Santa Fe County Water Policy Advisory Committee
2026 1st Quarter Summary Report
Pursuant to Santa Fe County Resolution 2024-038

Introduction

This Summary Report highlights WPAC progress made on its 2026 Work Plan in the 1st Quarter of 2026. It 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 first quarter of 2026.

Greater detail is presented in an Addendum to this Summary Report (Attached.)

Unified Water Authority

On February 12, 2026, WPAC considered and approved a letter stating “WPAC Findings and Recommendations Regarding the Pursuit of a Unified Santa Fe County–City of Santa Fe Water Authority.” The February 12, 2026 WPAC letter was presented to the BCC at its March 31, 2026 meeting.

Review & Comment on Consultant Reports

Drinking and Wastewater Management Working Group has reviewed and commented on the following consultant reports made available by staff:

1. LC/LC PER/Water Planning Study & Rapid Watershed Assessment
2. PFAS study
3. Aquifer Storage Recovery at the Quill Plant
4. Preliminary draft report on a “Santa Fe County Water Utility Master Plan”

The Working Group comments will be presented to the full WPAC at its May 14, 2026 meeting.

Outreach

Working Group has advised staff on agenda topics for the 2026 Next Generation Water Summit and Water Leadership Institute.

Working Group met with Santa Fe Watershed Association to brainstorm on how to collaborate, using grants for watershed health throughout the county in conjunction with its planning grant from the Bureau of Reclamation for watershed restoration. Consultation continues.

Santa Fe County Water Policy Advisory Committee
Addendum to 2026 1st Quarter Report
Pursuant to Santa Fe County Resolution 2024-038

PREAMBLE

This Addendum supplements the WPAC 1st Quarter 2026 Report pursuant to 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…"

INTRODUCTION

The WPAC 2026 Work Plan (Plan) was approved by the Board on January 27, 2026. (Attachment 1.) 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 Addendum describes 1st quarter 2026 WPAC activities for each working group, by specific tasks.

STORMWATER MANAGEMENT WORKING GROUP

Task 1

Review and comment on the County staff and consultants' effort on: 1) revisions and additions to the Sustainable Land Development Code related to water conservation, harvesting and reuse, stormwater management, and code requirements for new developments; 2) Green Stormwater Infrastructure (GSI) Facility Master Plan); 3) GSI Installation and Maintenance Guide; 4) Subdivision review; and 5) Arroyo Stormwater Management component for the Stormwater Management Plan (SWMP).

1st Quarter 2026 Activity

Work Group continues to provide comments on staff efforts upon request.

Task 2

Explore and recommend projects and policies for promoting wastewater reuse in new and existing residential and commercial developments including updates to County's Sustainable Land Development Code (SLDC) and Sustainable Growth Management Plan (SGMP) to include incentives and/or requirements for wastewater reuse.

1st Quarter 2026 Activity

Exploration continues but no recommendations have been considered yet.

Task 3

Review information included in the Hazard Mitigation Plan on flood control structures that are owned by the Santa Fe-Pojoaque Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD).

1st Quarter 2026 Activity

SWCD Board members presented this issue to the full WPAC at its January 8, 2026 meeting. Review of the information continues.

DRINKING & WASTEWATER MANAGEMENT WORKING GROUP

Task 1

Review and Process applications for utility service by existing water and wastewater service providers pursuant to Resolution 2015-121 and as it may be amended. Consider additional amendments specific to Mutual Domestic Community Water Associations (MDCWAs) and long-term coordination with the County's utilities system.

1st Quarter 2026 Activity

No applications pursuant to Resolution 2015-121 have been forwarded to WPAC for its consideration.

Task 2

Review and comment on staff and consultant efforts on:

a. LC/LC PER/Water Planning Study & Rapid Watershed Assessment
b. County PFAS study
c. Santa Fe 2100 Water Plan
d. Wastewater treatment plant return flow credits
e. Aquifer Storage Recovery at the Quill Plant
f. Domestic Wells Monitoring Program
g. Return flow credits
h. Pojoaque Basin Regional Water System (PBRWS)
I. Eldorado Area Water & Sewer District (EAWSD) plans for water lines and for acquiring water rights and transfers

Comment on reports once available.

