitations posted here: <https://www.northcoastresourcepartnershipprojects.org/ProjectCustomPage/RFPs>

Federal sources

US Department of Agriculture Rural Development

- Federal Water & Waste Disposal Loan & Grant Program
- This program provides funding for sanitary sewage disposal and storm water drainage to households and businesses in eligible rural areas (rural areas and towns with populations of 10,000 or less)
- Provides long-term low-interest loans and grants when available
- Funds may be used to finance the acquisition, construction or improvement of wastewater collection, transmission, treatment, and disposal, as well as stormwater management.
- County Contacts (Lake, Marin, Mendocino, Napa & Sonoma)
 - Reef Atwell-Smith, Santa Rosa
 - Email: reef.atwellsmith@usda.gov
- Apply through RD Apply: <https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/rd-apply>

US Department of Agriculture -Rural Development

- Special Evaluation Assistance for Rural Communities and Households Grant (SEARCH)
- This program helps very small (<2,500), financially distressed (defined as having a median household income below the poverty line or less than 80 percent of the statewide non-metropolitan median household income) rural communities with predevelopment feasibility studies, design and technical assistance on proposed water and waste disposal projects.
- Funds may be used for:
 - Feasibility studies to support applications for funding water or waste disposal projects
 - Preliminary design and engineering analysis
 - Technical assistance for the development of an application for financial assistance
- The application window is currently open as of August, 2026.
- For more information contact state RD Office:
 - Bryan Anguiano, State Director
 - Email: rd.ca.general.inquiries@usda.gov

- Web: <https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/water-environmental-programs/search-special-evaluation-assistance-rural-communities-and-households-grant>

United States Environmental Protection Agency

- Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (WIFIA) Program
- "The Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act of 2014 (WIFIA) established the WIFIA program, an EPA-operated bank that provides supplemental, flexible, low-cost credit assistance to public and private borrowers for all types of wastewater, drinking water, and stormwater projects. The WIFIA program offers long-term loans that can be combined with State Revolving Fund assistance, municipal bonds, and federal and state grants to help communities deliver more critical water infrastructure projects for a lower cost with less impact on rate payers."
- Web: <https://www.epa.gov/wifia/about-wifia-program>

United States Environmental Protection Agency

- EPA Community Grants
- Congress appropriates resources for specifically named community water infrastructure projects including wastewater and water quality protection.
- Requires congressional sponsorship (Jared Huffman)
- Web: <https://www.epa.gov/sustainable-water-infrastructure/epa-community-grants-program-basics>

Private sources of funding

Private funders can provide supplemental funding to support non-infrastructure aspects of this project. Many of these only accept proposals from organizations who they invite to submit. Using existing, environmentally focused non-profits in Sonoma County might be one approach and framing the work around things such as: watershed resilience, climate adaptation, protecting disadvantaged rural communities, long-term ecological restoration, or rural environmental justice would make the work more appealing to these organization.

National Fish and Wildlife Federation

- Five Star Program
- The Five Star Program, first launched in 1998, seeks to develop community capacity to sustain local natural resources for future generations by providing modest financial assistance to a variety of local partnerships for wetland, forest, riparian and coastal habitat restoration, stormwater management, outreach and stewardship.
- While this won't fund the construction of sewer lines it may provide supplemental support for river protection.
- RFPs released in later winter, due the following June
- Email:
 - Sydney Godbey, Director, National Programs: Sydney.Godbey@nfwf.org
 - Ericka Popovich, Manager, National Programs: Ericka.Popovich@nfwf.org
 - Zoey Apelt, Coordinator, Regional Programs: Zoey.Apelt@nfwf.org
- Web: <https://www.nfwf.org/programs/five-star-program>

Rose Foundation

- California Watershed Protection Fund
- The California Watershed Protection Fund supports projects designed to improve water quality and protect watersheds across California.
- Watershed eligibility changes year to year. Check the list of eligible watersheds in CA before applying.
- There are two application periods per year, in the spring and fall
- While not for infrastructure, this grant may be used to for watershed protection, monitoring, stewardship work, etc.
- Web: <https://rosefdn.org/environmental-grants/california-watershed-protection-fund/>

Community Foundation Sonoma County

- Grant Programs - Sonoma County Resilience Fund
- Grant programs support community partners in addressing Sonoma County's most pressing local challenges.
- While this won't support the construction of a sewer system, it could provide supplemental funding to a non-profit doing work to support river/ecosystem health. Framing need around climate change would be a good approach.

- Contacts:
 - Annette Williams, Community Impact Associate
 - Email: awilliams@sonomacf.org
 - Phone: 707.303.9639
 - Amy Holter, Vice President for Community Impact
 - Email: aholter@sonomacf.org
 - Phone: 707.303.9621
 - José Castro Gambino, Senior Community Impact Officer
 - Email: jcastro@sonomacf.org
 - Phone: 707.360.6140
- Web: <https://www.sonomacf.org/nonprofits/apply-for-grants/>

Rural Community Assistance Corporation (RCAC)

- Technical Assistance for Water, Wastewater & Solid Waste
- RCAC assists rural communities to build, improve, manage, operate, or finance drinking water and wastewater systems.
- This organization can provide support, including grant and loan support, for the project. RCAC helps rural communities build, improve, manage, operate, and/or finance wastewater systems.
- Web: <https://www.rcac.org/environmental/water-wastewater-solidwaste/>
- Phone: (916) 447-2854

Appendix E: Public Comments

This section provides a complete overview of all comments received on the Project Advancement Report through October 18, 2026. The comment inventory is divided into three sections:

- Stakeholder Committee comments provided from August 18, 2026 thru September 6, 2026.
- Comments provided by the North Coast Water Quality Control Board
- General public comments provided as part of public review from October 5, 2026 thru October 18, 2026.

