

Santa Fe County Water Policy Advisory Committee
2025 2nd Quarter Report Pursuant to Santa Fe County Resolution 2024-038

PREAMBLE

This report is responsive to the Santa Fe County Resolution 2024-038, paragraph 19 requirement which states: “WPAC shall present a report of its activities and recommendations to the Board on a quarterly schedule...” for the second quarter of 2025.

INTRODUCTION

The WPAC 2025 Work Plan (Plan) was approved by the Board on January 28, 2025. The plan identified three WPAC working groups, and assigned specific tasks to each group. Those working groups include: 1) Stormwater Management Working Group; 2) Drinking & Wastewater Management Working Group; and 3) Outreach Working Group.

This report describes 2nd Quarter 2025 WPAC activities for each working group, by specific tasks.

STORMWATER MANAGEMENT WORKING GROUP

Task 1

Develop and present recommendations to the Board of County Commissioners (BCC) on revisions and additions to the Sustainable Land Development Code related to water conservation, harvesting and reuse, stormwater management, and code requirements for new developments.

2nd Quarter 2025 Activity

The Working Group has had a staff presentation providing background on the County's stormwater management program, and continues to learn about the program.

Task 2

Develop a Green Stormwater Infrastructure (GSI) Facility Master Plan and GSI Maintenance Training Guide.

2nd Quarter 2025 Activity

Stormwater Management Working Group members received a briefing on staff's initial progress on a GSI Master Plan and Training Guide.

Task 3

Review information to develop proposals for a County Compost Facility and Biogas Capture Project and provide recommendations to the BCC for inclusion in Planning considerations for County wastewater infrastructure expansion.

2nd Quarter 2025 Activity

Stormwater Management Working Group members received a staff briefing on current County practices for biosolids management and treated effluent, as well as staff's initial thoughts on possible wastewater management partnerships.

DRINKING & WASTEWATER MANAGEMENT WORKING GROUP

Task 1

Develop a framework for potential customers to efficiently navigate the process of connecting to the County utility system or requesting that the County take over an existing system. (Requires completion of an after-action report on Cañada de Los Alamos application and requires review and potential request to amend Resolution No. 2015-121.)

2nd Quarter 2025 Activity

The WPAC Resolution 2015-121 Report on the Cañada de Los Alamos Mutual Domestic Water Consumers and Mutual Sewage Works Association (Cañada), approved by WPAC October 10, 2024, has not yet been approved by the BCC. Substantive progress on this task awaits an after action report on the Board disposition of the Cañada application. In the meantime, the task leader has prepared separate internal working group memos describing existing procedures and policies for new developments and existing community systems to obtain water service from the County.

At the June 12, 2025 WPAC meeting, La Pradera Homeowners Association summarized its application for bulk wastewater service from the County. This application is under review for compliance with Resolution 2015-121. Preliminary Working Group analysis under existing regulatory requirements will be presented at the July 10, 2025 WPAC meeting.

Task 1A

Develop and present recommendations to the BCC for La Cienega/La Cieneguilla Drinking Water Contamination Mitigation. Including a bilingual, digital, and door-to-door survey. (Three-month timeline – present to BCC in late March/early April.) (Andrew Harnden)

2nd Quarter 2025 Activity

La Cienega/La Cieneguilla (LCLC) Preliminary Engineering Report (PER) /Water Planning Study community meeting for the Rapid Watershed Assessment (RWA), attended by Peter Gowen and John Kadlecik. A presentation was given by Amy Ewing of DBS&A. Community attendance was about 5 people. Ms. Ewing discussed steps going forward. The consultants are still in a data collection stage and will continue to have monthly meetings with the community.

Also briefly presented was the LCLC Draft Community Plan May 2025 (Plan), which has a section on water. Water section pages are 100-119. Other relevant pages for the PER are 50-51, 55, 62-71, & 74-80. The Plan was expected to be finalized in June after minor edits.

