



BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
AGENDA LETTER

Agenda Number:

Clerk of the Board of Supervisors
105 E. Anapamu Street, Suite 407
Santa Barbara, CA 93101
(805) 568-2240

Submitted on:
(COB Stamp)

Department Name:	County Health Department
Department No.:	041
Agenda Date:	December 9, 2025
Placement:	Administrative Agenda
Estimated Time:	N/A
Continued Item:	No
If Yes, date from:	
Vote Required:	Majority

TO: Board of Supervisors
FROM: Department Director: Mouhanad Hammami, County Health Department
Jason Johnston, Environmental Health Services Director
SUBJECT: Santa Barbara County Drought Resilience Plan

County Counsel Concurrence

As to form: Yes

Other Concurrence: OEM, County Water Agency

As to form: Yes

Auditor-Controller Concurrence

As to form: Yes

Recommended Actions:

That the Board of Supervisors:

- Receive and file the June 2025 Santa Barbara County Drought Resilience Plan, prepared by Lynker Corporation and GSI Water Solutions (Attachment A);
- Authorize the County Health Director, or designee, to submit the June 2025 Santa Barbara County Drought Resilience Plan to the California State Department of Water Resources as evidence of completion of the County's Drought Resilience Plan in accordance with the County Drought Resilience Planning 2023 Grant Agreement (Attachment B) and Water Code section 10609.70(b); and
- Determine that the recommended actions are not a Project within the meaning of California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), pursuant to Section 15378(b)(5) of the CEQA Guidelines, because the actions are organizational or administrative activities of governments that will not result in direct or indirect physical changes in the environment.

Summary Text:

This item is on the agenda to provide the Board with the Santa Barbara County Drought Resilience Plan (June 2025) prepared by the County's consultants Lynker Corporation and GSI Water Solutions, Inc. This work was funded by the California Department of Water Resources County Drought Resilience Planning 2023 Grant and was developed to meet the requirements of Senate Bill 552

(2021). Potential drought resilience mitigation measures are identified in the plan as recommended options for consideration based on a drought vulnerability and water shortage risk assessment specific to small water suppliers located in Santa Barbara County. This action also authorizes the County Health Director, or designee, to submit the plan to the California State Department of Water Resources as evidence of completion of the County's Drought Resilience Plan in accordance with its grant agreement executed with the State on May 30, 2024.

Discussion:

Drought, or the lack of precipitation over a defined timeframe, is a recurring hazard in Santa Barbara County. While drought can occur over short (less than 6 months) and long-term periods, in Santa Barbara long-term drought is most common with impacts increasing with duration and severity. In Santa Barbara, the longest recorded drought was 16 years (1918-1934) with the most recent in 2021 and 2022. Since 2005, there have been more years in drought than wet years. To improve drought and water shortage planning, SB 552 required counties to develop a drought resilience plan specific to their county.

The Santa Barbara County Drought Resilience Plan (Plan) was prepared by Lynker Corporation and GSI Water Solutions, Inc. in coordination with the County's internal drought task force composed of County Health, County Office of Emergency Management (OEM), and County Water Agency (Public Works). The Plan focuses on small water system suppliers (i.e. private domestic wells, state small water systems, and small water systems with less than 200 connections). It includes an evaluation of the risks and vulnerabilities these systems may have to drought-related water shortages, while identifying potential mitigation measures that can be implemented in the short- and long-term to reduce risks to water system users.

The risk assessment also considers drought vulnerabilities, including environmental hazards, and physical and social vulnerabilities. Examples of environmental hazards include drought and wildfire. Physical vulnerabilities include groundwater levels, water quality, and the age of well and water system infrastructure. The Healthy Places Index (HPI) social vulnerability metric was used to represent socioeconomic vulnerabilities that may increase drought risks to consumers. These various risks were geographically mapped to provide a visual representation of areas with greater drought risk in the county.

