

California County Café Series: Year One Summary

Starting in May 2024, the Department of Water Resources (DWR), in partnership with the California State Association of Counties, convened a series of monthly gatherings for county staff who are responsible for the planning and implementation of [Senate Bill \(SB\) 552 of 2021 \(Hertzberg\)](#). Hosting the California County Café (C3) webinar series was in response to feedback from counties when DWR wrapped up the collaborative development of the [County Drought Resilience Planning Guidebook](#). During that process, counties emphasized the benefits and values of sharing information and best practices to support learning from each other.

This C3 series is meant to strengthen the county network to promote and make progress in drought resilience throughout the state, including economically and socially disadvantaged communities. During the gatherings, counties are able to share experiences, best practices, and insights to advance the implementation of SB 552 and improve countywide drought resilience beginning with the immediate needs for developing County Drought Resilience Plan (DRP). The meetings were not recorded, but summaries covering the content shared and any relevant resources were provided following each gathering. The sections below describe the topics discussed throughout the first year of the C3 series. Each section includes a summary of the key content shared, references the presenting counties, and links to any materials or presentations provided.

Task Force Formation

Discussed: May 2024 Gathering

- Presentations from **Santa Cruz County**, **El Dorado Water Agency**, **San Luis Obispo County**, and **Butte County** shared different approaches to forming a Task Force to support the development and implementation of Drought Resilience Plans (DRPs). Speakers highlighted the value of interdepartmental coordination, agency collaboration, and building community trust.
- Presentation available at: <https://water.ca.gov/-/media/DWR-Website/Web-Pages/Programs/Water-Use-And-Efficiency/Urban-Water-Use-Efficiency/SB-552/California-County-Cafe-C3-052924.pdf>

Risk Assessment

Discussed: July 2024 Gathering

- **Madera County** and **Tuolumne County** shared their experience completing the water shortage risk assessment portion of the DRP.
- They demonstrated the use of tools such as DWR's Water Shortage Vulnerability Tool to assess rural communities' physical and social vulnerability to water shortage and identify priority domestic wells and state small systems of concern.
- Presentation available at: <https://water.ca.gov/-/media/DWR-Website/Web-Pages/Programs/Water-Use-And-Efficiency/Urban-Water-Use-Efficiency/SB-552/California-County-Caf-C3-072424-ADA.pdf>

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Consolidation & System Partnerships

Discussed: September 2024 Gathering, February 2025 Office Hour

- In September, representatives from **Placer County Water Agency**, **El Dorado County**, and **South Tahoe Public Utility District** shared lessons learned from their water system consolidation efforts. Topics included assessing feasibility, navigating funding challenges, and building community buy-in.
- Participants raised the issue of underreporting dry wells due to a lack of trust in the government. Proposed solutions included having reports go through the Office of Emergency Services or trusted Community-Based Organizations like Self-Help Enterprises.
- During the February office hours, **Santa Cruz County** presented their successful outreach to expand voluntary well water quality testing and a recent feasibility study on water system consolidation.
- Additional resources shared by Michelle Frederick (State Water Board):
 - Countywide and Regional Funding Solicitation: https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/safer/funding_solicitation.html
 - Water System Consolidation Guidance: https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/consolidation/
 - Water System Partnerships: https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/drinking_water/certlic/drinkingwater/waterpartnership.html2025 Aquifer Risk Map: <https://gis.water.ca.gov/app/AquiferRiskMap/>
 - Drinking Water System Outreach Tool: <https://gis.water.ca.gov/app/DrinkingWaterOutreachTool/>
- September presentation available at: <https://water.ca.gov/-/media/DWR-Website/Web-Pages/Programs/Water-Use-And-Efficiency/Urban-Water-Use-Efficiency/SB-552/California-County-Caf-C3-092524.pdf>
- February presentation available at: <https://water.ca.gov/-/media/DWR-Website/Web-Pages/Programs/Water-Use-And-Efficiency/Urban-Water-Use-Efficiency/SB-552/California-County-Caf-C3-2192025.pdf>

Short-Term Water Shortage Response Actions

Discussed: November 2024 Gathering

- **Tulare County** presented their short-term response strategies, including service agreements, supply chain management, and emergency activation. A case study on Tooleville was shared to illustrate interim and long-term solutions.
- **Napa County** highlighted bottled water distribution, water hauling, dry well replacement permitting, and their conservation work plan emphasizing outreach.
- **Santa Barbara County** described collaboration with emergency management, environmental health, and water agencies.
- **Yolo County** presented a five-stage drought response plan covering proactive communication, conservation, mitigation, monitoring, and emergency water provision.
- Presentation available at: <https://water.ca.gov/-/media/DWR-Website/Web-Pages/Programs/Water-Use-And-Efficiency/Urban-Water-Use-Efficiency/SB-552/California-County-Caf-C3-111324-ADA.pdf>

