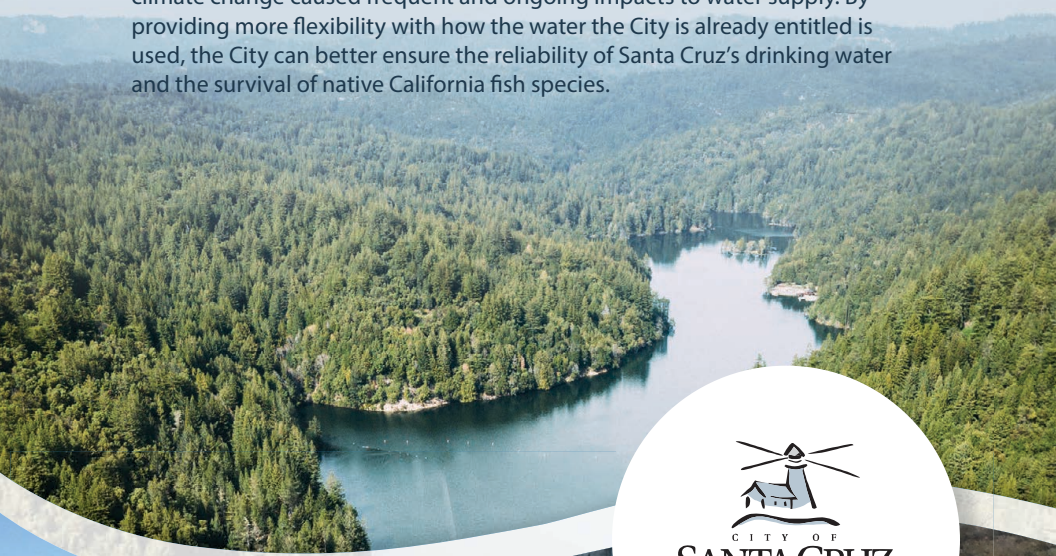


Community Guide

Santa Cruz Water Rights Project

Ninety-five percent of City of Santa Cruz drinking water comes from surface sources like rivers and creeks, with the remaining five percent from local groundwater. Surface water resources are overseen by the State of California Water Resources Control Board and its use is governed by legally enforceable rules called “water rights.”

The City’s water rights were granted over 50 years ago. Long before coho salmon and steelhead trout became “special status species”, and before climate change caused frequent and ongoing impacts to water supply. By providing more flexibility with how the water the City is already entitled is used, the City can better ensure the reliability of Santa Cruz’s drinking water and the survival of native California fish species.





What is the Santa Cruz Water Rights Project (SCWRP)?

The City is working with the State Water Resources Control Board to revise the decades-old rights to allow more options for where and how the City can use its existing appropriative water rights. The SCWRP would improve flexibility in operation of the City's water system while enhancing stream flows for local anadromous fisheries. The primary project and programmatic components of the SCWRP include:

- 1** water rights modifications related to place of use, method of diversion, points of diversion and redirection, underground storage and purpose of use, extension of time, and stream bypass requirements for fish habitats;
- 2** water supply augmentation components, including new aquifer storage and recovery (ASR) facilities at unidentified locations, Beltz ASR facilities at the existing Beltz well facilities, and water transfers and exchanges and intertie improvements; and
- 3** surface water diversion improvements, including the Felton Diversion fish passage improvements and the Tait Diversion and Coast Pump Station improvements.

Project Benefits

System Flexibility and Regional Collaboration

Current water rights allow Santa Cruz to only use its water within service area boundaries established when the rights were issued decades ago. This prevents the City from implementing water supply solutions like sharing available winter water with other regional water agencies, storing available water in regional aquifers, and diverting available water to where it can be used most efficiently.

With more flexibility, the City can participate in regional solutions that build regional resilience, ensure better local supply reliability, help replenish depleted groundwater basins, and maximize available water.

Help Support Threatened Native Fish Species

Most California water rights were granted without consideration for the impacts of diversions on native fish species and before native fish species were under stress, and therefore don't require water utilities to accommodate surface flows that support fish and their habitats. Because of the scarcity of water in parts of California, including Santa Cruz, some important fish species have become threatened or endangered.