The Plan then identifies potential mitigation measures that could be considered for implementation over short- and longer-term timeframes. These include:

Short-Term Drought Mitigation Measures:

- Mutual Aid Agreements (Attachment A, page 31): agreements between water systems/well owners establishing how they may help each other during an emergency
- Interties (Attachment A, page 32): physical interconnection between adjacent systems to facilitate sharing of water between systems
- Interim Drinking Water Supplies (Attachment A, page 33): water filling stations, distribution of bottled water, or bulk water hauling to meet basic health and safety needs

Short-term measures identified for small water suppliers are quicker to implement; however, their implementation should be considered prior to a drought or water shortage. Examples of short-term measures for small water suppliers include entering into mutual aid agreements or establishing interties with neighboring water systems. These short-term actions described in the Plan are the responsibility of individual small water system suppliers to implement, and these mitigation actions

will be topics of consideration to be shared with small water suppliers at ongoing countywide drought task force meetings.

Long-Term Drought Mitigation Measures

- Drinking Water Well Mitigation Program (Attachment A, page 38): well rehabilitation and planning for new wells
- Consolidation Planning (Attachment A, page 40): physical or managerial/operational merging of two or more nearby systems
- Regional Water Infrastructure Planning (Attachment A, page 42): planning and prioritization of projects to facilitate infrastructure improvements such as interties, physical consolidation, and augmentation of groundwater resources or groundwater recharge

Long-term measures may build capacity and resilience countywide, and include drinking water infrastructure rehabilitation, ensuring new wells are completed to appropriate depth with adequate separation from existing wells, consolidation planning for drinking water systems, and other infrastructure planning to prepare for drought conditions.

Currently, these mitigation measures involve integration and discussion between small and large water suppliers in the county and are often incorporated into planning discussions across various planning efforts, such as at the Integrated Water Resource Management Program (IRWMP) or the State Water Resources Control Board's SAFER Program. SAFER focuses on short and long-term solutions to provide safe, accessible, and affordable supply of drinking water. These recommendations emphasize the importance of ongoing discussion and regional planning to incorporate risks of drought, where "at risk" areas are identified in this Plan.

No policy direction is proposed in the recommended actions for the Board today; however, should local policy action be necessary during a drought emergency, this Plan will provide an essential framework for mitigation actions that can be further developed when needed. Many of the proposed actions can be implemented at or between individual small water system suppliers or incorporated into their operating practices.

Background:

On September 23, 2021, State legislation signed by the Governor of California, Senate Bill 552, found that there are currently varying levels of water contingency planning and coverage across counties for small water suppliers, potentially leaving people at risk of going without water to meet basic household and drinking water needs during the next drought. As part of this legislation, SB 552 (in Section 10609.70 of the California Water Code) requires all counties to take specific measures to improve drought and water shortage preparedness for small water system suppliers and domestic wells, including the preparation of a drought resilience plan specific to an individual county.

On June 27, 2023, the Board approved and authorized the Director of Public Health, or designee to apply for, and execute if awarded, a County Drought Resilience Planning Assistance Grant application to the State Department of Water Resources for financial assistance in an amount not to exceed \$125,000 for the period January 1, 2024, through December 30, 2025. The State Department of Water Resources awarded the grant in the amount of \$125,000 on January 23, 2024, and the County's consultants began work on preparing the County's Drought Resilience Plan.

In July 2024, public meetings were held in Cuyama, Solvang, and Carpinteria to solicit feedback on the results of the risk assessment conducted to date and potential short and long-term mitigation strategies identified. These locations were chosen to be spread geographically throughout the County, and in groundwater basins categorized as medium or high-priority to develop groundwater

sustainability plans and manage groundwater for long-term sustainability. Feedback from these sessions was used in preparing the Drought Resilience Plan in accordance with the State Department of Water Resources County Drought Resilience Planning Guidebook. The Santa Barbara County Drought Resilience Plan was provided to County staff on June 30, 2025.

Fiscal and Facilities Impacts:

There are no immediate costs associated with this Board item. However, the Plan does present short-term responses and long-term mitigation strategies that may require fiscal resources if future policies are developed by the County to support drought resiliency of small water suppliers.

Fiscal Analysis:

The consultant utilized for this project was funded by the County Drought Resilience Planning Assistance Grant awarded by the State Department of Water Resources in the amount of \$125,000.

Staffing Impacts:

There is no staffing impact associated with this Board item.

Special Instructions:

Direct the Clerk of the Board to provide a certified copy of the minute order to County Health, Attention: PHDGROUPEContractsUnit@sbcphd.org.

Attachments:

Attachment A – Santa Barbara County Drought Resilience Plan

Attachment B – Santa Barbara Grant Agreement No. 4600015969

Contact Information:

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