



# RUSSIAN RIVER WATERSHED RESILIENCE PILOT PROJECT

Watershed Collaboration to Advance Climate Resilience

PREPARED BY SONOMA WATER

Climate change is affecting California's watersheds in complex ways, including more severe droughts and floods, wildfire impacts, and rising water temperatures. These impacts affect water supply, ecosystems, communities, and local economies, requiring coordinated planning and collaboration across multiple sectors.

To help address these challenges, the California Department of Water Resources (DWR) launched the Watershed Resilience Program (WRP) as part of the California Water Plan. The program focuses on understanding climate risks at the watershed scale and developing adaptation strategies through collaboration among agencies, Tribes, community groups, and other watershed stakeholders.

In July 2024, Sonoma Water received a \$2 million grant from DWR to develop a Watershed Resilience Plan for the Russian River watershed, one of five pilot watersheds selected statewide. The pilot projects are intended to test and refine a watershed-scale planning framework that could ultimately be expanded to watersheds throughout California.

The Russian River pilot project evaluates climate vulnerabilities and resilience strategies across multiple sectors within the watershed, including surface water supply, groundwater supply, flood management, water quality, ecosystems, recreation, hydropower, and community and equity considerations.

The final Watershed Resilience Plan, expected in April 2026, will include a climate vulnerability assessment, adaptation strategies, and an implementation framework to guide future resilience investments and watershed projects.

## Building a Watershed Network

A key component of the pilot project is the development of a Watershed Network to guide the resilience planning process and ensure broad engagement across the watershed.

The Russian River Watershed Network brings together participants representing Tribal governments, federal, state, and local agencies, nonprofit organizations, academic institutions, agricultural interests, recreation stakeholders, businesses, and community organizations.

## **Supporting Implementation of Watershed Resilience Strategies**

The Russian River pilot project is also helping position the watershed to take advantage of new state funding opportunities focused on climate resilience and water management.

The recently approved Proposition 4 climate bond includes \$100 million for watershed-scale climate resilience projects and \$75 million for agricultural and urban water conservation programs.

The Department of Water Resources is currently exploring how these funding sources could be coordinated with Watershed Resilience Program efforts to maximize administrative efficiency and support implementation of locally developed resilience strategies.

## **Advancing a Collaborative Approach to Watershed Resilience**

The Russian River Watershed Resilience Pilot Project demonstrates how collaborative watershed networks can help address complex climate challenges that cross jurisdictional and sector boundaries.

By bringing together diverse partners to identify shared vulnerabilities and solutions, the project is helping build relationships and partnerships needed to strengthen climate resilience across the Russian River watershed.

Following completion of the pilot plan in 2026, it is anticipated that the Watershed Network will continue working together to refine resilience strategies and pursue funding opportunities to implement priority projects throughout the watershed.