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Triggers for Response Activation

Discussed: March 2025 Gathering

- **Sutter County** shared their approach to aligning their DRP with Emergency Operations, Local Hazard Mitigation, and Groundwater Sustainability Plans. They presented a timeline for completion and a StoryMap to help residents access drought-related resources.
- **Community Water Center** introduced their Domestic Well Mitigation Template to guide local agencies in defining roles and coordinating actions. They presented a trigger system based on metrics tied to groundwater conditions and impacts, with an example from East Kaweah GSA.
- **Mendocino County** outlined their three-stage drought response framework, informed by past drought declarations, other county DRPs, and analysis of groundwater/hydrologic data. Their triggers included both countywide and region-specific metrics for inland and coastal areas.
- Presentation available at: <https://water.ca.gov/-/media/DWR-Website/Web-Pages/Programs/Water-Use-And-Efficiency/Urban-Water-Use-Efficiency/SB-552/California-County-Caf-C3-031925.pdf>

Technical Assistance Resources

Discussed: January 2025 Gathering, February 2025 Office Hours

- In the January gathering, technical assistance providers shared information about their organization and the services they offer related to water shortage for counties:
 - **Self-Help Enterprises (SHE)** provides emergency water services (e.g., bottled water delivery, temporary water storage and hauling), domestic well repair/replacement grants (up to \$60,000), and water quality testing and filtration solutions in the San Joaquin region. SHE partners with State and local agencies to offer immediate and long-term drought responses. More on Self Help Enterprises: <https://www.selfhelpenterprises.org/>.
 - **Rural Community Assistance Corporation (RCAC)** supports rural and Indigenous communities across California with funding and training. Services include grants and loans for small water systems and onsite infrastructure, regionalization support, income surveys, and outreach assistance. More on RCAC: <https://www.rcac.org/>.
- During the February office hours, representatives from USDA discussed federal Water & Environmental Programs for Decentralized Systems.
- January presentation available at: <https://water.ca.gov/-/media/DWR-Website/Web-Pages/Programs/Water-Use-And-Efficiency/Urban-Water-Use-Efficiency/SB-552/California-County-Caf-C3-12925.pdf>
- February presentation available at: <https://water.ca.gov/-/media/DWR-Website/Web-Pages/Programs/Water-Use-And-Efficiency/Urban-Water-Use-Efficiency/SB-552/California-County-Caf-C3-2192025.pdf>



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Additional Topics Discussed in Office Hours

Events: October 2024 Office Hour, December 2024 Office Hour, February 2025 Office Hour

- These sessions provided informal time for county staff and DWR representatives to discuss questions and share resources.
- The December office hours discussed the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) background and shared motivations & strategies to coordinate with Groundwater Sustainability Agencies.
 - Presentation available at: <https://water.ca.gov/-/media/DWR-Website/Web-Pages/Programs/Water-Use-And-Efficiency/Urban-Water-Use-Efficiency/SB-552/20241018-DRIP-Collaborative-Meeting-PRESENTATION---2-1.pdf>
- The October office hours featured many topics, including outreach to domestic well owners, dry well reporting issues, SB 552 requirements for small suppliers, and shared supporting resources.
 - Resources available at: https://water.ca.gov/-/media/DWR-Website/Web-Pages/Programs/Water-Use-And-Efficiency/Urban-Water-Use-Efficiency/SB-552/Resources-11012024_ADA.pdf
 - Presentation available at: <https://water.ca.gov/Programs/Water-Use-And-Efficiency/SB-552/County-Drought-Resilience-Planning-Assistance-Program/-/media/CDE85AEBD35C467598098933997AA9EC.ashx>
- The content of the February office hours was discussed in the Consolidation & Systems Partnerships and Technical Assistance Resources sections above.

Acknowledgments

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- Sierra Ryan, County of Santa Cruz
- Kyle Ericson, El Dorado Water Agency
- Courtney Howard, County of San Luis Obispo
- Kamie Loeser, Butte County
- Jenny Nunez Rodriguez, Madera County
- Sean Hembree, Tuolumne County
- Jeremy Shepard, Placer County Water Agency
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- Denise England, Tulare County
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- Jason Johnston, Santa Barbara County
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- Amber Fisette, Mendocino County
- Amir Mani, EKI Environment & Water, Inc.
- Tami McVay, Self-Help Enterprises
- Cyril Barmore, Rural Community Assistance Corporation
- Jennifer Strauch, U.S. Department of Agriculture
- Michelle Frederick, State Water Resources Control Board

Check the SB 552 County Drought Resilience Planning Assistance Program webpage for updates, presentation slides, and tools shared throughout the C3 series:

<https://water.ca.gov/Programs/Water-Use-And-Efficiency/SB-552/County-Drought-Resilience-Planning-Assistance-Program>