Stakeholder Committee⁵

ID	STAKEHOLDER COMMENT	RESPONSE
Rich Holmer		
1	The project 1a cost states that the cost to unsewered communities will be \$626 million. It states that there are 7500 people in unsewered communities but does not give the number of homes. Assuming 1.7 people per home, it looks like 4412 homes in unsewered communities. Therefore, the costs would appear to be about \$142,886 per home for project 1A. These costs should be clearly defined on a per parcel basis to provide transparency for people who read the report.	See page 11 under Modified Alternative 1a
2	The report recommends upgrading the FWD/GCSD plants for nutrient removal. Why isn't this recommended for RRCSD? Toxic algae growths were documented last year at Patterson Point and algae growth in general is a persistent problem in the lower river.	RRCSD already produces disinfected tertiary effluent which means NPDES effluent limits for nutrient removal are met. Please refer to Feasibility Study Report Chapter 2.
3	Page 14 states that finding meeting venues in west county is difficult. These are the venues that are available: Occidental Community Center, Monte Rio Community Center, Guerneville Vets Building, Guerneville School, Forestville Fire Department and Graton Community Club.	The wording will be revised to "Identifying accessible and suitable meeting venues in Western Sonoma County can sometimes be

⁵ Note that page numbers referenced by the Stakeholder Committee comments apply to the working draft of the PAR presented to the Stakeholder Committee on August 18, 2026 available [here](#). The response to comments provides updated section and page references for this final draft PAR.

ID	STAKEHOLDER COMMENT	RESPONSE
		challenging. Potential venues include community centers and other public facilities throughout the project area." Appendix B provides additional information.
4	<p>Page 17, Infrastructure, states that protecting community character is a concern by citizens in unsewered communities. This is true but the concerns relative to providing sewer collection systems to the unsewered communities is greater than just community character. The concerns extend to the existing inadequate infrastructure including deteriorated and inadequately constructed road systems, fire safety/emergency egress due to few exit routes and the inadequate roads, lack of adequate parking in many neighborhoods, preservation of low-cost housing, the lack adequate water infrastructure in some areas and the lack of availability of community support systems such as shopping, medical, employment and public spaces. The growth that can occur due to sewer infrastructure needs to be tied directly to the other infrastructure needs in the areas and timed so that adequate infrastructure will be provided if the sewer becomes available. At the very least there should be a growth management plan implemented by Permit Sonoma and a commitment to not waiver from fire safe standards, parking requirements and setback requirements for new structures.</p>	<p>The PAR acknowledges community concerns that expansion of sewer service to currently unsewered areas could encourage development and affect the rural and small-town character of West County communities. The additional concerns identified by the commenter regarding roads, emergency access, parking, affordable housing, water infrastructure, and community services are not specifically evaluated in the PAR. These issues extend beyond the wastewater infrastructure focus of the Feasibility Study and PAR and may warrant consideration as part of future planning for connection of individual unsewered communities. Additional clarifying text was added to Appendix B under "General Public Outreach".</p>

ID	STAKEHOLDER COMMENT	RESPONSE
5	Page 16 proposes "moving outreach to unsewered communities further down in the process after collection system design is nearing completion". This is very late in the process to perform community outreach and does not provide adequate transparency in the process to give the public adequate information as the project proceeds.	Suggestions provided during the June 17, 2026 public workshop do not represent consensus but helped inform the development of the PAR. Appendix B provides additional clarification.
6	Page 17 states: "They also stated unsewered areas (particularly Monte Rio and Villa Grande) are already considering an OWTS special district; a plan is already developed and may move faster than other unsewered areas." There is no plan at this time. There is only a study of potential solutions and the study has not been formally adopted.	The language in Appendix B was revised to clarify that Monte Rio and Villa Grande have studied potential wastewater solutions, but no plan has been formally adopted at this time.
7	Page 17, Funding and Finance: The potential impacts to low-cost housing need to be clearly defined. The high cost of project 1A will result in the removal of low-income housing from the housing pool in Sonoma County. This could have significant impacts on the demographics of the area. There will be a need for provision of housing which will be affordable to residents displaced by the costs of the project. Monte Rio qualifies as a DAC and many residents are barely getting by on limited or fixed incomes. The vague statements later in the report about potential funding sources do not adequately mitigate the concerns relative to impacts to low income residents. Connection costs, ongoing annual fees and needed onsite improvements are substantial costs that will affect the ability of a property owner to maintain rents at reasonable levels. If properties are reassessed, it will also contribute to increased rents. Landlords cannot absorb these costs. They will be passed on to tenants.	Addressed in Appendix B.
8	Page 20, conclusions: There need to be measurable standards developed on the anticipated level of improvement to water quality that will result from implementation of the project. What is the expected benefit to the community? Are the anticipated costs of the project going to result in a measurable environmental benefit?	The PAR is a planning-level document and does not establish quantitative environmental benefits for individual projects. Specific environmental and water-quality benefits, performance objectives, and applicable regulatory

ID	STAKEHOLDER COMMENT	RESPONSE
		requirements will be identified and evaluated at the project level as individual components of the regionalization program proceed through design, environmental review, and permitting. This information is included as a footnote on page 25.
9	Page 20, costs: These need to address onsite costs to the property owner for lateral construction, permits, connection fees, plumbing modification, septic tank abandonment, etc.	The Feasibility Study cost estimates include anticipated costs associated with septic system decommissioning, new collection systems, and sewer connection fees. The PAR is a planning-level document, and detailed property-specific costs, such as sewer laterals, permits, plumbing modifications, septic tank abandonment, and other onsite improvements, cannot be fully defined at this stage. This is included in the footnote on page 25.
10	Page 22 states "funding from the State Water Board is generally not available for the installation of new septic systems". The state legislation which adopted the statewide OWTS standards (AB885) specifically provided for low interest loans to property owners to come into conformance with the standards.	AB 885 (Water Code Section 13291.5) expresses legislative intent to provide financial assistance to private property owners with existing onsite wastewater treatment systems who incur costs to comply with statewide OWTS requirements. The State Water Board's OWTS

