

Proposed Alexander Valley Water District

Background & Introduction

To secure water supply and improve water resilience, the Sonoma Alliance for Vineyards and the Environment (SAVE) and Russian River Property Owner's Association (RRPOA) have led an effort to pursue formation of a new special district, a California Water District.

This new District will address the threats to the water supply in Alexander Valley.

Threats to Alexander Valley Water Supply	What is at Risk?
1. A period of increased duration of droughts and intense storm events has arrived.	1. Diminished water supply for all beneficial uses including agricultural irrigation.
2. Significant reduction of Eel River imports is ongoing.	2. Reduced grape production or acreage planted.
3. Total loss of Eel River imports is possible.	3. Contracted wine production sector
4. State Water Board curtailment of Russian River surface water rights is likely in all but the wettest years (i.e., ~8 out of 10 years).	4. Impacted recreation uses.
5. Groundwater curtailments is possible due to underflow connection of the aquifer to River flows.	5. Mandated urban water conservation, increased household costs.
6. Domestic use and Russian River minimum instream flows for fish have priority over agricultural and commercial use.	6. Impacted hospitality sector.
	7. Negatively affected fish populations.

Water District Purpose & Functions

The following core services demonstrate that the Water District is needed:

Water Sharing Programs	establish and manage a water sharing program for the Alexander Valley in cooperation with other water agencies.
New Eel River-Russian River Diversion Facility	negotiate with, and potentially join, the new Regional Entity that proposes to operate a new water diversion facility on the Eel River; administer any new water supply acquired for Alexander Valley water users.
Groundwater Investigation & Management	study the relationship between groundwater pumping, recharge, and streamflow; prepare a groundwater sustainability plan if mandated by the State.
Groundwater Recharge Program	construct and operate new water infrastructure, obtain water rights and regulatory approvals, and monitor and report performance on behalf of participating landowners.
Represent Landowners	represent private water users in regulatory proceedings and enter into agreements with other local or regional water supply organizations, non-profit entities, and private sector.

Coordination with local water supply agencies, regulating agencies, public interest organizations will be a key function of District leadership, including establishing formal partnerships such as a joint powers authority to participate in a Groundwater Sustainability Agency (GSA).

District Boundary & Area Description

The proposed new District boundary encompasses:

- the two Alexander Valley Groundwater Basins.
- an estimated 1,655 parcels including 300 large (>5 acres) agricultural land ownerships and some upland grazing and forested areas.
- several residential subdivisions, scattered rural residential parcels, the community of Geyserville, 43 wineries, and other commercial uses.
- (note: excluded are public lands, Tribal Trust lands, and an upland portion of the Southern Basin near Franz Valley).

All landowners within the proposed boundary will participate in the district.

Water District Formation Process

The Water District can be formed in two ways

1. Through a petition-initiated application to the Sonoma County Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO); or
2. Through a Special Act of the State Legislature that would create the District directly.

Both options continue being considered by the petitioners at this time; a decision will result following ongoing consultations with Legislative staff and the Sonoma County Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) regarding the most appropriate approach.

Proposed District Leadership & Staff

- A minimum of five directors will be elected by landowners;

- Directors must be landowners within the District (or their legal representatives) and will serve for a fixed term and regularly stand for re-election;
- An executive director will serve the Board, direct the District's efforts, lead a small staff, and retain professional advisors and consultants.

Proposed District Funding Sources

The capacity to raise public funding for water supply and conservation is a primary purpose of the District.

Specific funding sources would include:

- It is proposed that a nominal special tax or assessment be established concurrently or just following District formation scaled to support basic District operating costs;
- It is proposed that the District would immediately (on formation) elect to be a GSA in order to utilize the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) funding authorities;
- Specific programs would be funded through fees for service and regulatory fees consistent with statutory requirements and as exemplified by other water districts;
- Capital investments, including proposed participation the new Eel-Russian Diversion Facility and any local water supply or conservation infrastructure would be funded through grants, special benefit assessments, and bond measures as may be appropriate, all requiring subsequent landowner voter approval;