1st Quarter 2026 Activity

Consultant reports on items a, b, e, above and an additional preliminary draft report for a "Santa Fe County Water Utility Master Plan" have been made available to the Working Group. Review comments have been prepared and circulated for review by the full Working Group. Those comments will be presented to the full WPAC at its April 9, 2026 meeting.

OUTREACH WORKING GROUP

Task 1

Identify options for potential collaboration/partnerships regarding stormwater and wastewater management with the City of Santa Fe and other organizations such as the Santa Fe Watershed Association (SFWA), and with stakeholders and collaborative watershed planning groups in other County watersheds.

1st Quarter 2026 Activity

Working Group met with SFWA to brainstorm on how to collaborate, using grants for watershed health throughout the county in conjunction with its planning grant from the Bureau of Reclamation for watershed restoration. Progress continues.

On February 12, 2026, WPAC approved a letter to the BCC transmitting " WPAC Findings and Recommendations Regarding the Pursuit of a Unified Santa Fe County–City of Santa Fe Water Authority." (Attachment 2)

Staff and WPAC Chair presented this document to the BCC at its meeting on March 31, 2026. If the effort gains traction, WPAC will proceed with public participation suggestions.

Task 2

Explore opportunities for greater cooperation between NM Environment Department, Office of State Engineer (OSE) and County staff, to coordinate reporting requirements and databases for septic tanks and domestic wells.

1st Quarter 2026 Activity

Task leader learned that there is no useful state database for septic systems, and that prior funding for one has been withdrawn. The Work Group is working on mapping septic systems and wells.

Task 3

Explore options for supporting Community Water Systems for strengthening resiliency in infrastructure, people, and water supply. Support staff, NMED Drinking Water Bureau (DWB), Rural Community Assistance Corporation (RCAC), North Central New Mexico Economic Development District (NCNMEDD), and Rural Water Association (RWA) capacity building and training activities for Mutual Domestic Community Water Associations (MDCWAs) including systems regional collaboration for pooling and sharing resources. Propose engagement activities with MDCWA umbrella organizations as a contact point for staff efforts for promoting well monitoring and water conservation and reuse.

1st Quarter 2026 Activity

Working Group is working with and participating with the Water Leadership Institute in its educational program for water providers on topics of governance, water conservation, collaboration models and Open Meetings Act.
Working Group is responding to the Interstate Stream Commissions new rule for regions creating Water Security Plan, identifying the need for the County to identify a representative, as well as Mutual Domestic Community Water Associations.

Task 4

Explore and recommend strategies with USDA NRCS to increase agricultural producers' and residents' awareness of Soil Health Program. Work with Soil Health New Mexico.

1st Quarter 2026 Activity

This is a program managed by the The Santa Fe - Pojoaque Soil and Water Conservation District, which has sponsored this program in the past. Due to administrative challenges with the state agency, the District is not continuing the program this year, but hopes to re-engage next year with improved administrative conditions. There is no additional WPAC WG activity expected for the remainder of this year.

Task 5

Create a suite of strategies for increasing outreach to any county water-related program (domestic well reporting, for example, to address the question: how do residents find out about a program? (website, newsletter, property tax stuffers (biannual?), informational packets with new home purchases partnering with realtors. E-communication sign-up. Items for fun – water bottles, flow reduction products, videos, press releases, social media)

1st Quarter 2026 Activity

The Work Group has been conferring with the organizers of the Next Generation Water Summit (NGWS) on the NGWS 2026 program and its followup workshop on water conservation.

The Work Group commented on the Green Stormwater Infrastructure (GSI) Guide, suggesting that once it is formally released in April, that a link be included in utility and tax bills.

Task 6

Continue exploring trends in water data and consider ways of updating these data elements and conveying relevant data to the residents of the county.

1st Quarter 2026 Activity

See response to Task 2 above.

Task 7

Explore and recommend processes for additional community engagement regarding County water-related projects. Meet with Acequia Association(s) to better understand needs and identify opportunities for coordination with the County.

