

# Meeting Summary

## Drought Resilience Interagency & Partners (DRIP) Collaborative Roles & Responsibilities for Domestic Wells (DW) and State Small Water Systems (SSWS) Workshop #1

On Wednesday, March 25, 2026, the California Department of Water Resources hosted the first in a series of workshops to address [the DRIP Collaborative 2024 recommendation](#) on clarifying roles and responsibilities to DW and SSWS affected by water supply shortages and water quality. The workshop focused on developing a shared vision for supporting DWs and SSWSs during drought and other water-related challenges, beginning an inventory of existing programs and initiatives, and validating an approach to identify programmatic gaps and opportunities to strengthen current efforts.

Paul Gosselin, California Department of Water Resources, and Karen Mogus, State Water Board, the co-chairs of this initiative, provided opening remarks and expressed appreciation for participants' engagement and emphasized the importance of broad, cross-sector participation in clarifying the roles and responsibilities in supporting domestic well challenges.

Participants emphasized the importance of representing and advocating on behalf of residents with domestic wells to ensure they receive the same level of support and reliability as communities served by public water systems.

### Topic Scope and Vision Statement

The meeting opened with discussion of the underlying problem statement related to this topic:

*When domestic wells (DW) and state small water systems (SSWS) fail to provide safe drinking water, due to impaired water supply or quality, it impacts **Californians' Human Right to Water**. California currently lacks a comprehensive approach to address the urgent drinking water needs of households served **by failing DW and SSWS** and lacks a comprehensive policy for reducing the growth of dry DW and SSWS in the future.*

Participants reflected on the two key components of the problem statement: the Human Right to Water and failing DW and SSWS. Participants emphasized that ensuring the Human Right to Water is not the responsibility of any single entity, but is a shared responsibility requiring coordination across state, local, and regional partners. Simultaneously, there are inherent limitations for some entities (e.g., the state) when addressing issues related to privately owned wells. Participants also discussed how to define and characterize failing DW and SSWS, noting the importance of distinguishing between acute failures (e.g. sudden loss of a previously reliable source) and longstanding, nonviable systems. Additional drivers of failure were identified beyond those listed (including mechanical, hydrology, geology, water quality (contaminants), and demand) including naturally occurring arsenic, natural disasters (particularly wildfires) and limited education on well operation and maintenance among private well owners.

Participants then reacted to an initial vision statement for this topic, which will be refined in the coming months:

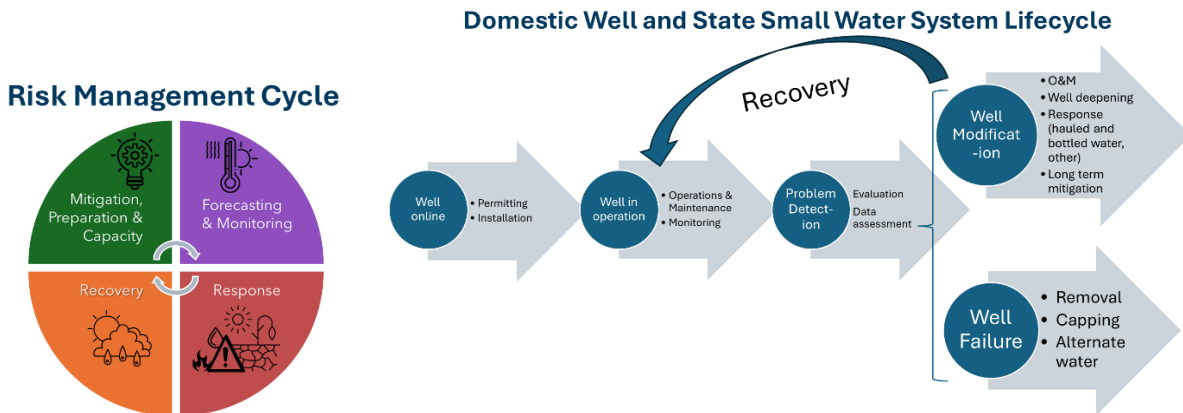
*Ensure that all households relying on domestic wells and state small water systems in California have consistent reliable access to safe and sufficient drinking and sanitation water, supported by a comprehensive and coordinated statewide approach to prevent, identify, and respond to failing wells.*

Key themes from the discussion included:

- **Resources and funding for coordination:** Sustained investment is needed to support coordination beyond one-time funding opportunities.
- **Local engagement:** Counties can help organize and empower local property owners, providing a more localized approach to well management and support.
- **Scale:** Addressing these issues requires considering multiple scales, from regional groundwater trends to individual property-level management, within the framework of a coordinated statewide approach.