In Santa Cruz, we share the watershed with endangered coho salmon and threatened steelhead trout. We are stewards of habitat that is critical to the survival of both humans and fish. Santa Cruz has voluntarily agreed to flow releases specifically designed to support special status species and to integrating these flows into our water rights as we're making other changes. This will codify the community's commitment to sharing water resources with fish.

Additional Benefits



- **Improve the flexibility with which the City operates the water system** so the community's drinking water needs can be met while providing flow conditions that are protective of coho salmon and steelhead.
- **Provide protective flow conditions for coho salmon and steelhead within all streams** from which the City diverts water, as agreed to with state and federal regulators.
- **Support improvements to the City's limited water storage** through passive recharge of regional aquifers (via water transfers and/or exchanges), and active recharge of regional aquifers (via aquifer storage and recovery (ASR), including allowing for underground storage of treated surface water in groundwater basins for use as water supply and to protect the Santa Cruz Mid-County Groundwater Basin from seawater intrusion.
- **Remove potential operational constraints** on the City's existing diversions.
- **Allow additional time for the City to fully reach beneficial use** under existing water-right permits at Felton.
- **Improve fish screening at Felton and Tait Diversions**, and improve fish passage at the Felton Diversion.
- **Address reliability and operational deficits** at Tait Diversion and the Coast Pump Station.
- **Implement state policy favoring integrated regional water management** by involving the City and other local agencies in significantly improving the reliability of water supplies by diversifying water portfolios, taking advantage of local and regional opportunities, and considering a broad variety of water management strategies.

What the Project Will Not Do

Proposed changes to Santa Cruz's water rights will not change the authorized amounts of water that the City can take from local sources. The changes would simply allow the City to be more flexible with the water that it currently has rights to use.

Environmental Review

Under the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), the City has prepared a Draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the proposed water rights changes and released it for a 45-day public review period. A Draft EIR is an informational document used to inform the general public and public agency decision makers about the project. It includes a detailed description of the proposed project, an analysis of potential impacts of the proposed project, and proposed mitigation measures to reduce impacts that can't be avoided. Other topics covered in the Draft EIR include an analysis of alternatives to the proposed project, an analysis of cumulative impacts of the proposed project in relationship with other past, present, or reasonably foreseeable future projects, and a discussion of the proposed project in the context of climate change.

Following the close of the public comment period on the Draft EIR, responses will be prepared for all timely comments received that raise significant environmental issues regarding the Proposed Project. The Final EIR will include written responses to such comments and will also include any text changes to Draft EIR that become necessary after consideration of public comments.

Timeline

November 2018

- City releases CEQA Initial Study and Notice of Preparation of a Draft EIR issued for a 30-day public scoping period.
- Two public meetings held in Santa Cruz and Ben Lomond.

January 2021

- City submits final water rights change petitions to the State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB).

February 2021

- WRCB publicly notices water rights change petitions for a 30 day public review period.

June – July 2021

- City releases Draft EIR for 45-day public review period.
- Two online public meetings to be held.

December 2021

- City to prepare Final EIR.
- Santa Cruz City Council to consider certification of Final EIR and project approval at a public City Council meeting.

2022

- Expected action by SWRCB on change petitions.

Photo by Morgan Bond



Public Review and Comment

The 45-day public review period for the Draft EIR is **June 10, 2021, through July 26, 2021**. Comments on the Draft EIR must be received in writing by email or mail to the contact listed below by 5 PM on July 26, 2021. Please include a return address and contact name.

Sarah Easley Perez, Principal Planner
City of Santa Cruz Water Department
212 Locust Street, Suite C
Santa Cruz, CA 95060
seasleyperetz@cityofsantacruz.com



Online review of the Draft EIR is encouraged. The Draft EIR and Notice of Availability, including information on how to comment, are available for review online at: **cityofsantacruz.com/waterenvdocs**

and at the Santa Cruz Public Library at:
catalog.santacruzpl.org/polaris

Copies of the documents are also available at local libraries and by appointment at the Santa Cruz Water Department engineering counter.

Two public information meetings regarding the Proposed Project and Draft EIR will be held. The content provided at both meetings will be the same.

July 14 5–6pm
Wednesday

OR

July 20 6–7pm
Tuesday

Meeting log-in information can be found at the project website:
cityofsantacruz.com/SCWRP

There will be an opportunity to ask questions about the CEQA review process at the end of each meeting.