

Meeting Summary

Drought Resilience Interagency & Partners (DRIP) Collaborative

Land Use Planning for Drought Resilience Workgroup Meeting IV
California Natural Resources Agency, 715 P St, Sacramento, Room 06-212
September 12th, 2025 | 1:00-2:30PM

The meeting recording is available at: <https://youtu.be/t1Lbv3Wrcbo>

Meeting materials, including the presentation, are available at:
<http://www.water.ca.gov/drip>.

Meeting Objective: Advance recommendations on Land Repurposing and the Housing-Water Supply Nexus, gather member feedback, and identify refinements needed to prepare vote-ready recommendations for the Fall (October) DRIP Collaborative Meeting. Review anticipated timeline for the Integrated Water Planning complement process.

Workgroup members in attendance:

- Sierra Ryan, Santa Cruz County (workgroup co-lead)
- Lawrence Grodeska, Governor's Office of Land Use and Climate Innovation (workgroup co-lead)
- Anna Schiller, Environmental Defense Fund
- Andrew Altevogt, State Water Resources Control Board
- Tami McVay, Self Help Enterprises
- Suzanne Pecci, Domestic Well Owner in the South American Subbasin

Absent:

- Brent Hastey, Plumas Self Storage
- Jason Colombini, Jay Colombini Ranch, Inc.
- Katie Ruby, California Urban Water Agencies
- Carolina Hernandez, Los Angeles County Public Works
- Virginia Jameson, California Department of Food and Agriculture
- Emily Rooney, Agricultural Council of California

Also in attendance:

- Lorena Munoz, Community Water Center

Recap of Previous Land Use Planning Discussions

Recap the Summer (July) DRIP Collaborative meeting discussion and proposed pathways for the three Land Use Planning ideas.

Several subject matter experts (SMEs) shared input during and since the Summer (July) DRIP Collaborative meeting, including:

- July 2025: Presentation by Kristin Dobbin about **LAFCO and their role in consolidation** and water systems [Summer meeting]
- August/September 2025: UCLA Luskin Center on ideas Land2A & 2B
- September 2025: Watershed Solutions Network on ideas Land2A & 2B

Land3. Integrated Water Planning – path forward is to support LCI’s General Plan Guidance update process; augment input on water and drought. Members were invited to complete a survey related to the optional Water Element and to an upcoming session where non-state agency workgroup members can share feedback on the guidance update.

Land1. Land Repurposing

This section was dedicated to advancing Land Repurposing ideas, including a recap of member input in the July meeting and discussing draft recommendation ideas.

As lead of this issue area, Anna Schiller oriented the discussion around land use repurposing by first presenting the challenge of transitioning hundreds of thousands of acres of farmland that will go idle due to drought and groundwater sustainability requirements. Poor management of these lands can lead to economic, human health, and social impacts. Insufficient funding is limiting the reach of regionally-led multi-benefit land repurposing programs (MLRP), with only 8 of the 20 proposed projects currently funded. Anna discussed the opportunity for the DRIP Collaborative to play a role in articulating the resource and capacity gaps and making the case for increased state investment in regional planning and implementation efforts.

The DRIP Collaborative membership agreed in July that the regional approach and building regional capacity is the way forward, but haven’t yet pinned down the specifics of a possible recommendation. In this meeting, Anna proposed two pathways for supporting the regions in land repurposing build-up and expand MLRP.

1. Increase direct technical and funding support to seed development of regional capacity for farmland transitions.
2. Create an inventory of resources available for regional planners (funding, ongoing related planning processes, technical tools, guidance materials)
 - a. Also, tracking progress and lessons learned from regionals implementing MLRP.
 - b. Establish an expert advisory group to vet and maintain the resource inventory and provide technical input, as well as help define what regional capacity should look like.

The basis of the first pathway focuses on the challenge that no single entity is responsible for coordinating planning at a landscape scale—counties, irrigation districts, and farm bureaus all play roles, but no one is “bottom-lining” the effort. Members suggested the need for support to fund staff time and coordination capacity at the regional level.

