

Placer County

Water Shortage Emergency Response Process

Public Draft

February 2026

1.0 Introduction

This Water Shortage Emergency Response Process (ERP) documents how Placer County (County) will monitor water supply conditions to set an appropriate water shortage stage with corresponding short-term response actions to mitigate the impacts or potential impacts of a water shortage to domestic wells and state small water systems (SSWS).

2.0 Water Shortage Stages— Indicators and Triggers

The Water Shortage ERP is organized around three water shortage stages: Information, Alert, and Response. Determination of water shortage stage is informed using **Table 1**, which shows relevant indicators (water supply-related features) and associated triggers (conditions of indicators associated with a water supply status). These indicators and triggers can be used to support a water shortage stage recommendation and actions to the Task Force and public as well as an emergency proclamation for State and Federal resources. The information within this table is not exhaustive and is intended to show how the indicators and triggers could be considered. Other indicators and triggers (not shown) may also be developed by the County. The County will evaluate its triggers in October and make a corresponding water shortage stage recommendation to the Task Force at its annual meeting held in November. The stage determination should be re-assessed after winter snowfall and precipitation have occurred (often April). However, if conditions change considerably during the winter or at any time, the County can re-assess as necessary.

3.0 Responding to a Water Shortage Stage

The County has aligned specific short-term response actions (STRA) to each water shortage stage, as shown in **Table 2**. Additional information about these STRA is in Chapter 4. New STRA that are not listed in **Table 2** may be identified and implemented, based on the actual shortage conditions. In addition, not all STRA listed may be implemented during a shortage event. The County should consider the nature of the shortage when determining what STRA are most appropriate.

In the “Information Stage,” the County will complete an annual review of the County Drought Resilience Plan Implementation Plan, evaluate the water supply system health, organize a meeting with the Task Force, update County resources (i.e., website, vendor lists, etc.), and continue proactive outreach to domestic well and SSWS. In the “Alert Stage,” the County will

focus on raising awareness of potential water shortage issues, providing the steps to follow if a water shortage occurs, encouraging temporary mitigation measures that may avoid a shortage, and coordinating with other organizations that may be involved in the event a shortage occurs (such as Groundwater Sustainability Agencies, public water systems, and other County departments). In the "Response Stage," the County will activate its process to distribute emergency water supplies, coordinate with other organizations, and update the Task Force.

4.0 Responsibility and Coordination

Responsible entity(ies) for STRA that could be implemented in each water shortage stage were identified and listed in **Table 2**, which also provides additional entities that may be involved or with which coordination will be needed.

Table 1. Indicators and Trigger Considerations for Determining Active Water Shortage Stages for Domestic Wells and SSWS in Placer County

Indicator Name	Indicator Description	Trigger Consideration When Going into the Alert Stage	Trigger Consideration When Going into the Response Stage
US Drought Monitor	The US Drought Monitor is a map updated every Thursday that classifies drought conditions across the United States into none, Abnormally Dry, Moderate, Severe, Extreme, and Exceptional. The County can use this resource to understand the prevalence and severity of drought within the County and surrounding areas when determining if it should be in the Alert Stage.	The County will consider the current Drought Monitor regional drought stage to determine whether to enter the Alert Stage and monitor conditions more closely. If there are multiple years in a given drought condition, outreach efforts will be extended and permits for new, deepened, or replacement wells will be more closely monitored.	Indicator will not be used to trigger response actions.
Public Water System Water Shortage Stage	The Water Shortage Contingency Plan and Urban Water Management Plan (Plans), respectively managed by PCWA and NID, specify six stages of water shortage tied to projected water supply shortfalls. The Plans identify specific actions to be taken at each stage to facilitate water conservation. ¹	The County will enter the Alert stage if PCWA and or NID enter water shortage Stage 3 of 6 outlined in the respective Plans, which represents up to a 30% supply shortage. Although PCWA and NID rely largely on surface water supply, reduction in available surface water may place additional demand on groundwater resources. Public water system responses at Stage 3 include imposition of mandatory conservation actions such as landscape irrigation restrictions.	The County will enter the Response Stage if PCWA and or NID enter water shortage Stage 5 of 6 outlined in the respective Plans, which represents up to a 50% supply shortage. Public water system responses at Stage 5 include imposition of mandatory conservation actions such as limiting water applications to public health uses.
Groundwater Quality	Several entities in the County monitor groundwater quality, including the West Placer GSA as well as community and public water systems subject to state and federal drinking water regulations. Water systems must prepare and submit Consumer Confidence Reports detailing water quality to the state annually. Changes in observed water quality can be used to inform whether the County should be concerned about impacts to water availability.	In lieu of an Alert Stage, the County will monitor available groundwater quality data to remain apprised atypical or unsafe results (see "Response Stage").	The County will enter the Response Stage if observed groundwater quality exceeds public health standards such as maximum contaminant levels or the United States Environmental Protection Agency's primary standards, and/or if a boil water notice or intervention limiting use is issued.
Applications for Permits to Replace Wells	The County can monitor new well permits that are to replace an existing well, which may be indicative of low or dry wells. Tracking these reports can help identify regions where groundwater availability may be impacted.	The County will monitor well permit applications and enter the Alert Stage if, after evaluating these permits, it deems there are sufficient enough related to dry wells to indicate a potential water shortage related to low groundwater levels.	If the new well permit applications to replace dry wells are concentrated in a specific area and high enough that there may be a widespread water shortage, the County will enter the Response Stage.
Dry Well Reports	The County will use California's dry well reporting system to identify possible regional water shortages where well owners or operators have submitted dry well data.	The County will enter the Alert Stage upon receiving a dry well report while the County determines whether the report is associated with water shortage.	If the features of reported dry wells (i.e., depth, age, etc.) are similar to others in the same region, water shortage may be, or may grow to be, more widespread. In this event, the County will enter the Response Stage.
Groundwater Level Monitoring by West Placer GSA and via the Olympic Valley GMP	West Placer GSA monitors groundwater levels in the western region of the County, and levels in the east in Olympic Valley are monitored under the Olympic Valley GMP. Changes in observed groundwater levels can inform potential water shortage in areas served by domestic wells.	If an atypical decline is observed in monitored groundwater levels the County will enter the Alert Stage. The West Placer GSA monitors 13 wells that can be reviewed and used to focus outreach efforts, with minimum thresholds based on well completion data. This data will not be used to trigger an Alert or Response Stage.	If a decline in observed groundwater levels results in a water shortage or causes the West Placer GSA or Olympic Valley Public Service District to take responsive action, the County will enter the Response Stage.