ID	STAKEHOLDER COMMENT	RESPONSE
		<p>Policy provides a mechanism for local agencies to apply for Clean Water State Revolving Fund funding to establish local low-interest loan programs for eligible OWTS owners. The PAR was revised to clarify the distinction between funding for new septic systems and potential financial assistance for repair, replacement, or upgrades to existing OWTS necessary to meet regulatory requirements. Availability and eligibility for specific funding programs will be evaluated as individual projects are developed.</p>
11	<p>Page 26 states that Inflow and Infiltration measures will not be fully implemented for RRCSD until 2046 (begin construction in 2041, finish in 5 years). Therefore full correction to the RRCSD problems will not occur until 2046. The same section, however, states that design and construction for cluster 12 will begin in 2032 and will be completed in five years (2037). This implies that Cluster 12 (Monte Rio/Villa Grande) may be connected to RRCSD prior to all needed improvements being completed. This is simply unacceptable. You do not correct potential issues with OWTS by connecting them to a treatment plant that is not adequate to support the wastewater.</p>	<p>The roadmap does not contemplate delaying all RRCSD I&I improvements until 2041. RRCSD is scheduled to complete an I&I study and prioritization plan beginning in 2026, followed by funding, design, and construction of the highest-priority I&I improvements beginning in 2030. The activity beginning in 2041 represents continuation of longer-term I&I improvements rather than the start of I&I corrective work. The timing and</p>

ID	STAKEHOLDER COMMENT	RESPONSE
		prerequisites for connection of Cluster 12 will be evaluated and refined at the project level based on demonstrated collection and treatment capacity and completion of necessary RRCSD improvements.
Sara Yardley		
12	I would add that these same costs will impact homeowners as well as renters. The River area has a good share of homeowners who have no margin for this level of cost increase.	See response to Kyla Brooke comments below.
Kyla Brooke		
13	Let me add that multiunit landowners face a huge bump in taxes. The cost of the sewer tax is .8 per ESD. So a duplex is 1.6 x the cost of a single-family house, and a 4 plex will be 3.2 x the cost of a single-family house and this is only for sewer. Can you let me know what you think this will come to please? What financing measures will be allowed for this increase of taxes?	Property taxes and sewage rates are two separate issues (although both impact costs to individual landowners). The Sonoma County Auditor-Controller-Treasurer-Tax Collector (ECTTC) suggests connection to sewer WILL NOT result in reassessment, but instead viewed as a replacement for 1:1 services (septic provides wastewater treatment; so does sewer). If development potential changes, that could result in a reassessment of land values. Multi-family units WILL generate more wastewater than single family and likely result in higher commensurate rates. The team fully acknowledges (and the PAR

ID	STAKEHOLDER COMMENT	RESPONSE
		seeks to make this clear) that a regionalized system will not move forward without significant state funding/grants for capital improvements. Specific rates are not possible to project decades out.
Steve Trippe		
14	the PAR should include specific information on the increasing regulatory burden on West County communities, such as what property owners need to do to comply with the Russian River Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) requirements. As currently written, the PAR does not include a lot of information on regulatory issues, which serve as the impetus for any regionalized actions. For the Monte Rio Feasibility Study, the CAG struggled with community engagement and bringing people along with the process.	The Introduction was revised to note that a regionalized system could help provide resilience in the face of a changing regulatory environment. Further information would be specified in individual, project-specific design-level plans.
15	The PAR should include a specific outreach subsection in Section 5.	See Community Engagement and Stakeholder Outreach, page 31.
16	The PAR as written is fairly technical and may be challenging for a general public audience. A different version could be created with targeted, non-technical information for each of the communities impacted by regionalization	Comment noted. Future project-specific design and implementation will include robust public outreach to generate support and create shared understanding of project concepts.
Brenda Adelman		
17	As written in the draft provided for Stakeholder Committee review, the Executive Summary and Section 1 do not include a detailed history of wastewater management challenges associated with RRCSD or the Guerneville WWTP. Additionally, the PAR does not include detailed history of the contributions of the Russian River Watershed Protection Committee.	The Executive Summary and Section 1 were revised to provide a brief general history of wastewater management challenges in the project area.

North Coast Water Quality Control Board Comments⁶

ID	STAKEHOLDER COMMENT	RESPONSE
1	Revise the Introduction, Executive Summary, and other relevant sections to provide a more balanced description of the water quality and wastewater management challenges in West County. There is significant discussion of sewer infrastructure vulnerabilities, aged condition and lack of funding for collection system improvements, however the report could better balance the description of wastewater challenges by including more discussion of the potential water quality impacts of old or failing septic systems that may discharge inadequately treated human fecal waste throughout the year.	Executive Summary and Introduction now discuss aging/failing OWTS, year-round discharges from septic systems, regulatory challenges, and environmental/public health impacts alongside sewer system vulnerabilities. Please see page 2, Executive Summary and page 5, Section 1.
2	Include a discussion of the costs or consequences of not advancing identified feasible projects. This discussion would provide a more balanced consideration of the costs of feasible projects. Section 4: Stakeholder Engagement Outcomes provides a comprehensive discussion of stakeholder concerns regarding the costs of the two most viable regionalization alternatives [i.e., Modified 1a Two Local Facilities and 1c One Facility at Forestville Water District (FWD)] but lacks a similarly weighted discussion of the environmental, human health, and economic development costs of maintaining the status quo and not moving forward with technically feasible alternatives. If these costs cannot be quantified, a qualitative analysis would still provide more balance to the issue.	New section "Benefits of Regionalization Utilizing Alternative 1A and Drawbacks of Inaction" was added. Section 5 also discusses consequences of maintaining aging infrastructure and lack of wastewater solutions.
3	Consider including a broader community engagement effort to garner public attention and support in advancing wastewater management solutions. We agree with the PAR's findings that public support is crucial in advancing wastewater management projects. The PAR could be strengthened by providing additional regulatory context on Onsite Waste Treatment Systems (OWTS) and wastewater discharge permitting, to help residents understand how they may be affected and how a regional wastewater management plan may be of benefit. The potential regulatory compliance advantages include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Compliance with National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Permits and Waste Discharge Requirements (WDRs) 	The PAR was revised to strengthen the discussion of stakeholder engagement, community outreach, and the need for continued public involvement as wastewater management projects move forward. Section 3 expands discussion of stakeholder and community engagement efforts, while Section 4

