



# 9

## 9. Water Resources Element

The purpose of this element is to provide a policy framework to preserve and enhance water availability and quality. It is a County priority for water resources to be effectively managed to provide for the long-term viability and availability of this precious resource. The goals of the Water Resources Element recognize that the County has an important role to play in water management. The County's land use decisions, and resulting water demand and wastewater generation, affect the quality and availability of water in the county. Details on water resources in Ventura County are provided in the Background Report prepared for the 2040 General Plan and summarized here.

The framework for water management is complex and is comprised of federal and state laws, as well as local ordinances. There are laws governing water rights, protection of water quality, protection of beneficial uses of water, laws to ensure adequate provision of water for new development, and regulations that regulate the manner of development to minimize negative impacts to water quality and quantity.

Ventura County has a wide range of water resources, including imported water, surface water, groundwater, and recycled water. Within the unincorporated area, the predominant water supply is groundwater. The heavy reliance on groundwater, which increases during drought, has led to falling groundwater levels in some groundwater basins, putting some areas at risk of subsidence, and exacerbating seawater intrusion into groundwater basins in the coastal area.

Ventura County has a wide range of water purveyors. Most urban areas receive water through larger special districts, city utilities, private companies regulated by the state Public Utilities Commission, and mutual water companies. There are a total of 162 individual water suppliers and irrigation districts in the county, not including individual users on private well systems. This means the unincorporated area depends on an extensive array of water suppliers and systems that are not necessarily coordinated with one another.

Climate change adds complexity to water resources planning by affecting water supplies and water demands. Climate change increases the frequency and intensity of precipitation and is associated with extreme weather including devastating wildfires and extended severe drought. As reported by the California Environmental Protection Agency in Indicators of Climate Change in California (EPA, 2018), "From record temperatures to proliferating wildfires and rising seas, climate change poses an immediate and escalating threat to California's environment, public health, and economic vitality."

Goals, policies, and implementation programs in this element are organized under the following headings:

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## 9.1 Water Supply

An adequate and dependable water supply is essential for residents, businesses, agriculture, and environmental resources in Ventura County. Ensuring an adequate water supply is an ongoing concern in Ventura County, particularly because of climate change and drought, the related declines in river flows and reservoir levels, historic overdraft of several local groundwater basins, new groundwater well prohibitions, and seasonal and annual differences in the amount of imported water available. The policies in this section seek to improve and protect the county’s long-term water supply. An overview of water supply characteristics in Ventura County is described in Section 10.4, “Existing Conditions,” of the Background Report.

<b>WR-1</b>	To effectively manage water supply by adequately planning for the development, conservation, and protection of water resources for present and future generations.
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**WR-1.1** EJ HC **Sustainable Water Supply**  
 The County should encourage water suppliers, groundwater management agencies, and groundwater sustainability agencies to inventory and monitor the quantity and quality of the county’s water resources, and to identify and implement measures to ensure a sustainable water supply to serve all existing and future residents, businesses, agriculture, government, and the environment. (IGC, SO)

**WR-1.2** **Watershed Planning**  
 The County shall consider the location of a discretionary project within a watershed to determine whether or not it could negatively impact a water source. As part of discretionary project review, the County shall also consider local watershed management plans when considering land use development. (MPSP, RDR)

**WR-1.3** **Portfolio of Water Sources**  
 The County shall support the use of, conveyance of, and seek to secure water from varied sources that contribute to a diverse water supply portfolio. The water supply portfolio may include, but is not limited to, imported water, surface water, groundwater, treated brackish groundwater, desalinated seawater, recycled water, and stormwater where economically feasible and protective of the environmental and public health. (IGC)