1st Quarter 2026 Activity

Initial contacts have been made with N.M. Acequia Association and N.M. Acequia Commission to facilitate some conversations. A problem has been identified regarding acequias wanting advance notice of land disturbance activities in their areas to protect their assets. Response to this is under consideration.

Attachments:

1. 2026 WPAC Work Plan
2. WPAC February 12, 2026 Letter Supporting Unified Water Authority

Exhibit 1

Addendum to WPAC
1st Qtr 2026 Report

Water Policy Advisory Committee
2026 Work Plan
REVISED

Stormwater Management Working Group

1. Review and comment on the County staff and consultants' effort on: 1) revisions and additions to the Sustainable Land Development Code related to water conservation, harvesting and reuse, stormwater management, and code requirements for new developments; 2) Green Stormwater Infrastructure (GSI) Facility Master Plan); 3) GSI Installation and Maintenance Guide; 4) Subdivision review; and 5) Arroyo Stormwater Management component for the Stormwater Management Plan (SWMP).

2. Explore and recommend projects and policies for promoting wastewater reuse in new and existing residential and commercial developments including updates to County's Sustainable Land Development Code (SLDC) and Sustainable Growth Management Plan (SGMP) to include incentives and/or requirements for wastewater reuse.

3. Review information included in the Hazard Mitigation Plan on flood control structures that are owned by the Santa Fe-Pojoaque Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD).

Drinking & Wastewater Management Working Group

1. Review and process applications for utility service by existing water and wastewater service providers pursuant to Resolution 2015-121 and as it may be amended. Consider additional amendments specific to Mutual Domestic Community Water Associations (MDCWAs) and long-term coordination with the County's utilities system.

2. Review and comment on staff and consultant efforts on:

   a. LC/LC PER/Water Planning Study & Rapid Watershed Assessment
   b. County PFAS study
   c. Santa Fe 2100 Water Plan
   d. Wastewater treatment plant return flow credits
   e. Aquifer Storage Recovery at the Quill Plant
   f. Domestic Wells Monitoring Program
   g. Return flow credits
   h. Pojoaque Basin Regional Water System (PBRWS)
   i. Eldorado Area Water & Sewer District (EAWSD) plans for water lines and for acquiring water rights and transfers

Comment on reports once available.

Outreach Working Group

1. Identify options for potential collaboration/partnerships regarding stormwater and wastewater management with the City of Santa Fe and other organizations such as the Santa Fe Watershed Association (SFWA), and with stakeholders and collaborative watershed planning groups in other County watersheds.

SFC CLERK RECORDED 02/02/2026

Exhibit A

2. Explore opportunities for greater cooperation between NM Environment Department, Office of State Engineer (OSE) and County staff, to coordinate reporting requirements and databases for septic tanks and domestic wells.

3. Explore options for supporting Community Water Systems for strengthening resiliency in infrastructure, people, and water supply. Support staff, NMED Drinking Water Bureau (DWB), Rural Community Assistance Corporation (RCAC), North Central New Mexico Economic Development District (NCNMEDD), and Rural Water Association (RWA) capacity building and training activities for Mutual Domestic Community Water Associations (MDCWAs) including systems regional collaboration for pooling and sharing resources. Propose engagement activities with MDCWA umbrella organizations as a contact point for staff efforts for promoting well monitoring and water conservation and reuse.

4. Explore and recommend strategies with USDA NRCS to increase agricultural producers' and residents' awareness of Soil Health Program. Work with Soil Health New Mexico.

5. Create a suite of strategies for increasing outreach to any county water-related program (domestic well reporting, for example, to address the question: how do residents find out about a program? (website, newsletter, property tax stuffers (biannual?), informational packets with new home purchases partnering with realtors. E-communication sign-up. Items for fun – water bottles, flow reduction products, videos, press releases, social media)

6. Continue exploring trends in water data and consider ways of updating these data elements and conveying relevant data to the residents of the county.

7. Explore and recommend processes for additional community engagement regarding County water-related projects. Meet with Acequia Association(s) to better understand needs and identify opportunities for coordination with the County.