⁶ Note references to page numbers and sections in North Coast Water Quality Control Board comments on the working draft PAR distributed August 18 and available [here](#).

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compliance with the Fecal Waste Discharge Prohibition in the Russian River TMDL • More cost effective method of addressing the water quality conditions driving the requirement in the Sonoma County Local Agency Management Program (LAMP) for supplemental treatment and/or enhanced disposal upgrades for new, replacement, or repaired septic systems within 600 feet of impaired waterbodies. • Providing regulatory context could establish the groundwork for a future communication plan to help residents understand the regulatory landscape and how they may be affected by wastewater management issues. 	<p>includes community outreach and communications as a near-term and continuing implementation activity. The PAR is intended to serve as a high-level planning and project advancement document and therefore does not provide a detailed evaluation of all regulatory requirements that may apply to future regionalization projects. As specific regionalization components advance into project-level planning, design, environmental review, and permitting, additional evaluation of applicable regulatory requirements and compliance considerations will be conducted, including those associated with onsite wastewater treatment systems, wastewater discharge permitting, Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) requirements, and other state and local regulatory programs as appropriate. These regulatory considerations will also be incorporated into future public outreach and stakeholder engagement efforts to help communities understand the regulatory landscape</p>
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		and potential project benefits and implications.
4	<p>Section 4: Stakeholder Engagement Outcomes. This section summarizes key stakeholder concerns, comments and outcomes. However, clarification is needed on which statements are views expressed by stakeholders versus findings or conclusions of the PAR. In several instances, opinions of stakeholders appear to be framed as findings. Please revise this section to separate statements that are stakeholders' views/opinions from report analysis or conclusions.</p>	<p>Section 3 now explicitly states: "the themes below and in the appendices represent the individual opinions of Stakeholder Committee and community members." The distinction between stakeholder input and report conclusions is much clearer. Also, please see Appendix B, page 42.</p>
5	<p>Section 5: Implementation Roadmap. This section presents a "roadmap", described as one potential path forward for the implementation of a regionalized wastewater management approach based on Feasibility Study two-treatment hub modified Alternative 1(A). Please address the following in the Implementation Roadmap:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Revise the structure and presentation of the Implementation Road by integrating additional graphics or other means of displaying the multiple categories (i.e., Governance, Finance, Implementation), phases (i.e., Near Term, Mid-Term, Long-Term) and implementing lead agencies. The current layout presents challenges in readability—additional graphics or a different structure would make it easier to understand the complete roadmap and how the different actions relate. Consider ways to break out the roadmap with itemized cost estimates (where available) and provide a table or figure to depict projects that may occur concurrently versus in series. The roadmap could be strengthened by showing what funding would be required at different phases and within each phase. Where cost estimates are not available, a note of "costs not available" or similar language could be included. Include community communication/outreach as a near term and/or a continuing action, as the PAR appropriately identifies public support as an important factor in moving forward with viable projects. c. For implementation actions, incorporate available implementation status (e.g., not started, design underway, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Roadmap reorganized into governance, finance, implementation and outreach categories; color coding added; status column added; actions phased over time. Readability improved substantially. Both hub 1 and hub 2 include dedicated communications plans beginning in near-term phases and continuing throughout implementation. Status column added ("Underway" etc.). Funding-related actions are identified throughout

	under construction, etc.) and level of funding secured (where information is available).	roadmap. However, funding amounts by phase are not shown.
6	We support the Implementation Roadmap approach of phased implementation of components that can advance independently and provide environmental benefits on their own.	PAR explicitly emphasizes phased implementation and independent advancement of components.

General Public Comments

ID	STAKEHOLDER COMMENT	RESPONSE
Adam Klaus		
1	I am a homeowner in Monte Rio, and I believe we need to find a sustainable wastewater solution for our community, particularly the underutilized downtown areas. A major barrier to the development of this area -- which has huge potential -- is wastewater management. Please prioritize Monte Rio's needs as this project moves forward. Given the long lead times for developing a regional solution, I believe we should explore smaller-scale, decentralized, or interim solutions that could be implemented on a shorter timeline. This would allow local businesses to plan for expansion. We also need to know about costs, how these would be shared by the community, and what options could be offered to protect low-income folks from undue burden. The process must be collaborative with local residents, homeowners, and other stakeholders. We are eager to move forward -- there are many who would welcome collaboration with the Sonoma Water on this process.	The PAR and Feasibility Study were directed by North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board Order No. R1-2023-0049 to explore regionalized approaches to wastewater management and do not preclude localized solutions which meet regulatory requirements. Detailed finance plans for all individual project components will be required for all future actions, but are not possible for this reconnaissance-level effort.
Amy Rankin Williams		
2	Thank you to Sonoma Water and everyone who has worked on the West County wastewater study. As a Monte Rio resident, I strongly support finding a sustainable wastewater solution for our community. Our downtown has tremendous potential, but the lack of adequate wastewater infrastructure	Thank you for your comment.