## Framework

To organize the discussion, a framework was proposed combining components of the lifecycle of a well with a risk management cycle.



Suggestions from participants to update the proposed framework included:

- **System approach:** Expand the framework to consider the well as part of a wider ecosystem, emphasizing long-term water availability and quality rather than just individual well modifications (basin-level groundwater management, potential contaminants, and other systemic influences on well performance)
  - The framework should reflect (1) the immediate problem of people who currently lack water and need urgent support and (2) the long-term strategy to prevent future crises, which involves land use planning, SGMA implementation, well permitting, education, and other systemic factors.
  - The well is a physical tool that can be managed through operations, maintenance, and monitoring and groundwater as a resource, that is affected by broader management decisions.
- **Land use impacts:** Identify and incorporate land use decisions and planning into the framework.

## Spotlight on Existing Programs to Support DW and SSWS

Four presenters shared examples of existing programs and efforts that support DW and SSWS across California. Presenters were asked to briefly describe their program, identify where it fits within the drought risk management/lifecycle, highlight its impact, and explain how it coordinates with related efforts to expand its reach and effectiveness. The table below summarizes key takeaways from these presentations.

Topic	Presenter (Affiliation)	Presentation Overview	Risk Management Cycle	Program Impact	Coordination with Other Programs
DWR County Drought Planning Assistance Program	Julie Ekstrom (CA DWR – Water Justice Office)	Supports counties in SB 552 implementation through planning, technical assistance, funding, and tools.	Mitigation, Preparation & Capacity	Advanced statewide task forces and plans (56 counties; most with risk assessments/actions; many plans complete/in progress).	Coordinates with SGMO, CSAC, SAFER, and land use/climate planning efforts.
SGMA Well Mitigation & GSA Role	Caryl Sheehan (SWB – Office of Sustainable Groundwater Management)	SGMA implementation focused on preventing and mitigating dry wells through GSA plans and partnerships.	Mitigation, Preparation & Capacity; Response	Expands local mitigation programs and improves preparedness for significant and unreasonable impacts on domestic wells.	Coordinates with GSAs, NGOs, community groups, and emergency response partners.
County-Level SB 552 Implementation	Hannah Romero (El Dorado Water Agency)	El Dorado County drought resilience planning integrating wildfire impacts, rural conditions, and multi-agency coordination; extends beyond SB 552 requirements.	Mitigation, Preparation & Capacity; Forecasting & Monitoring; Response; Recovery	Strengthened partnerships, aligned plans, and prioritized actions; highlights funding/feasibility gaps for rural systems.	Aligns with General Plan, Hazard Mitigation Plan, climate efforts, and regional planning; coordinated through a multi-agency task force.
Emergency, Interim, and Long-Term Domestic Well Support Programs	Tami McVay (Self Help Enterprises)	Programs covering emergency response, interim supply, long-term well solutions, water quality, and education.	Mitigation, Preparation & Capacity; Response; Recovery	Provides immediate relief to households, supports transition to permanent solutions, improves water quality and reliability, and builds long-term resilience for disadvantaged communities.	Coordinates closely with State Water Board, local agencies, contractors, and community partners.

## Working Session - Inventory of Existing Programs

Workshop participants split into four groups based on the well lifecycle framework: (1) Permitting and Installation, (2) Operation and Monitoring, (3) Evaluation and Assessment, and (4) Response and Mitigation. Each group reviewed and contributed to a shared inventory of existing programs supporting drought preparedness for DW and SSWS ([Workshop Breakout Templates.xlsx](#); document access must be requested).

Participants suggested that the inventory of existing programs should include the following information:

- **Geographic boundaries:** Clearly define the geographic or jurisdictional coverage of each program.
- **Program details:** Include the administering agencies even if funding is not available and provide clear, actionable information about available services and points of contact.
- **Lessons learned:** Capture insights from past successful programs; consider including an "archived programs" section.
- **Outreach and engagement:** Recognize public education and engagement and local capacity-building as key resources (especially when funding not available).
- **Guidance document:** Develop supporting guidance to clarify roles, responsibilities, and funding sources across programs.

## Gap Analysis Approach

The meeting closed with a discussion on how to approach identifying gaps and opportunities for improvement, building from the programs inventory toward a more structured evaluation. The proposed approach assesses programs across their scope, effectiveness/impact, accessibility and equity, sustainability/longevity, and coordination. Adding onto the proposed assessment approach, participants advocated for considering geographic coverage and assessing a program's public awareness.