- WR-1.4 State Water Sources**  
The County shall continue to support the conveyance of, and seek to secure water from, state sources. (IGC)
- WR-1.5 Agency Collaboration**  
The County shall participate in regional committees to coordinate planning efforts for water and land use that is consistent with the Urban Water Management Planning Act, Sustainable Groundwater Management Act, the local Integrated Regional Water Management Plan, and the Countywide National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System Permit (stormwater and runoff management and reuse). (IGC)
- WR-1.6 Water Supplier Cooperation**  
The County shall encourage the continued cooperation among water suppliers in the county, through entities such as the Association of Water Agencies of Ventura County and the Watersheds Coalition of Ventura County, to ensure immediate and long-term water needs are met efficiently. (IGC)
- WR-1.7 Water Supply Inter-Ties**  
The County shall encourage the continued cooperation among water suppliers in the county, through entities such as Association of Water Agencies of Ventura County and the Watersheds Coalition of Ventura County, to establish and maintain emergency inter-tie projects among water suppliers. (IGC)
- WR-1.8 Water Supplier Consolidation**  
**EJ**  
The County shall encourage the consolidation of water suppliers where necessary to ensure all residents are receiving water of adequate quality and quantity, to promote management efficiencies, and to encourage sharing of local resources and enhancement of managerial and technical expertise and capacity. (IGC)
- WR-1.9 Groundwater Basin Use for Water Storage**  
Where technically feasible, the County shall support the use of groundwater basins for water storage. (IGC)
- WR-1.10 Integrated Regional Water Management Plan**  
The County shall continue to support and participate with the Watersheds Coalition of Ventura County in implementing and regularly updating the Integrated Regional Water Management Plan. (IGC)
- WR-1.11 Adequate Water for Discretionary Development**  
**EJ HC**  
The County shall require all discretionary development to demonstrate an adequate long-term supply of water. (RDR)
- WR-1.12 Water Quality Protection for Discretionary Development**  
**EJ HC**  
The County shall evaluate the potential for discretionary development to cause deposition and discharge of sediment, debris, waste and other pollutants into surface runoff, drainage systems, surface water bodies, and groundwater. The County shall require discretionary development to minimize potential deposition and discharge through point source controls, storm water treatment, runoff reduction measures, best management practices, and low impact development. (RDR)

**WR-1.13**

**Water Pumping**

The County shall require that all County-owned water pumps use 100 percent renewable-sourced electricity for water pumping, when feasible, and shall encourage private entities to use 100 percent renewable-sourced electricity when feasible.

**WR-1.14**

**Discretionary Development and Conditions of Approval – Golf Course Irrigation**

The County shall require that discretionary development for new golf courses shall be subject to conditions of approval that prohibit landscape irrigation with water from groundwater basins or inland surface waters identified as Municipal and Domestic Supply or Agricultural Supply in the California Regional Water Quality Control Board's Water Quality Control Plan unless:

1. The existing and planned water supplies for a Hydrologic Area, including interrelated Hydrologic Areas and Subareas, are shown to be adequate to meet the projected demands for existing uses as well as reasonably foreseeable probable future uses within the area; and
2. It is demonstrated that the total groundwater extraction/recharge for the golf course will be equal to or less than the historic groundwater extraction/recharge for the site as defined in the County Initial Study Assessment Guidelines.

Further, where feasible, reclaimed water shall be utilized for new golf courses. (RDR)

## 9.2 Water Quality

Water quality is affected by geology, climate, and human-caused factors, such as wastewater effluent, runoff from roads and urbanized areas, agricultural practices, and atmospheric contaminants. Poor water quality limits the beneficial use of a water source for drinking water supply, irrigation, industrial water supply, recreation, and support of habitat and the natural environment. An overview of water quality characteristics in Ventura County is described in Section 10.4, "Existing Conditions," of the Background Report.

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**WR-2**

To implement practices and designs that improve and protect water resources.