Members discussed the appropriate scale for “region” (e.g., groundwater subbasin, Groundwater Sustainability Agency (GSA), watershed) and emphasized that scale should reflect the primary drivers for land repurposing. They also encouraged linking land repurposing to existing plans and programs, such as habitat conservation plans, flood hazard mitigation efforts, and general plan processes, to avoid duplication and leverage additional funding.

As a next step, members agreed the idea of the inventory and advisory group concept to be presented at the October meeting, but still framing the idea around building regional capacity and clarifying the DRIP Collaborative’s potential role, and the group still needs to decide whether this idea fits as a complement or lead effort by the DRIP Collaborative.

Land2. Housing-Water Supply Nexus

This section focused on briefly reviewing input from the July meeting, walking through draft recommendations and soliciting member feedback. This idea has been divided into two recommendations: planning alignment analysis (Land 2A) and water supply and wastewater capacity in comparison with regional housing allocations (Land 2B). Julie noted that these ideas have been submitted to UCLA Luskin Center as a Masters student capstone. Note, this does not mean the DRIP Collaborative is implementing these studies, but is exploring a potential pathway to initiate the work.

Land 2A – Planning Alignment Analysis: Analyze the timelines of housing and water planning processes and identify opportunities for water agencies to engage earlier and more effectively in housing development allocation decisions.

Sierra Ryan and Lawrence Grodeska presented the basis of this recommendation idea as the significant challenge of aligning housing development and water planning in California, noting that these processes occur on different timelines, under different mandates, and often with minimal coordination. This disconnect can result in water supply concerns surfacing late in the development process, creating inefficiencies, higher costs, and missed opportunities to ensure equitable, sustainable growth. This recommendation proposes to analyze planning timelines for water and housing, and gather case studies to identify where communication and coordination aren’t happening (proof of problem statement), as well as documenting where there is exemplary regional coordination.

After talking to multiple SMEs, the co-leads learned that a core problem is communication and coordination breakdowns between water planners, land use planners, and developers. This theme of “siloe planning” was echoed repeatedly and framed as a central driver of the challenge. To better understand this disconnect and develop solutions, Sierra presented a draft recommendation which suggests an analysis of planning timelines, including general plans (housing elements every 8 years), urban water management plans (every 5 years), and groundwater sustainability plans (20+ year horizons), to identify misalignments and opportunities for earlier engagement by water agencies. The SMEs also stressed the importance of understanding the broader

development timeline, including when developers acquire land and make key decisions, since this often happens well outside the public planning cycle.

A second critical piece of the study would be to conduct a set of case studies as a key tool to document both failures and successes in housing-water planning coordination. The cases could detail where misalignment led to significant problems (lost funding opportunities, delayed projects, or community impacts) as well as highlighting exemplary regions where collaboration between planners, water agencies, and developers produced strong results. Members noted that case studies should reflect the real-world community experience, including impacts on domestic well communities, zoning variances, and informal development patterns.

Members discussed potential deliverables and agreed they should be practical and grounded in real-world needs. Suggestions included:

- A resource guidebook with best management practices, planning considerations, and guidance for regional housing authorities and local agencies.
- Recommendations for how and when local and regional water agencies can and should engage earlier in housing allocation decisions.
- A framework or template for improved collaboration that counties, water suppliers, and developers could adapt to their own planning processes.

Members emphasized that this work should be developed with input from those doing the work on the ground, not just researchers, potentially through a steering committee that can guide case study selection, review findings, and ensure recommendations are practical and implementable. Sierra noted that UCLA researchers are interested in supporting this effort, which could provide analytical capacity if paired with practitioner input.

Finally, members discussed the audience for this work, weighing whether recommendations should target state-level policymakers (potentially informing planning guidelines updates) or focus on regional and county-level collaboration, leaning towards the latter being more politically feasible and immediately actionable. They stressed the importance of keeping equity and affordability in view, ensuring that solutions do not inadvertently limit access to housing or water for vulnerable communities.

