



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 Executive Office &
Public Works/Water Agency
Department No.: 012, 054
Agenda Date: August 26, 2025
Placement: Administrative Agenda
Estimated Time: N/A
Continued Item: No
If Yes, date from:
Vote Required: Majority

TO: Board of Directors, Water Agency
FROM: Department Directors: Mona Miyasato, County Executive Officer
Chris Sneddon, Director, Public Works Department
Contact: Wade Horton, Assistant CEO
SUBJECT: Responses to 2024-25 Grand Jury Report on Water Management

Signed by:
Wade Horton
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DocuSigned by:
Chris Sneddon
67CEC4FE68B848C...

County Counsel Concurrence

As to form: Yes

Other Concurrence:

As to form: N/A

Auditor-Controller Concurrence

As to form: N/A

Recommended Actions:

That the Board of Directors:

- Consider and adopt the responses in Attachment A as the Santa Barbara County Water Agency Board of Directors' response to the 2024-25 Grand Jury report entitled "Water Management in Santa Barbara County – Keep Up the Good Work;"
- Authorize the Chair to sign the letter included in Attachment A, and forward the letter and responses to the Presiding Judge of Santa Barbara Superior Court; and
- Determine pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines 15378(b)(5) that the above actions are not a project subject to CEQA review because they are government administrative activities that do not result in direct or indirect physical changes to the environment.

Summary Text:

On June 13, 2025, the Santa Barbara County Grand Jury issued a report entitled "Water Management in Santa Barbara County – Keep Up the Good Work." On August 26, 2025, the Santa Barbara County Water Agency Board of Directors (Board) will consider the proposed responses to the report, adopt their preferred responses, and authorize the Chair to sign the response letter. The Board is required to respond in writing to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court within 90 days of the report issuance.

Discussion:

In the report entitled “Water Management in Santa Barbara County – Keep Up the Good Work” (Attachment B), the Grand Jury found that local water agencies have made significant strides in managing the county’s water supplies. Through improved inter-agency coordination, proactive conservation programs, and early investments in recycled water and desalination, the county is better prepared for a drought than in previous years. Nevertheless, fluctuating rainfall and increasing water demand due to population growth and new development remain challenges and a fact of life in the county. To secure long-term resilience, the report urges sustained funding for infrastructure maintenance, continued expansion of supplemental supplies, and rigorous, county-wide planning for the next inevitable drought.

The Board is named a responder to Findings 1 and 2. Please refer to Attachment A for the County’s responses.

Background:

Historically, Santa Barbara County’s water system has faced growing challenges from drought and the depletion of groundwater by urban and agricultural land uses. Though the last three winters of heavy rainfall led to full reservoirs and somewhat replenished aquifers throughout the county, another drought is inevitable. These conditions, combined with additional pressures from population growth and new development, were cause for concern for the 2016-17 and 2024-25 Grand Juries.

The 2016–17 Grand Jury conducted a review of regional water management efforts and found that water supply planning in Santa Barbara County was fragmented among numerous agencies and coordination efforts were largely voluntary and ineffective. As a result, the Grand Jury recommended that the Santa Barbara County Water Agency become the regional coordinator for water management.

The 2024-25 Grand Jury shared similar water management concerns. The Grand Jury also expressed concern about the impacts of recent droughts and State housing mandates on local water supplies. To determine if the county as whole is prepared for the next drought and increased development, the 2024-25 Grand Jury investigated water management practices amongst the patchwork of more than a dozen independent water agencies. After considering the recommendations of the 2016-17 Grand Jury, the 2024-2025 Grand Jury found that circumstances have substantially improved since the issuance of the previous Grand Jury report. For example, the report found that although the County Water Agency did not assume the role of regional water management coordinator, staff clearly maintained relationships with the other agencies and continued to work collaboratively as needed. Furthermore, the report found that all interviewed water agencies had adopted plans to prepare for future water use, build infrastructure improvements, and develop additional water sources as needed to accommodate growth. Please see Attachment B for more details.

Fiscal and Facilities Impacts:

There are no fiscal or facilities impacts as a result of the Board’s action on this matter.

Page 3 of 3

Attachments:

Attachment A – Board of Directors Response – “Water Management in Santa Barbara County – Keep Up the Good Work”

Attachment B – 2024-25 Grand Jury Report “Water Management in Santa Barbara County – Keep Up the Good Work”

Contact Information:

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