	has been a major obstacle to reopening commercial properties, attracting businesses, and creating a vibrant town center.	
Michelle McDonnell		
3	As a Monte Rio property owner and family who has lived and owned businesses since 1915, I strongly support finding a sustainable wastewater solution for our community. Our downtown has tremendous potential, but the lack of adequate wastewater infrastructure has been a major obstacle to reopening commercial properties, attracting businesses, and creating a vibrant town center. I encourage Sonoma Water to work with Permit Sonoma to prioritize Monte Rio's waste water needs as this broader project moves forward - one cannot expect a 30 yr project to take shape without interim solutions that should allow flexibility in compliance (not risking environmental concerns). In particular, I would like to see: 1. A clear timeline for when wastewater service could become available to downtown Monte Rio properties to allow for revitalization. 2. An exploration of smaller-scale, decentralized, or interim solutions that could be implemented sooner for Monte Rio's historic downtown, while the larger regional system is developed. 3. A transparent explanation of the likely costs to property owners and businesses, along with potential funding sources and affordability protections. 4. Continued collaboration with Monte Rio residents and businesses to develop a solution that supports downtown revitalization and protects the Russian River. 5. Recognize that any solution requires working together with Permit Sonoma and the community in a clear and reasonable manner. Our community is eager to move forward. Please help us find a practical pathway that allows downtown Monte Rio to thrive again.	The PAR and Feasibility Study were directed by North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board Order No. R1-2023-0049 to explore regionalized approaches to wastewater management and do not preclude localized solutions which meet regulatory requirements. Detailed finance plans for all individual project components will be required for all future actions, but are not possible for this reconnaissance-level effort.
Robert O'Shaughnessy		
4	I'd love to see the county find a wastewater solution for Monte Rio. The lack of county interest has prevented businesses from providing locals and visitors the vibrant community so many of us want. Please do not overlook Monte Rio's needs! We would love to see a timeline for Monte Rio revitalization. And any interim solutions that could be implemented sooner for Monte Rio's historic downtown, while the larger regional system is developed. Our	Thank you for your comment.

	community is eager to grow so humbly asking for the county to support this.	
Marion Patricia Thayer		
5	<p>I strongly oppose the recommendations in this study because 1) the methodology used to determine feasibility of various options was seriously flawed, 2) the authors admittedly ignored the fact that the Guerneville sewage treatment facility is unable to safely process the current level of wastewater, much less increased volumes from West County, 3) the authors also ignored that there are current needs for inspection and repair of septic systems that should not wait 10-20 years while the county tries to find money to finance the proposal, 4) the authors admitted during public meetings that they do not know how homes in areas like the Terraces on Starrett Hill can physically be connected to Guerneville, and 5) the cost of the centralized system to the public and to individual home owners is exorbitant. What West County needs is a septic system district that will immediately help homeowners (and the river) identify systems in need of repair or upgrade and that can apply for state financing for the needed improvements. The authors of the study simply did not examine the feasibility of such a district because they assumed no grants or other state/federal funding would be available for onite septic systems or clusters. So, proposing the hook up to a centralized treatment facility was a foregone conclusion.</p>	<p>The PAR and Feasibility Study were directed by North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board Order No. R1-2023-0049 to explore regionalized approaches to wastewater management and do not preclude localized solutions which meet regulatory requirements. Detailed finance plans for all individual project components will be required for all future actions, but are not possible for this reconnaissance-level effort.</p>

Crystal Wong		
6	<p>Thank you to Sonoma Water and all those involved in the West County wastewater study for your work on this important issue. As a Monte Rio resident, I support developing a sustainable, long-term wastewater solution for our community. Monte Rio's downtown has significant potential for revitalization, but inadequate wastewater infrastructure continues to limit the reopening of commercial properties, the establishment of new businesses, and the development of a thriving town center. I urge Sonoma Water and Sonoma County to make Monte Rio's needs a priority as this project moves forward. Specifically, I encourage the county to consider the following: * **Establish a clear timeline** for when wastewater service may be available to downtown Monte Rio properties so that property owners and prospective businesses can plan for future investment and revitalization. * **Evaluate smaller-scale, decentralized, or interim wastewater solutions** that could serve the historic downtown sooner, rather than requiring the community to wait for completion of a larger regional system. * **Provide transparent information about costs and funding**, including the anticipated financial burden on property owners and businesses, available funding opportunities, and measures to ensure that wastewater solutions remain affordable. *</p> <p>**Maintain meaningful engagement with local residents and businesses** throughout the planning process to ensure the chosen approach supports economic revitalization while protecting the Russian River and the surrounding environment. Monte Rio has an opportunity to restore vitality to its downtown and strengthen its local economy. I encourage Sonoma Water and Sonoma County to identify a realistic, timely, and affordable path forward that addresses our community's immediate needs while supporting long-term sustainability. Please help make it possible for downtown Monte Rio to thrive again.</p>	<p>The PAR and Feasibility Study were directed by North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board Order No. R1-2023-0049 to explore regionalized approaches to wastewater management and do not preclude localized solutions which meet regulatory requirements. Detailed finance plans for all individual project components will be required for all future actions, but are not possible for this reconnaissance-level effort.</p>
James Testa		
7	<p>Our Monte Rio community DOES NOT have any interest in connecting to the Guerneville sewer system! This project is not economically feasible. Please stop forcing this unwanted project on us.</p>	<p>Thank you for your comment.</p>