The Plan states the Community would like to continue to work in developing a water plan for the County water utility that addresses:

- Recharge of the area aquifer and springs;
- Reduced pumping of County held wells in or near the Planning Area;
- Planning future expansion of the county water system to manage withdrawals from wells near the Planning Area to help with recharge and mitigate depletion of the aquifer;
- Investigating and actively pursuing other points of diversion that would reduce impact on the Planning Area;
- Investigating and pursuing the possibility of using effluent to supplement acequia flows and;
- Coordinating a cooperative process with the community and all water interests to minimize impacts of future water use on the Planning Area; and
- Incorporate County "growth area" zones to further define areas that may have future access to County water systems.

The same presentation was given to some working group members on May 28.

Task 2

Review PFAS report dealing with the extent of contamination, clean-up timeline, alternatives analysis, and advise the BCC on most efficient path forward.

2nd Quarter 2025 Activity

After INTERA completes the initial sampling and incorporated that data into the model, with the preliminary findings, a direction to take will be more clear. It is known that there is PFAS contamination in the La Cienega / La Cieneguilla area and the most common question is, "What to do now?" INTERA's primary focus with this project is to determine the extent of the groundwater contamination. A goal is to provide guidance as to what the County and the affected parties can do to potentially reduce exposure in the future. The County may utilize the findings report to justify further funding of projects or programs that benefit County constituents.

Staff is encouraging WPAC to review the County website for info on PFAS and start thinking of scalable solutions that can be implemented in an efficient manner.

Task 3

Review policy, procedures, and enforcement for a Countywide Domestic Well Monitoring Program.

2nd Quarter 2025 Activity

The Working Group has reviewed the county's La Cienega / La Cieneguilla Well Monitoring Program Pilot report and Phase 2 Work plan, and will be meeting with County staff in early July to discuss lessons learned and receive updates on the current plan. The Working Group will also confirm how the WPAC can best support County Staff in 3rd Quarter 2025 on this initiative.

Task 4

Santa Fe 2100 Water Plan - Work with the City of Santa Fe to prepare for the growth and expansion of infrastructure and increased water demand.

2nd Quarter 2025 Activity

The City of Santa Fe signed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with Santa Fe County on February 13, 2025 regarding the County's Contribution of Funds to the City for Water and Wastewater Planning. The County signed this agreement in December 2024. City of Santa Fe Water Resources Planner, Steve Shultz, summarized the "Systems Tool for Evaluating Water Resource Decisions and Strategies" (STEWaRDS) model being developed as part of the long-range planning process, at the February 13, 2025 WPAC meeting. The use of this model is specifically called out in the MOA. County staff is working on population and service area projections for input into the model later this year. WPAC expects a staff presentation on these projections before they are delivered to the City.

Working Group member, Stephen Schmelling attended the May meeting of the City of Santa Fe's Water Conservation Committee, where Jesse Roach, the head of the Water Division and the Acting Head of the Public Utilities Division, gave a presentation on the status of the City's water system. This included a summary of water use in 2025, and an outline of the progress being made on Water 2100. Two important developments are: (1) that the City is going ahead with plans for the return flow pipeline, and (2) is rebuilding both the Nichols Reservoir and the McClure Reservoir in the next two years. The return flow pipeline will decrease the amount of water being discharged from the wastewater treatment plant into the Santa Fe River, which will, in turn, decrease the flow in the lower Santa Fe River. The impact of this decrease is not currently known.

Working Group member Stephen Schmelling attended the Next Generation Water Summit, which is primarily organized and sponsored by the City of Santa Fe's Water Conservation Office. The City made a presentation on their Water 2100 program that was very similar to the earlier presentation made in May. Santa Fe County is listed as one of the sponsors of this meeting. However, no one from the County was included as a speaker. Having someone from the County make a presentation at the 2026 edition of this meeting should be considered.

The following tasks will be considered as time and information become available:

Task 5

Pursue petition return-flow credit application

2nd Quarter 2025 Activity

Review of paragraph 8 of the Amended and Restated Water Resources Agreement (WRA) between the City of Santa Fe and Santa Fe County, signed by the County December 13, 2016 and by the City on December 14, 2016, reveals that the County has no right to any return flow from the City's wastewater treatment plant. This task is interpreted as support of the City seeking return flow credit. The Working Group is not actively working this task.

Task 6

Promote Aquifer Storage Recovery (ASR) at the Quill Plant.

2nd Quarter 2025 Activity

Staff is working on this ongoing project. No WPAC member is participating on this task at this time.

