

California County Café Series: Living Summary of Sessions & Resources

Starting in May 2024, the Department of Water Resources (DWR), in partnership with the California State Association of Counties (CSAC), began hosting the California County Café (C3) series: monthly gatherings to support counties in planning and implementing [Senate Bill \(SB\) 552 of 2021 \(Hertzberg\)](#). The series is in response to feedback from counties during the 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.

The 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 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 are not recorded, but summaries covering the content shared and any relevant resources are provided following each gathering.

This Living Summary of Sessions & Resources compiles the topics discussed and resources shared and is updated as gatherings occur. Each section includes a summary of the key content shared, references the presenting counties, and links to any materials or presentations provided.

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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, June 2025 Office Hours

- In July, **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.
- During the June office hours, **DWR** provided an overview of the Water Shortage Vulnerability Score and Explorer Tool, explaining how it combines physical and social vulnerability indicators to assess drought and water shortage risk for domestic wells, state small systems, and small water systems. The session reviewed the underlying data, the indicator weighting approach, and the recent updates to the scoring method. DWR also demonstrated core tool functions, including filtering, navigating between layers, exporting data, and adding local data. Refer to the resources below to access the Tool and supporting methodologies:
 - Water Shortage Vulnerability Explorer Tool: <https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/ae1b4e3e41004f07b4901a7a3fa50637/>
 - Score & Tool Webpage: <https://water.ca.gov/Programs/Water-Use-And-Efficiency/SB-552/SB-552-Tool>
- July 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>
- June 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-OH-062525.pdf>

Consolidation & System Partnerships

Discussed: September 2024 Gathering, February 2025 Office Hour, May 2025 Gathering

- 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.
- During the February office hours, **Santa Cruz County** presented recent feasibility study on water system consolidation. The County acknowledged that they cannot force consolidation but will help facilitate the process if it is desired by all parties. The analysis focused on (1) the distance between small water systems and nearby municipal water mains and (2) the estimated cost of connecting each system, highlighting how geological and site-specific conditions affect feasibility. Going forward, the County plans to survey the viable small water systems to gauge their interest in and barriers to consolidation.
- Following Santa Cruz County's presentation, additional resources were shared by the **State Water Board**:

County & Regional Funding: https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/safer/funding_solicitation.html

Water System Consolidation Guidance:

https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/drinking_water/certlic/drinkingwater/consolidation.html

Water System Partnerships:

https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/drinking_water/certlic/drinkingwater/waterpartnership.html

Aquifer Risk Map:

<https://gispublic.waterboards.ca.gov/portal/apps/experiencebuilder/experience/?id=18c7d253f0a44fd2a5c7bcfb42cc158d>

Drinking Water System Outreach Tool:

<https://gispublic.waterboards.ca.gov/portal/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=70d27423735e45d6b037b7fbaea9a6a6>



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>

Well Management in Fractured Rock Areas

Discussed: August 2025 Gathering, September 2025 Office Hours

- In August, the Café focused on challenges and strategies for managing wells and water resources in fractured-rock areas, featuring three presentations:
 - **DWR** provided an overview of groundwater conditions in these non-basin areas, highlighting monitoring gaps, the influence of climate change on recharge, and how fractured rock considerations will be reflected in the upcoming update to *California's Groundwater* (Bulletin 118).
 - **San Mateo Resource Conservation District** shared examples of rural drought-resilience projects including water storage tanks and wet-season diversion pilots and discussed the complexities of aligning infrastructure improvements with water rights.
 - A member of the Nicasio Land Owner Association in **Marin County** presented practical, community-level approaches for improving well performance and water management in

fractured-rock areas, including water management newsletters, memos on individual well performance, and the use of rainwater capture, graywater systems, and storage tanks. The presentation emphasized how proactive well management strengthens drought resilience while also supporting broader community benefits such as fire safety, biodiversity, and soil health.