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**WR-2.1**

**Identify and Eliminate of Sources of Water Pollution**

The County shall cooperate with Federal, State and local agencies in identifying and eliminating or minimizing all sources of existing and potential point and non-point sources of pollution to ground and surface waters, including leaking fuel tanks, discharges from storm drains, dump sites, sanitary waste systems, parking lots, roadways, and mining operations. (IGC)

**WR-2.2**

**Water Quality Protection for Discretionary Development**

The County shall evaluate the potential for discretionary development to cause deposition and discharge of sediment, debris, waste, and other contaminants into surface runoff, drainage systems, surface water bodies, and groundwater. In addition, the County shall evaluate the potential for discretionary development to limit or otherwise impair later reuse or reclamation of wastewater or stormwater. The County shall require discretionary development to minimize potential deposition and discharge through point source controls, storm water treatment, runoff reduction measures, best management practices, and low impact development. (RDR)

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**WR-2.3 Discretionary Development Subject to CEQA Statement of Overriding Considerations – Water Quality and Quantity**  
 The County shall require that discretionary development not significantly impact the quality or quantity of water resources within watersheds, groundwater recharge areas or groundwater basins. (RDR)

**WR-2.4 Out-of-River Mining**  
 The County shall require discretionary development for out-of-river mining below the historic or predicted high groundwater level in the Del Norte/El Rio (Oxnard Forebay Basin) to demonstrate that extraction activities will not interfere with or affect water quality and quantity pursuant to the County’s Initial Study Assessment Guidelines. (RDR)

### 9.3 Water Conservation and Reuse

Existing water supply is extended by water conservation and re-use. Because it is costly and difficult to develop new water supplies, water conservation is an essential method for ensuring quality water resources while reducing net demand. Water use efficiency benefits the environment, economy, and overall community. Water can be conserved through reduction programs (e.g. drought tolerant landscaping) and supplies augmented through the re-use of agricultural wastewater, rainwater capture, and domestic graywater. Through a series of wastewater treatments and filtration techniques, recycled water can be safely used for agricultural and domestic purposes. This section focuses on conserving water resources through increased efficiency and reuse.

**WR-3** To promote efficient use of water resources through water conservation, protection, and restoration.

**WR-3.1 Non-Potable Water Use**  
 CAP The County shall encourage the use of non-potable water, such as tertiary treated wastewater and household graywater, for industrial, agricultural, environmental, and landscaping needs consistent with appropriate regulations. (RDR)

**WR-3.2 Water Use Efficiency for Discretionary Development**  
 EJ HC CAP The County shall require the use of water conservation techniques for discretionary development, as appropriate. Such techniques include low-flow plumbing fixtures in new construction that meet or exceed the California Plumbing Code, use of graywater or reclaimed water for landscaping, retention of stormwater runoff for direct use and/or groundwater recharge, and landscape water efficiency standards that meet or exceed the standards in the California Model Water Efficiency Landscape Ordinance. (IGC, RDR)

**WR-3.3 Low-Impact Development**  
 CAP The County shall require discretionary development to incorporate low impact development design features and best management practices, including integration of stormwater capture facilities, consistent with County’s Stormwater Permit. (RDR)

**WR-3.4 Reduce Potable Water Use**  
 CAP The County shall strive for efficient use of potable water in County buildings and facilities through conservation measures, and technological advancements. (SO)



## 9.4 Groundwater

Groundwater is estimated to provide 67 percent of the local water supply. Sustaining this water source is both a local and statewide priority. In 2014, the state enacted the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) to provide a framework for sustainable management of groundwater supplies at the local level by local agencies, with the potential for state intervention if necessary. The aim of the legislation is to ensure the management of groundwater basins within their sustainable yield. SGMA empowers local agencies to form Groundwater Sustainability Agencies (GSAs) to manage basins sustainably and requires those GSAs to adopt Groundwater Sustainability Plans (GSPs) for crucial groundwater basins. As defined by SGMA, several groundwater basins in the county are in critical overdraft condition (and some are experiencing seawater intrusion), which occurs when the “continuation of present water management practices would probably result in significant adverse overdraft-related environmental, social, or economic impacts.”