John Lillis		
8	<p>Thank you to Sonoma Water and everyone who has worked on the West County wastewater study. As a Monte Rio resident, I strongly support finding a sustainable wastewater solution for our community. Our downtown has tremendous potential, but the lack of adequate wastewater infrastructure has been a major obstacle to reopening commercial properties, attracting businesses, and creating a vibrant town center. I encourage Sonoma Water and Sonoma County to prioritize Monte Rio's needs as this project moves forward. In particular, I would like to see: A clear timeline for when wastewater service could become available to downtown Monte Rio properties to allow for revitalization. An exploration of smaller-scale, decentralized, or interim solutions that could be implemented sooner for Monte Rio's historic downtown, while the larger regional system is developed. A transparent explanation of the likely costs to property owners and businesses, along with potential funding sources and affordability protections. Continued collaboration with Monte Rio residents and businesses to develop a solution that supports downtown revitalization and protects the Russian River. Our community is eager to move forward. Please help us find a practical pathway that allows downtown Monte Rio to thrive again.</p>	<p>The PAR and Feasibility Study were directed by North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board Order No. R1-2023-0049 to explore regionalized approaches to wastewater management and do not preclude localized solutions which meet regulatory requirements. Detailed finance plans for all individual project components will be required for all future actions, but are not possible for this reconnaissance-level effort.</p>
Patrick McDonnell		
9	<p>Monte Rio has needed a wastewater solution for 40+ years. Please don't let the issues go unaddressed for another 40 years.</p>	<p>Thank you for your comment</p>

Danny Northern

10	<p>1. Sewer Infrastructure Of course, we need to repair and expand our sewer systems. The question is how that expansion will affect our communities and whether the necessary supporting infrastructure will also be provided. 2. Public Access to Information Expecting members of the public to review these lengthy technical documents is unrealistic. A concise summary document should be provided for public review, clearly identifying the major recommendations, proposed projects, costs, and anticipated impacts. The public should not have to work through hundreds of pages of technical material to understand what is being proposed. 3. Expansion of the Forestville Treatment Site I could not find specific information about the proposed expansion of the Forestville Treatment Site, although it may be included somewhere in the documents. This needs to be clearly addressed. The surrounding land is zoned for affordable housing, so how will the County reconcile the potential expansion of the treatment facility with its affordable housing plans? Which use will take priority? 4. Public Representation I noticed considerable public representation from the Lower Russian River area, but little or none from Forestville and Graton. Can you explain this difference? Were residents of Forestville and Graton adequately notified and given meaningful opportunities to participate in the planning process? 5. Growth and Supporting Infrastructure Increasing treatment plant capacity will make additional sewer connections possible, potentially facilitating more housing, including affordable housing. However, West County already has limited supporting infrastructure and services, including public transportation, employment opportunities, and essential community services. Have these limitations and the cumulative impacts of additional population growth been adequately evaluated as part of the sewer expansion plans? Expanding sewer capacity should not be considered in isolation from the other infrastructure and services needed to support that growth. 6. The Cost of New Sewer Connections A cost of approximately \$150,000 for a new sewer connection would be prohibitive for many property owners and developers. Such a cost could significantly increase the price of new housing, undermining the County's stated goal of</p>	<p>Please see Section 3, page 17. Early outreach to individuals within the project area included Graton, Forestville, and Occidental. Service on the Stakeholder Committee was entirely voluntary/based on willing participants.</p>
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	<p>providing affordable housing. How does the County intend to reconcile these connection costs with its affordable housing objectives? What funding, financing, or other measures are being considered to reduce this burden?</p>	
Matthew Meblin		
11	<p>Occidental is burdened with some of the highest sewer fees in California, if not the country. These extraordinary costs make it extremely difficult for local businesses to survive and compete on a fair playing field with businesses in nearby communities that pay substantially lower sewer rates. The proposed project may ultimately help create a more sustainable future for Occidental. However, the timeline for meaningful relief appears to be many years, possibly even decades. Some businesses may not survive long enough to benefit from the eventual improvements. The final report should address this immediate economic crisis, not only the community's long-term wastewater needs. I urge Sonoma Water to include specific recommendations for short-term relief for Occidental businesses while the larger project moves forward. These could include temporary rate reductions, hardship programs, grants, subsidies, revised commercial rate structures, or other measures that provide businesses with a reasonable degree of fairness and a genuine opportunity to survive. Long-term infrastructure improvements are important, but Occidental also needs</p>	<p>The PAR and Feasibility Study were directed by North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board Order No. R1-2023-0049 to explore regionalized approaches to wastewater management and do not preclude localized solutions which meet regulatory requirements. Detailed finance plans for all individual project components will be required for all future actions, but are not possible for this reconnaissance-level effort. Emergency relief for current Occidental ratepayers was outside of</p>

	<p>immediate relief. Without it, the community risks losing the very businesses the project is ultimately intended to support.</p>	<p>the scope of the PAR and Feasibility Study.</p>
12	<p>Please include the following as my public comment on the draft West County Feasibility Study Project Advancement Report:</p> <p>Occidental is burdened with some of the highest sewer fees in California, if not the country. These extraordinary costs make it extremely difficult for local businesses to survive and compete on a fair playing field with businesses in nearby communities that pay substantially lower sewer rates.</p> <p>The proposed project may ultimately help create a more sustainable future for Occidental. However, the timeline for meaningful relief appears to be many years, possibly even decades. Some businesses may not survive long enough to benefit from the eventual improvements.</p> <p>The final report should address this immediate economic crisis, not only the community's long-term wastewater needs. I urge Sonoma Water to include specific recommendations for short-term relief for Occidental businesses while the larger project moves forward. These could include temporary rate reductions, hardship programs, grants, subsidies, revised commercial rate structures, or other measures that provide businesses with a reasonable degree of fairness and a genuine opportunity to survive.</p> <p>Long-term infrastructure improvements are important, but Occidental also needs immediate relief. Without it, the community risks losing the very businesses the project is ultimately intended to support.</p>	<p>The PAR and Feasibility Study were directed by North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board Order No. R1-2023-0049 to explore regionalized approaches to wastewater management. Emergency relief for current Occidental ratepayers was outside of the scope of the PAR and Feasibility Study.</p>