Task 7

Solicit community representation and engagement regarding the scope of work considerations during the project development phase.

2nd Quarter 2025 Activity

No WPAC member is participating on this task at this time.

OUTREACH WORKING GROUP

Task 1

Recommend the initiation for developing a Joint Powers Agreements (JPAs) with the City of Santa Fe for stormwater and wastewater management.

2nd Quarter 2025 Activity

After the working group proposed a Draft Plan of Action for this task in the first quarter of 2025, internal discussions were held by the County as to how to proceed with this task. A decision was made to not to proceed with joint powers agreements at this time, but to continue informal discussions with the City for purposes of exploiting current opportunities for further cooperation and coordination with the City on water matters.

Task 2

Support efforts for more cooperation/coordination with the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) and the Office of the State Engineer (OSE) (1) to require NMED to update and share its septic tank database with the County and require septic permit applicants to submit to County before NMED and (2) to require OSE to update GIS mapping to show well-head meter diversion points so the County can better estimate water use per acre.

2nd Quarter 2025 Activity

The Working Group (WG) has downloaded well data from NM Water Data and began effort to locate wells by latitude, longitude, or neighborhood, and well age. This is preparatory to revising the methodology for determining domestic well withdrawals and, assuming that domestic wells are associated with septic systems, may provide insight on shallow groundwater recharge.

The WG has obtained shape files for arroyos and other water courses. It has also downloaded the 2020 water withdrawals study from NM Tech and has extracted the Santa Fe County data and shared this study and the previous comparable studies with the full WPAC.

The WG has initiated contact with Legislative Finance Committee analyst for NM Environment Department and NM Energy, Minerals, and Natural Resources Department. Additionally, the WG has started contacting NM Tech, Office of State Engineer, and the Water Quality Bureau at NM Environment Department to discover available data.

Task 3

Develop educational materials and partnerships that promote watershed health and water conservation.

2nd Quarter 2025 Activity

A meeting occurred between Working Group task leader Kadlecik, with Santa Fe Watershed Association (SFWA) Executive Director, Mori Hensley. Ms. Hensley expressed a willingness to share materials and partner with the county to meet the objectives of this task. Afterwards, she spoke with their director of education, who confirmed that SFWA could most easily offer support to WPAC and the County in terms of curriculum training and design, expanding any of their existing programs to other areas of the County outside of the Santa Fe watershed, or serving as a strategic partner in identifying educational priorities and then designing programs accordingly.

WPAC Member, Peter Gowen has explicitly recused himself from this matter, as he is a board member of the SFWA, and thus has a conflict of interest.

Mori noted that the county has no specific water conservation office or people dedicated to working only on that. She also suggested working with the City's Office of Water Conservation. The Working Group will continue to explore possibilities with the SFWA and the City for meeting these objectives.

Task 4

Support Primacy of surface waters in the state.

2nd Quarter 2025 Activity

The legislature passed SB-21 in its regular 2025 legislative session. This bill authorizes the creation of state discharge permit system administered by the NMED, equivalent to the NPDES program currently administered by USEPA. With statutory action complete, the next step is rulemaking by the NMED. This process will go forward without regard to WPAC or

Santa Fe County participation. WPAC has not been actively engaged in this matter, nor will it continue to engage with this task.

The following tasks will be considered as time and information become available:

Task 5

Develop maps and a database of all NMED-approved septic systems and wells, arroyos, and rain garden/catchment areas in Santa Fe County.

2nd Quarter 2025 Activity

Work has begun to evaluate the data sources available for this task, including GIS shapefiles and point source data. Additional work will be performed in the next quarter.

Task 6

Develop a guideline/information packet for communities to form 501(c)(3) watershed associations.

2nd Quarter 2025 Activity

The task leader has prepared a narrative on forming watershed related non-profit corporations under New Mexico law called “Comments on Forming Nonprofit Watershed Associations”. This was presented to the full WPAC on March 13, 2025 and approved as full satisfaction of this work plan task. No additional work will be performed on this task.

Task 7

Support strategies with USDA NRCS to increase agricultural producers' awareness of Soil Health Program.

2nd Quarter 2025 Activity

WPAC is not working on this task at this time.