- The September office hours expanded on the fractured rock discussion. Discussion included what distinguishes fractured-rock wells from volcanic aquifer wells and how tools like the [SGMA Data Viewer](#) can help identify fractured rock areas.
- August 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-C3-082025.pdf>
- 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-OH-092425.pdf>

Community Groundwater Monitoring

Discussed: February 2025 Office Hours, October 2025 Gathering

- During the February office hours, **Santa Cruz County** shared about their voluntary domestic well water-quality pilot, conducted in partnership with the Central Coast Drinking Water Well Testing Program. The County used bilingual outreach (e.g., fliers, social media, door-to-door engagement, etc.) to encourage participation in targeted disadvantaged communities. More than 160 well owners applied with 70 wells tested and several exceedances identified. Eligible households received bottled water and treatment assistance, and groundwater elevations were compared to available well logs where possible.
- In October, the Café focused on groundwater level monitoring, highlighting both county and state efforts:
 - **Sonoma County Water Agency** presented its *Level Up!* voluntary well-monitoring program, emphasizing why community participation is essential in areas with extensive groundwater use. Sonoma shared targeted outreach strategies in data-gap areas, lessons from enrolling more than 80 volunteer wells, and a new participant-management system that replaces multiple spreadsheets with a consolidated workflow for enrollment, communication, and long-term program tracking.
 - **DWR** introduced its voluntary *Community Groundwater Monitoring Program*, which provides training, equipment, and technical support to expand groundwater-level data collection from domestic wells, schools, and small water systems. The presentation outlined the three participation levels for domestic well owners, monitoring options for small systems, how the program supports SB 552 requirements, and examples from early pilots in Sacramento and Yolo counties.
- 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>
- October 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-C3-102925.pdf>



Coordination to Support Implementation

Discussed: January 2026 Gathering, February 2026

- The January gathering featured presentations about finalizing the DRP and early implementation efforts:
 - **Mono County** shared how it used an existing interdepartmental committee as its Drought Task Force, highlighting the benefits of building on established coordination structures.
 - **Marin County** described its process for prioritizing short-term response actions and long-term mitigation strategies, including stakeholder input, public outreach, and phased implementation of the plan as a living document.
- The February gathering featured presentations about intentional coordination to support DRP implementation:
 - **Yolo County** described how it coordinated development of its Drought Resilience Plan with the Yolo Subbasin Groundwater Agency to align drought planning with SGMA implementation, groundwater sustainability objectives, and protections for domestic wells and disadvantaged communities.
 - **Kern County** shared how its Drought and Water Shortage Task Force supports coordination across County departments, Groundwater Sustainability Agencies, community-based organizations, and other partners to support plan development and implementation.
- 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-C3-012826-ADA.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-C3-022526.pdf>

Integrating Drought Resilience Plans into Existing Planning Efforts

Discussed: March 2026 Gathering

- **San Luis Obispo County** shared how it aligned SB 552 requirements with existing planning efforts, working groups, and public communication channels. The County described how its Drought Task Force, Water Resources Advisory Committee, Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan, Master Water Report, and public-facing webpages support ongoing drought planning, public engagement, and implementation tracking.
- **San Mateo County** described how it integrated development of its Drought Resilience Plan with the County's General Plan Safety Element update. The County highlighted the cross-departmental coordination needed to define implementation roles across planning, emergency management, environmental health, sustainability, public works, and other task force partners.
- 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-C3-031126.pdf>



Additional Topics Discussed in Office Hours

Events: October 2024 Office Hour, December 2024 Office Hour, February 2025 Office Hour, April 2025 Office Hour, June 2025 Office Hour, September 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/DWR-Website/Web-Pages/Programs/Water-Use-And-Efficiency/Urban-Water-Use-Efficiency/SB-552/California-County-Caf-C3-103024-ADA.pdf>
- The content of the February office hours was discussed in the Consolidation & Systems Partnerships, Technical Assistance Resources, and Community Groundwater Monitoring sections above.
- The April office hours key themes from the first year of the Café series and discussed outreach, dry-well reporting challenges, workforce capacity constraints, and coordination of drought response with emergency planning.
 - 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-C3-4162025-ADA.pdf>
 - Year One Gatherings Recap: https://water.ca.gov/-/media/DWR-Website/Web-Pages/Programs/Water-Use-And-Efficiency/Urban-Water-Use-Efficiency/SB-552/GatheringsRecap_ADA.pdf
- The content of the June office hours was discussed in the Risk Assessment section above.
- The September office hours, **Sutter County** shared how it is developing its Drought Resilience Plan, including how the county interprets the Water Shortage Vulnerability Score and Tool, addresses inconsistencies with local conditions, and considers mitigation options such as temporary interties and outreach for domestic well users.
 - 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-OH-092425.pdf>

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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>