Jon Box		
13	<p>Implementing a sewer system in the Monte Rio /Villa Grande area would cost too much money and will probably displace seniors and low income residents that simple can't afford the estimated \$160,000 cost per parcel (multiple units pay even more). Is the state willing to pay for this since they are the ones asking? This could construed as tantamount to confiscation of private property. What I would like to see is: 1) Proof that the local communities here are the sourced of water pollution since it seems logical and more likely the pathogens are coming from upstream sources like agriculture or homeless encampments along the river. 2) Identifying leaky septic systems or cesspools and requiring repairs on specific properties and leaving functioning septic alone. Putting in a sewer system will allow for fast development and building that will alter the ambience of West County, and not for the better if the population doubles.</p>	<p>Thank you for your comment.</p>
Colin Mutchler on behalf of Monte Rio Revival		
14	<p>1. Affordability and financial impacts on property owners. Our understanding is that the proposed regional solution could potentially be funded substantially through state and federal grants, including programs intended to support disadvantaged communities. The report notes that the State Water Board currently limits funding to \$175,000 per domestic residence for eligible septic-to-sewer conversions, and that this amount may cover most conversion costs, including septic system decommissioning and sewer connections. However, we understand that this funding is not guaranteed and that future sewer rates, assessments, and other costs remain undetermined. We request clarification on the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the anticipated range of upfront costs to individual residential property owners in Monte Rio and Villa Grande under the preferred alternative? • What portion of these costs could reasonably be expected to be covered by state or federal funding, and what would property owners be responsible for paying? • What are the anticipated ongoing annual sewer service charges, and how would they compare with the costs of maintaining existing septic systems? 	<p>See response to comment 18 below.</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could property owners face additional assessments, taxes, or other financial obligations associated with the new infrastructure? • What mechanisms could ensure that low-income and fixed-income residents are not financially displaced by mandatory sewer connections? <p>We encourage Sonoma Water to develop a preliminary household affordability analysis that illustrates potential upfront and ongoing costs under different funding scenarios.</p>	
15	<p>2. Implementation timeline for Monte Rio and Villa Grande: Our understanding of the proposed implementation schedule is that funding for Cluster 12 (Monte Rio/Villa Grande) would be pursued beginning in approximately 2030, with design and construction of connections estimated to begin around 2032 and continuing for approximately five years. This suggests that 2037 would be the earliest reasonable preliminary target for completion, assuming adequate funding, successful permitting, and timely construction. We recognize that the report presents a potential implementation pathway rather than a binding schedule. Nevertheless, this represents a substantial period during which residents and businesses would continue relying on aging or inadequate onsite wastewater systems. We would appreciate clarification on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is 2037 an appropriate interpretation of the anticipated completion date for Monte Rio and Villa Grande? • Does this timeline anticipate that all eligible properties would receive service by that date, or would connections be phased over additional years? • What are the principal factors preventing implementation before 2032? • Which planning, engineering, governance, and funding activities could begin earlier? 	See response to comment 18 below.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What interim assistance or regulatory accommodations might be available to property owners whose septic systems fail before regional service becomes available? We encourage the project team to identify opportunities to accelerate the overall schedule, particularly for communities with significant existing wastewater constraints. 	
16	<p>3. Accelerating wastewater service to Monte Rio's commercial core This is our highest-priority comment, as it has been identified as a top priority for the community as part of a community input process happening over the last year.</p> <p>The report explicitly recognizes the particular challenges facing Monte Rio's historic commercial downtown, noting that: “without reliable wastewater treatment, the commercial core of Monte Rio is not sustainable”</p> <p>The reality is that Monte Rio's commercial core has not been rebuilt for 46 years since the Labor Day fire of 1980 burned down several buildings that housed a grocery, bar and restaurant, multiple realties, and a public library.</p> <p>The report also acknowledges that the recommended regional approach allows flexibility for individual communities, or specific areas within communities, to connect independently based on funding availability and community support. It specifically identifies the Monte Rio commercial core as an example.</p> <p>We consider this recognition extremely important.</p> <p>Monte Rio's downtown has experienced longstanding challenges maintaining and attracting commercial activity. Wastewater limitations are a significant barrier to reopening</p>	See response to comment 18 below.