Indicator Name	Indicator Description	Trigger Consideration When Going into the Alert Stage	Trigger Consideration When Going into the Response Stage
Non-Drought Hazards	Wildfires, extended power outages (either planned or unplanned, particularly in the eastern region), earthquakes, and floods have potential to create conditions that may lead to a water shortage. Monitoring conditions related to these hazards can help the County predict potential impacts to water supply and quality.	Water systems in the County are strongly encouraged to be self-sufficient for up to three days of interrupted supply and may require less external support in that period. Hazards that temporarily interrupt domestic well and/or SSWS supplies for up to three days will trigger the Alert Stage, so the County can be prepared for a potential extended outage. If a well has been impacted by a flood, the County will assume that property flood assistance has been triggered and may be available to support water shortage needs.	Hazards that interrupt domestic well or SSWS supplies for an extended period (four or more days) - which could in some cases include public safety power shutoffs - will trigger the Response Stage. If a well has been impacted by a flood, the County will assume that property flood assistance has been triggered and may be available to support water shortage needs.

Key:
County = Placer County
GMP = Groundwater Management Plan
GSA = Groundwater Sustainability Agency
NID = Nevada Irrigation District
PCWA = Placer County Water Agency
Plans = Water Shortage Contingency Plan and Urban Water Management Plan
SSWS = State Small Water Systems

Table 2. Short-Term Response Actions Aligned to Water Shortage Stage with Responsible Organization(s) for Placer County

Water Shortage Stage	Description	Activity Description	Responsible Organization(s)	Comment
Information	No major drought or potential for water shortage	Annual County DRP Implementation Check-In	OES (Lead), Environmental Health, Public Works	OES will review the status of the DRP Implementation Plan, determine if any modifications are required, and assign responsibilities for making DRP modifications.
		Bi-Annual Water Supply Assessment	OES (Lead), Environmental Health, Public Works, Other entities	OES, in partnership with Environmental Health and Public Works, will evaluate the water supply system health in October to support a water shortage stage recommendation for the Task Force. This water system health will be reevaluated in April.
		Annual Task Force meeting	OES (Lead), Environmental Health, Public Works, Task Force	Annual Task Force meetings will occur in November after the water supply health is evaluated.
		Annual website update	OES (Lead), Environmental Health, Public Works	Website will be updated in November and April to reflect current conditions.
Alert	Drought or other hazard occurring that could cause a water shortage	As-Needed Task Force Meetings	OES	OES will schedule additional Task Force meetings.
		Outreach to domestic well and SSWS communities on water shortage-related information, including, but not limited to: - How to monitor domestic well health - Resources for when a well runs dry - County contact information - Information on water shortage conditions within the County	OES (Lead), Environmental Health, Public Works, West Placer GSA, PCWA, Other entities	OES will coordinate with Environmental Health, West Placer GSA, PCWA, and others to conduct outreach to domestic well and SSWS communities on what to do if they experience a water shortage.
		Outreach on voluntary water conservation strategies	OES	OES will coordinate with Environmental Health, West Placer GSA, PCWA, and others to conduct outreach to domestic well and SSWS communities on voluntary water conservation measures.
		As-needed coordination with relevant organizations - West Placer GSA, PCWA, groundwater management districts, power companies, NGOs, other County departments	OES (Lead), Environmental Health, Public Works, West Placer GSA, PCWA, Other entities	OES will initiate coordination, but other organizations may be required to lead or participate, depending on conditions.
Response	Water shortage is occurring or is imminent	Regular Task Force meetings	OES	OES will schedule additional Task Force meetings.
		Activate Emergency and Interim Drinking Water Distribution Plan as listed in this County DRP for area(s) experiencing shortage	OES (Lead), Environmental Health, Public Works	OES will activate the process, but other organizations will implement specific activities.
		Standing coordination with relevant organizations	OES (Lead), Environmental Health, Public Works	OES will organize regular coordination meetings and will delegate to other organizations as required.

Key: County = Placer County DRP = Drought Resilience Plan Environmental Health = Placer County Environmental Health GSA = Groundwater Sustainability Agency
NGO = Non-governmental Organization OES = Placer County Office of Emergency Services PCWA = Placer County Water Agency SSWS = State Small Water Systems
Task Force = Placer County Drought and Water Shortage Task Force