In summary, this discussion updated the recommendation concept since July 2025 in the following ways:

- Combines a timeline analysis and a case study approach
- Captures the need to ground the analysis in real world experiences for both failures and successes
- Adds practical deliverables (resource guidebook, process maps, template for collaboration)
- Brings in equity, affordability, and domestic well considerations
- Clarifies that this should be guided by an advisory group with practitioner input

Land 2B – Capacity: Complete statewide comparison of regional housing allocations to water supply capacity to ensure housing growth is matched with sustainable water resources.

Lawrence Grodeska framed the issue as a growing tension between California’s housing development goals and the state’s limited water resources. He emphasized that while California faces immense pressure to build more housing, there is limited data on whether water supply and wastewater infrastructure can actually support this growth, particularly during dry periods. This lack of clear, data-driven understanding fuels two competing narratives: some argue there is “plenty of water” to build everywhere, while others worry continued growth will strain already fragile systems. This recommendation would help inform future discussions and provide insight into infrastructure or other supply needs.

To address this, Lawrence presented the draft idea that the DRIP Collaborative recommend a study be conducted to:

- Assess actual and projected water supply and wastewater treatment capacity by region across the state.
- Compare findings with regional housing allocations.
- Document best practices where housing and water planning are well coordinated.

He noted that this effort could build on previous statewide studies, such as a 10-year-old Senate Committee analysis, but update assumptions, methods, and planning horizons to reflect today’s climate realities.

In summary, members raised the following key considerations for this recommendation:

- **Regional Focus & Scope:** Members agreed that analysis should be done regionally but stressed the need to define what “region” means (e.g., county, GSA, planning region). They discussed starting with a pilot study to demonstrate feasibility before scaling statewide.
- **Time Horizons:** Multiple members suggested that a 20-year horizon is too short, recommending a 50-year horizon to align with infrastructure lifespans and long-term water availability planning.
- **Equity & Small Systems:** Members stressed the importance of considering **small water systems and domestic well communities**, which may face shortages even when regional supply appears adequate. Members highlighted that historic county approvals allowed subdivision development even after water levels had already declined, suggesting the study incorporate lessons from past well and subdivision records.
- **Data Sources & Feasibility:** Members discussed potential data inputs, including GSA modeling (which is publicly available), groundwater quality work (CV-SALTS), and other regional modeling efforts. Members noted that assembling this data would require a skilled researcher who could creatively combine multiple datasets.

- **Methodological Improvements:** Members agreed that past approaches underestimated risk by treating a six-year drought as an extreme case. The study should reflect **longer, more frequent droughts as a planning baseline** and consider ongoing transitions from agriculture to housing in rural regions.
- **Partnerships:** UCLA Luskin Center expressed interest in supporting the work, potentially beyond student projects, though members agreed that practitioner input will be critical to keep recommendations grounded in real-world decision-making.
- **Advisory Group & Deliverable:** Members discussed forming an advisory group with representation from DWR, State Water Board, and other state and regional stakeholders to guide the study, shape recommendations, and ensure outputs are useful for policy and planning.

The group expressed agreement to move both recommendations Land2A and Land2B forward and present these at the October meeting. Members emphasized the need to keep the studies focused, ensure relevance for housing-water planning, and include affordability and equitable access as part of the scope.

Next Steps

DWR provided an update on upcoming opportunities to engage with LCI's process for integrated water planning – General Plan, inviting the workgroup members to participate in activities related to the General Plan Guidance Update. Next full DRIP Collaborative meeting will be held in Sacramento on October 17th.

Public Comment

Lorena Munoz, Community Water Center: Commented that this is her first Land Use Planning Work DRIP Collaborative meeting. Noted that it has been great to see how it all works, and appreciate the amount of work being done behind the scenes.