In 2018, the California Department of Water Resources identified the following groundwater basins in Ventura County as being in “critical overdraft”: Cuyama Valley, Oxnard Plain, and Pleasant Valley. (It is important to note that while the Cuyama Valley basin as a whole is considered to be in overdraft, the United States Geological Survey estimates the portion in Ventura County *not* to be in overdraft.) In addition to the critically overdraft basins, seven are designated as “high-priority”: Oxnard Plain, Pleasant Valley, Las Posas, Mound, Fillmore, Piru, and Cuyama Valley; and four basins are designated as “medium-priority”: Ojai Valley, Upper Ventura River, and Lower Ventura River. Consistent with SGMA, this section focuses on groundwater recharge.

An overview of groundwater characteristics in Ventura County is described in Section 10.4, “Existing Conditions,” of the Background Report.

### WR-4

To maintain and restore the chemical, physical, and biological integrity and quantity of groundwater resources.

#### WR-4.1



#### Groundwater Management

The County shall work with water suppliers, water users, groundwater management agencies, and groundwater sustainability agencies to implement the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) and manage groundwater resources within the sustainable yield of each basin to ensure that county residents, businesses, agriculture, government, and the environment have reliable, high-quality groundwater to serve existing and planned land uses during prolonged drought years. (IGC, RDR, SO)

#### WR-4.2

#### Important Groundwater Recharge Area Protection

In areas identified as important recharge areas by the County or the applicable Groundwater Sustainability Agency, the County shall condition discretionary development to limit impervious surfaces where feasible and shall require mitigation in cases where there is the potential for discharge of harmful pollutants within important groundwater recharge areas. (IGC, RDR)

### WR-4.3 **Groundwater Recharge Projects**

**CAP**

The County shall support groundwater recharge and multi-benefit projects consistent with the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act and the Integrated Regional Water Management Plan to ensure the long-term sustainability of groundwater. (IGC, RDR, SO)

### WR-4.4 **In-Stream and Recycled Water Use for Groundwater Recharge**

**CAP**

The County shall encourage the use of in-stream water flow and recycled water for groundwater recharge while balancing the needs of urban and agricultural uses, and healthy ecosystems, including in-stream waterflows needed for endangered species protection. (RDR)

### WR-4.5 **Repealed**

### WR-4.6 **Repealed**

### WR-4.7 **Discretionary Development and Conditions of Approval – Oil, Gas, and Water Wells**

The County shall require that discretionary development be subject to conditions of approval requiring proper drilling and construction of new oil, gas, and water wells and removal and plugging of all abandoned wells on-site. (RDR)

### WR-4.8 **New Water Wells**

The County shall require all new water wells located within Groundwater Sustainability Agency (GSA) boundaries to be compliant with GSAs and adopted Groundwater Sustainability Plans (GSPs). (RDR)

### WR-4.9 **New Water Wells in the Oxnard Plain Pressure Basin**

The County shall prohibit new water wells in the Oxnard Plain Pressure Basin if they would increase seawater intrusion in the Oxnard or Mugu aquifers. (RDR)

## 9.5 Watershed Management

In the past, different resources in the water system were managed separately from each other. For example, groundwater was managed as a separate resource from stormwater and recycled water. The County continues to move toward managing and regulating water resources through a watershed-based approach. This approach integrates many facets of water resources management on a regional level, including water supply, water quality, flood management, sediment management, ecosystem health, and recreation through enhanced collaboration across geographic and political boundaries and diverse stakeholder groups.

Watershed management and integrated regional water management are critical elements to ensuring sustainable water resources in the county. While there are only two policies in this section, the County intends to consider many of the policies throughout this element in a watershed context.

### WR-5

To protect and, where feasible, enhance watersheds and aquifer recharge areas through integration of multiple facets of watershed-based approaches.

