



Sonoma Water

Clean. Reliable. Essential. Every Day.

January 2026 Russian River Spill

- After-Action Findings
- Cleanup and Abatement Order
- Capacity Planning
- Funding Outlook
- Community Advocacy & Communication

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sonomawater.org



Overview

1. After-Action Findings
2. Proposed Cleanup and Abatement Order No. R1-2026-0043, North Coast Water Board, released for public comment July 24, 2026
3. Capacity Planning: Onsite storage, plant process improvements
4. Funding Outlook: Clean Water State Revolving Fund Award, Federal Earmarks, WRDA, Low Interest Loans, SW General Fund, Sewer Rates
5. Community Advocacy & Communication



What Happened: January 6–8, 2026

JANUARY 6, 3:00 A.M.

- Influent storage reached 100% of rated capacity

JANUARY 6, 7:14 A.M.

- Basin 3 overtopped; wastewater traveled about one-quarter mile overland to the Russian River

JANUARY 6, 2:30 P.M.

- The emergency storage pond also began to overflow

JANUARY 8, 6:50 A.M.

- the discharge ended

Total volume: approximately
4.9 million gallons

Advisories lifted

January 9:
Coastal Beaches

January 12:
Russian River



Why It Happened

River water entered the collection system through unbolted manhole covers and likely other unfound sources

Influent exceeded 4 MGD against the facility's 3.5 MGD peak wet-weather design capacity

Fine silts and clays from river water fouled the cloth filters; the plant is not designed to treat surface water

Storage was already partly consumed by diverting off-specification tertiary effluent back for retreatment

Hydraulic overload washed out the biological secondary treatment process



After Action Findings: Unified County Spill Response

Strengths

- Continuous 24-hour operator coverage with real-time process adjustments
- Regulatory notifications completed within required timeframes
- Water quality sampling beyond NPDES permit requirements
- Dedicated incident webpage and frequent bilingual updates
- No illnesses or injuries reported

Areas for Improvement

- SOPs on valve closures and manhole inspections require additional detail
- No winter baseline water quality data for comparison
- Coordination ran on parallel tracks; no EOC activation
- “Advisory,” “warning,” and “closure” were used inconsistently across agencies



High-Priority Recommendations

- Align regulatory expectations with real-world operating conditions in long-term infrastructure planning
- Expand hydraulic capacity, storage, and equalization
- Strengthen the SOP framework and pre-wet-season preparedness
- Continued development of interagency coordination and outreach



Cleanup and Abatement Order

Key submittal deadlines under proposed Order No. R1-2026-0043:

September 1, 2026

- Flow Monitoring Plan, with meters installed by October 1, 2026 for inflow and infiltration study

October 1, 2026

- Corrective Action Plan and Flood-Susceptible Manhole Assessment Workplan

February 1, 2027

- Final Flood-Susceptible Manhole Assessment Report

October 1, 2027

- Final Inflow and Infiltration Study Report



Funding Outlook

- Clean Water State Revolving Fund - \$47,766,537 grant
 - **Not** associated with January 2026 event
 - Received as a “Clean Water Construction Loan,” per the draft funding agreement. Principal forgiveness covers the full award — it is not repaid.
- Federal Earmarks
- WRDA Funding
- Low Interest Loans
- Sonoma Water General Fund
- Sewer Rates



What the Grant Funding Delivers

Rehabilitation of three parts of the District's wastewater system

1. The wastewater treatment plant headworks
2. The Rio Nido Force Main, Beanwood Force Main, and Main Force Main
3. 11 lift stations

Eligible costs

- construction, real property and easement acquisition, project management, and completion of final design

Timeline

- Construction to begin in 2028
- Complete by December 31, 2030



Two Parallel Workstreams

The capital project and the spill response advance on separate tracks.

Both strengthen the same system.

Where the two overlap:

- headworks and lift stations.
- The funded work also supports the Order's objectives
- The Order-required studies and plans will be scheduled and resourced separately

Clean Water State Revolving Fund Award Project

- Predates the January 2026 event and funds long-planned rehabilitation of the headworks, force mains, and lift stations

The Cleanup and Abatement Order

- Focuses on the collection system: flow monitoring, manhole security, valve procedures, and inflow and infiltration



Community Advocacy & Communication

- Awareness that we take our responsibilities seriously
- Support for the work currently underway
- Patience for the grant work occurring 2028-2030
- Continued communication with Sonoma Water
- Wipes, grease and clean outs
- Water Year Webinar upcoming this Fall





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