	<p>vacant commercial properties, establishing new businesses, and restoring a vibrant, walkable town center. Waiting until approximately 2037 for a wastewater solution would represent another decade of lost economic opportunity.</p> <p>We therefore request that Sonoma Water explicitly identify an accelerated wastewater solution for the Monte Rio commercial core as a potential early implementation project within Cluster 12.</p> <p>In particular, we ask the project team to consider: A. Early connection to the Guerneville treatment facility The report identifies potential available treatment capacity at the existing RRCS facility.</p> <p>Could a smaller wastewater collection system serving Monte Rio's commercial properties connect to the Guerneville facility before the broader Monte Rio/Villa Grande system is completed?</p> <p>What infrastructure, treatment capacity, regulatory approvals, and funding would be required?</p> <p>B. Alternative shared wastewater solutions If an early connection to Guerneville is not feasible, could a shared decentralized treatment system or community-scale onsite wastewater solution serve the commercial core? Could such a system be designed to integrate with the eventual regional sewer network, avoiding stranded infrastructure investments?</p> <p>C. Dedicated feasibility assessment and funding Would Sonoma Water support a focused engineering and financial feasibility assessment of accelerated wastewater service to Monte Rio's downtown? Could such an assessment identify a minimum viable service area, estimate commercial wastewater flows, compare alternative solutions, and establish an accelerated implementation schedule? Are there state or federal funding opportunities specifically applicable to commercial revitalization, small community wastewater infrastructure, or economically disadvantaged</p>	
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	<p>rural communities?</p> <p>D. An accelerated implementation target We would like to explore whether wastewater service could become available to the commercial core by approximately 2030, substantially ahead of the broader regional implementation schedule. We recognize that this date would need to be evaluated against engineering, permitting, governance, and funding realities.</p> <p>Our request is that the project team examine the earliest technically and financially feasible pathway rather than assuming that downtown must wait for the full regional project.</p>	
17	<p>4. Governance and community participation The report identifies governance arrangements and the need for legally constituted entities as important considerations for securing funding and implementing wastewater improvements.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We would appreciate clarification regarding the governance options available to Monte Rio and Villa Grande, including: • Which existing public agency would be best positioned to sponsor and administer an accelerated downtown wastewater project? • Would such a project require expansion of the RRCSD service area or another formal governance arrangement? 	<p>See Section 4, page 29. It is likely an amendment to the Sonoma County General Plan will be required to modify urban service area boundaries; if Monte Rio and Villa Grande proceed with a regionalized approach to wastewater management, a new governance structure or entity (such as a community service district) would be established, or the boundaries of an existing</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could a defined group of commercial property owners participate in a smaller initial service area? • What role could community organizations, local businesses, and Sonoma County play in developing and supporting such an initiative? <p>We encourage the project team to establish a clear mechanism for interested community stakeholders to participate in advancing early implementation opportunities.</p>	<p>service provider such as RRCSD would be expanded to incorporate these areas. Specific governance plans will need consideration as individual project plans are developed and implemented.</p>
18	<p>5. Requested additions to the final report: To make the Project Advancement Report more useful as an implementation roadmap, we respectfully request that the final version:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarify anticipated property-owner costs, including illustrative upfront and ongoing expenses under different funding scenarios. • Clarify the projected service date for Monte Rio and Villa Grande, including major dependencies and opportunities for acceleration. • Explicitly identify the Monte Rio commercial core as a candidate for accelerated implementation, consistent with the flexibility already described in the report. • Recommend a focused feasibility assessment comparing early regional connection with potential shared or decentralized wastewater solutions for the commercial core. • Identify a practical near-term pathway for initiating that assessment, including responsible agencies, potential funding sources, and opportunities for community participation. 	<p>The PAR and Feasibility Study were directed by North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board Order No. R1-2023-0049 to explore regionalized approaches to wastewater management and do not preclude localized solutions which meet regulatory requirements. Detailed finance plans and timelines for all individual project components will be required for all future actions, but are not possible for this reconnaissance-level effort.</p>

Kim Dion		
19	<p>I live and work in Occidental and share the concerns of residents and business owners here about our town's extremely high sewer fees and the negative economic impact they have on our community's ability to survive and thrive. I want to add my voice to our town's request for short-term sewer rate relief while long-term solutions are being developed.</p> <p>Occidental is burdened with some of the highest sewer fees in California, if not the country. We appreciate support for projects that will ultimately address the town's long-term wastewater needs. That is certainly necessary - but not sufficient.</p> <p>We also need support in the near term, to help us navigate the reality of high costs today, while long-term projects come to fruition. Otherwise, we fear some of our local businesses - ones that make Occidental such a uniquely special place - may not survive the interim period. That would have dire consequences, economically and socially, for those who live and work here.</p> <p>Short-term relief for Occidental businesses could include: temporary rate reductions, hardship programs, grants, subsidies, revised commercial rate structures, or other measures that provide businesses with a reasonable degree of fairness - compared to nearby communities that pay much lower sewer rates - and a genuine opportunity to survive, now and into the future.</p>	<p>Emergency relief for current Occidental ratepayers was outside of the scope of the PAR and Feasibility Study.</p>
Brenda Adelman		
	<p>Fix RRCSD and don't hook other communities to it. The river is fragile and problems are likely to reoccur because so many properties are in the flood plain. Monte Rio and Villa Grande flood like crazy during heavy rains. Set up Septic Management District for Monte Rio and Villa Grande and provide assistance in helping them meet compliance.</p>	<p>The PAR and Feasibility Study were directed to focus on regionalized approaches to wastewater management and lay out a potential path forward for sewer service to communities within the project area. The PAR and Feasibility Study do not preclude the development</p>

		of solutions to localized areas if they comply with regulatory requirements such as (but not limited to) environmental regulations.
	Forget hooking up new septic systems along river. Make stringent compliance mandatory along river. Develop strict inspection program.	The PAR and Feasibility Study focused on regionalized solutions for wastewater management. Compliance and inspection is generally the purview of the North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board and Sonoma County as the primary regulatory enforcement agencies in the project area.
	Establish citizen advisory committee for RRCSD that meets regularly and weighs in on any major changes to whatever systems are implemented and/or upgraded.	Thank you for your comment.
	Avoid development policies that encourage new growth in our area. Any new development along river should have at least 300' setbacks. (Make this part of new GP.)	Development and service area boundaries are set by Sonoma County and are outside the scope of this PAR and the Feasibility Study. Future project implementation will require adherence to local, regional, and state regulatory requirements.
	Community character should be protected while encouraging upgrading of systems when necessary. Residents should be educated by County on fiscal resources available for important septic system improvements. Maybe State should be lobbied to provide this service.	Thank you for your comment.
	County should lobby State to change rule that prohibits using penalty funds from wastewater treatment facility for repairing system. In fact, penalties allocated should be required to be used to assure problem causing spills are addressed.	Lobbying for legislative or regulatory changes is outside of the scope of this PAR or the Feasibility Study.

	<p>Affordability has been a constant issue. That's a term hard to define, however. It would be helpful to have staff conduct a study of possible savings opportunities that would not hinder successful operation of the plant. Where are the cost saving opportunities? Have there been time management studies with staff? How can future penalties be avoided, especially since now major repairs will be done on the collection system?</p>	<p>Detailed finance plans (including cost estimates and a cost-benefit analysis) would be developed for specific project components.</p>