SFC CLERK RECORDED 02/02/2026

Exhibit A

Water Policy Advisory Committee

2026 Meeting Calendar

The Water Policy Advisory Committee will hold regular meetings on the second Thursday of each month at 4 p.m. in the Plaza Conference Room located in the County Administration Building, 240 Grant Ave., Santa Fe, NM 87501. Specifically, meetings will be held on the following dates in 2026:

January 8, 2026

February 12, 2026

March 12, 2026

April 9, 2026

May 14, 2026

June 11, 2026

July 9, 2026

August 13, 2026

September 10, 2026

October 8, 2026

November 12, 2026

December 10, 2026

The Santa Fe County Water Policy Advisory Committee strives to make its meetings accessible to the public through alternatives to in-person attendance, such as virtual meeting platforms. These alternatives, however, are not guaranteed due to internet and other service disruptions and equipment failures, and duly noticed meetings may be held notwithstanding that those alternatives are unexpectedly unavailable.
Accordingly, members of the public assume the risk that they may be unable to watch, listen to and/or participate in Water Policy Advisory Committee meetings through such alternatives.

Subject to the above disclaimer, the County intends to allow members of the public to listen to and participate in Water Policy Advisory Committee meetings virtually. For instructions on joining the meeting virtually, visit www.santafecountynm.gov/joinwpac.

SFC CLERK RECORDED 02/02/2026

EXHIBIT 2
Addendum to WPAC
1st QTR 2026 Report

Santa Fe County
Water Policy Advisory Committee (WPAC)
Santa Fe, New Mexico

February 12, 2026

To: Santa Fe County Board of County Commissioners (BCC)
From: Water Policy Advisory Committee (WPAC)

Re: WPAC Findings and Recommendations Regarding the Pursuit of a Unified Santa Fe County–City of Santa Fe Water Authority

Dear Commissioners,

The Santa Fe County Water Policy Advisory Committee (WPAC) submits this letter memorandum to formally transmit its findings and recommendations regarding the pursuit of a unified water authority between Santa Fe County and the City of Santa Fe.

Record Before the Committee

WPAC received and reviewed presentations from the Albuquerque Bernalillo Water Authority and other water utility and governance experts concerning regional and unified water system models. These presentations addressed governance structures, intergovernmental coordination, operational efficiencies, infrastructure resilience, water conservation, long-term planning, and public accountability.

The Committee considered this information as part of its advisory deliberations.

Findings

Based on the presentations received and discussion among Committee members, WPAC makes the following findings:

1. Santa Fe County and the City of Santa Fe face shared hydrologic constraints, infrastructure demands, and long-term water security challenges that warrant coordinated planning and governance.
2. A unified City–County water authority model provides a viable framework for aligning water rights administration, conservation strategies, capital planning, and operations across jurisdictions.
3. Regional governance structures can improve system resiliency, operational efficiency, and public accountability through consolidated planning and decision-making.
4. The models presented reflect best practices currently operating within New Mexico and other western states facing similar water supply constraints.

The New Mexico Regional Water System Resiliency Act, NMSA 1978, §§ 62-20-1 et seq., expressly authorizes counties and municipalities to collaborate in the creation of regional or unified water systems. This authority is supported by the Joint Powers Agreements Act, NMSA 1978, §§ 11-1-1 through 11-1-7, and related water utility statutes, including NMSA 1978, § 72-1-10 and §§ 3-27-1 through 3-27-5.

Recommendations

Based on these findings, WPAC makes the following recommendations to the Board:

1. support for a future resolution to adhere to NMSA 1978, § 62-20-3.C to pursue the establishment of a unified water authority between Santa Fe County and the City of Santa Fe.
2. advance further legal, financial, governance, and operational analysis necessary to evaluate formation of a unified City–County water authority.
3. coordinate engagement with the City of Santa Fe, relevant agencies, and the public to ensure transparency and informed participation.
4. continue WPAC involvement in an advisory capacity as this effort moves forward.

Advisory Statement

These findings and recommendations are advisory in nature and are submitted to assist the Board of County Commissioners in its consideration of next steps toward coordinated water governance and long-term regional water resilience.

WPAC Approval

This letter has been authorized by a majority vote of the quorum present at the WPAC meeting on February 12, 2026.

Respectfully submitted,

Peter Gowen
WPAC Chair

Stephen Schmelling
WPAC Vice Chair