#### WR-5.1

##### **Integrated Watershed Management**

The County shall work with water suppliers, Groundwater Sustainability Agencies (GSAs), wastewater utilities, and stormwater management entities to manage and enhance the shift toward integrated management of surface and groundwater, stormwater treatment and use, recycled water and conservation, and desalination. (IGC, SO)

#### WR-5.2

##### **Watershed Management Funding**

The County shall continue to seek funding and support coordination of watershed planning and watershed-level project implementation to protect and enhance local watersheds. (FB)



## 9.6 Water for Agriculture

Agriculture, water availability, economic vitality, and natural resource conservation are inextricably linked in enhancing the quality of life in Ventura County. According to the Ventura County 2013 Water Supply and Demand Report, agricultural water use accounts for nearly 60 percent of total water demand in the county. Water is essential to agricultural production, and its availability and supply source vary by location.

In addition to the need for a sustainable water supply for agricultural uses, the County must also ensure that agriculture does not negatively impact water quality. Tillage and irrigation are likely to alter the runoff and infiltration characteristics of the land, affecting groundwater recharge, and increasing erosion that can result in sediment deposit into surface-water bodies. This in turn could affect the interaction of groundwater and surface water. The policies in this section address the County’s role in balancing adequate water quality and a sufficient supply for agricultural uses in the county. An overview of water availability for agriculture in Ventura County is described in Section 10.4, “Existing Conditions,” of the Background Report

WR-6	To sustain the agricultural sector by ensuring an adequate water supply through water efficiency and conservation.
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### WR-6.1

#### **Water for Agricultural Uses**

**CAP** The County should support the appropriate agencies in their efforts to effectively manage and enhance water quantity and quality to ensure long-term, adequate availability of high quality and economically viable water for agricultural uses, consistent with water use efficiency programs. (IGC)

### WR-6.2

#### **Agricultural Water Efficiency**

**CAP** The County should support programs designed to increase agricultural water use efficiency and secure long-term water supplies for agriculture. (PI)

### WR-6.3

#### **Reclaimed Water Use**

**CAP** The County should encourage the use of reclaimed irrigation water and treated urban wastewater for agricultural irrigation in accordance with federal and state requirements in order to conserve untreated groundwater and potable water supplies. (IGC, RDR, SO)

## 9.7 Water for the Environment

Environmental quality and natural resource conservation are inextricably linked with the quality of life in Ventura County. A variety of upland, riparian, wetland, and coastal vegetation types exist in the county that are home to both common and sensitive species. To preserve, maintain, and improve the environment, water must be allocated and managed with the intent to improve the health of forests, upland areas, rivers, wetlands, and floodplains. The policies in this section address the County’s role in assuring adequate water supply for the environment. A summary of environmental characteristics of water in Ventura County is described in Section 10.4, “Existing Conditions,” of the Background Report.

WR-7




To consider the water needs of the natural environment with other water uses in the county.





### WR-7.1

#### **Water for the Environment**

The County shall encourage the appropriate agencies to effectively manage water quantity and quality to address long-term adequate availability of water for environmental purposes, including maintenance of existing groundwater-dependent habitats and in-stream flows needed for riparian habitats and species protection. (IGC)

## 9.8 Implementation Programs

Programs		Implements Which Policy(ies)	Responsible	2020 – 2025	2026 – 2030	2031 – 2040	Annual	Ongoing
			Supporting Department(s)					
<b>WR-A</b>	<b>Monitor Water Supply and Water Demand</b> The County shall prepare Reports on the Water Supply and Demand outlook for the unincorporated portions of the county every five years. 	WR-1.1 WR-1.2 WR-1.3 WR-1.4 WR-1.5 WR-1.6 WR-1.7 WR-1.10 WR-4.1	PWA	■				■
			n/a					
<b>WR-B</b>	<b>Water Supply and Use Factors Database</b> The County shall continue to coordinate with water districts and other appropriate agencies to establish a database on actual available supply, projected use factors for types of land use and development, and threshold limits for development within available water resources. 	WR-1.1 WR-1.2 WR-1.3 WR-1.4 WR-1.5 WR-1.6 WR-1.7 WR-1.10 WR-5.1	RMA PWA					■
			n/a					
<b>WR-C</b>	<b>Regional Collaboration on Water Issues and Sustainability</b> The County shall continue to provide data and staff resources to support collaboration on climate change and sustainability, and for planning and implementing projects that address local and regional water issues. 	WR-1.1 WR-1.3 WR-1.4 WR-1.5 WR-1.6 WR-1.7 WR-1.10 WR-1.11 WR-4.1 WR-4.2 WR-4.3 WR-5.1 WR-5.2	WPD					■
			PWA RMA CEO					
<b>WR-D</b>	<b>Invasive Weed Abatement District for Ventura County Watersheds</b> The County shall provide staff resources to explore the feasibility of establishing a weed abatement district to help control invasive plant species found within Ventura County’s watersheds.	WR-1.2 WR-1.5 WR-1.9 WR-4.3 WR-4.4	CEO					■
			PWA					

Programs		Implements Which Policy(ies)	Responsible	2020 – 2025	2026 – 2030	2031 – 2040	Annual	Ongoing
			Supporting Department(s)					
<b>WR-E</b>	<b>Well Guidelines Update</b> The County shall coordinate with the local groundwater management agencies and local groundwater sustainability agencies to update County of Ventura Ordinance 4468 and related guidelines on the location, construction, and abandonment of water wells, if necessary. 	WR-1.5 WR-1.12 WR-4.1 WR-4.3	PWA			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
			n/a					
<b>WR-F</b>	<b>Discretionary Development Review for Adequate Water and Wastewater</b> The County shall verify that all discretionary development proposals demonstrate an adequate long-term supply of water, adequate methods for sewage disposal, provide adequate drainage to avoid flooding, prevent erosion, and prevent contamination of local water. 	WR-1.12 WR-3.3 WR-3.4 WR-3.2	RMA					<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
			PWA					
<b>WR-G</b>	<b>Water Conservation</b> The County shall continue to implement ongoing programs to educate County residents on incentives for water conservation features, including drought-tolerant landscaping, removal of turf, graywater, and water-saving plumbing technologies. 	WR-3.1 WR-3.2 WR-3.3	RMA					<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
			PWA					
<b>WR-H</b>	<b>County Water Efficiency</b> The County shall review water usage at County-owned facilities and from County operations and develop recommendations for water saving practices and facility improvements, including turf removal to conserve water. 	WR-3.4	GSA					<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
			HCA AIR HD					

Programs		Implements Which Policy(ies)	Responsible	2020 – 2025	2026 – 2030	2031 – 2040	Annual	Ongoing
			Supporting Department(s)					
WR-I	<p><b>Demonstrate Adequate Water Supply during Normal, Single-Dry, and Multiple-Dry Years</b></p> <p>A water supply assessment shall be prepared prior to project approval for water-demand projects (as defined in Section 15155 of the State CEQA Guidelines) that require service from a public water system (as defined in Section 15155 of the State CEQA Guidelines). If the projected water demand associated with the project was not accounted for in the most recently adopted urban water management plan, or the public water system has no urban water management plan, the water supply assessment must address the public water system's total projected water supplies available during normal, single-dry, and multiple-dry water years for a 20-year projection. The assessment shall describe if the new water service will be sufficiently met under this 20-year projection. The water supply assessment shall be prepared to the satisfaction of and approved by the governing body of the affected public water system and the County. A water-demand project that includes a new water service from a public water system shall not be approved unless adequate water supplies are demonstrated.</p> <p><b>EIR</b></p>	WR-1.1 WR-1.2 WR-1.3 WR-1.4 WR-1.5 WR-1.6 WR-1.7 WR-1.10 WR-4.1	RMA					
			n/a					

*Please see the next page.*