



SONOMA COUNTY WATER AGENCY BUSINESS OPERATIONS PLAN



November 2009

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This report presents the Sonoma County Water Agency's (Agency) staffing plan to address changing conditions regarding the services it provides. The Agency, like other public agencies, has been affected by the financial downturn and faces the need to address new challenges with greater funding constraints. These new challenges include complying with the recently adopted Biological Opinion for the Russian River (BO) requiring new areas of study, monitoring, design and construction. The Agency must also more closely manage water supplies because of changes in the operation of PG&E's Potter Valley Project that has resulted in significantly less water being available for maintaining minimum stream flows in the Russian River. The recently adopted stream maintenance plan for the Agency's flood control facilities requires increased care and sensitivity to environmental resources within these riparian corridors. Additionally, the Agency needs to be able to adapt to climate change issues and to find methods to reduce emission of greenhouse gases.

Over the past several years, the makeup of Agency staff has changed in response to new challenges and increased pressure to control operating costs. The Agency has increased its reliance on temporary staff to conduct seasonal fisheries monitoring and stream maintenance activities. This has allowed the Agency to comply with more rigorous environmental resource monitoring requirements and to maintain critical infrastructure. Moving forward, the Agency understands there will be a need to continue to reduce operating costs while better understanding and managing water and other natural resources in its service area.

In developing this plan, the Agency recognizes that it will be facing significant fiscal uncertainties over the next few years. These uncertainties are associated with general economic downturn, limits on water deliveries associated with changed water supply conditions and the BO, and uncertain future water supply projects. In response to these uncertainties, the Agency plans to utilize managed attrition to reduce the number of permanent staff positions at the Agency from 211 to 178. The plan also includes the strategic restoration of staff positions once some of the financial uncertainties are addressed. The Agency has 182 permanent staff positions filled at this time.

During the short term, certain identified positions, if vacated, will be refilled while others would not. Because less than 10% of existing Agency staff is employed in overhead positions, the majority of these reductions would be in technical, operations, and maintenance positions. The Agency will continue to use temporary employees to meet seasonal maintenance and monitoring needs and outside consultants for project design and environmental studies. The Agency also plans to move its operations and maintenance facility to property purchased in the Airport Business Park which will decrease travel time to most Agency facilities and increase operating efficiency. Even with increases in operating efficiency, the Agency will may need to decrease maintenance of its facilities and, in some cases, suspend operating certain facilities. The ability to proactively address regulatory requirements and participation in research and regional programs will also be reduced until staffing levels are restored.

The longer-term plan emphasizes the strategic restoration of certain positions and balancing operations cost reductions with increasing the Agency's technical diversity and its ability to meet

broader water resource, climate change, and natural resource challenges and restoring deferred maintenance activities. The longer-term plan includes the creation of new job classifications to allow the Agency's skill set to meet future needs and increased capabilities to develop renewable energy and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. It also includes the refilling of several positions vacated as a result of the recent early retirement incentive program in two to three years. It is anticipated that the Agency would have about 189 permanent allocated staff positions under this long-term plan. It is not known at this time whether the Agency will be able to reliably operate and maintain all of its existing facilities at this long term staffing level and, therefore, this long term figure is an estimate.

This plan envisions the Agency taking a larger role in managing natural resources in a comprehensive manner and to increase the reliability and sustainability of the region's resources, and work collaboratively with other County departments, jurisdictions, and stakeholders where there is shared responsibility for these areas. Such resource management issues would include the following:

- Working with stakeholders to manage and coordinate increasing demands on the Russian River system;
- Analyzing climate change impacts to the region's resources and development of adaptation strategies;
- Working to develop resource management programs that recognize the connectivity of water resources such as reuse, flood control – groundwater recharge, and groundwater banking;
- Working to proactively address recovery of endangered salmonid species populations that go beyond BO and other regulatory requirements but support eventual delisting of steelhead trout, coho salmon and Chinook salmon;
- Working with other entities to develop and support implementation of water and energy efficiency measures such as low impact development (LID) standards and participating in regional and statewide initiatives; and
- Working to ensure that the Agency's energy portfolio is based on renewable sources to promote long-term energy independence.

The Agency recovers overhead costs through technical services its staff provides for the various enterprises it manages. The elimination of technical positions will likely require an increase in the Agency's overhead rates to cover fixed overhead costs.

Further descriptions of short term and long-term actions are presented below. Also included for reference is the number of positions in each division after the last internal reorganization in 2001. In 2001, the Agency had 216 permanent staff positions allocated.

2.0 SHORT TERM PLAN – MANAGED ATTRITION

Significant funding uncertainties are likely to exist for several years due to the weak economy and rates pressures for water and wastewater systems. The Agency's current staffing level represents the lowest number of full time equivalent (FTE) positions that have been filled at the

Agency since the 1995 reorganization that transferred responsibility for the county sanitation districts and service areas to the Agency. Staffing decreases have been spread relatively uniformly across all of the Agency's divisions. Future staffing decreases will also be spread among the divisions with priority directed towards complying with operating permits for water, wastewater and flood protection services and with the BO.

In some cases, the staff reductions reflect decreased needs for certain functions. In other areas, these staff reductions are intended to decrease operational costs associated with the planning, design, environmental compliance, operations and maintenance of water supply, sanitation and flood control systems. Several of the staff reductions identified in this plan will not occur until positions are vacated through a normal attrition process.

Descriptions or staffing changes for each division are presented below.

2.1 General Management Division

The Agency recently received direction from its Board of Directors to modify the job description for the General Manager/Chief Engineer (GM/CE) position. This position will be modified to remove the Chief Engineer portion from the current GM/CE job description and add a separate Chief Engineer position. This division currently contains 5 allocated positions. The Agency plans to decrease the one allocated position in this division, Administrative Services Officer I, which is currently unfilled and add a Chief Engineer position.

The General Management Division currently contains 5 allocated positions. There will be no net change in the number of allocated positions in this division in the short term. In 2001, this division had 3 allocated positions.

2.2 Administrative Services Division

The Administrative Services Division provides clerical, personnel, accounting, budgeting, payroll and other support services ancillary to the Agency's activities. In the short term, two Office Assistant IIs, one Payroll Clerk, and one Administrative Services Officer I positions would be eliminated or kept vacant, subject to productivity improvements from new Agency accounting and electronic document management systems. In order to implement these new systems significant resources will be needed on a temporary basis (consultants and extra help).

These changes will reduce the number of allocated positions in the Administrative Services Division from 24 to 20. Again, this figure is based on the implementation of new accounting and electronic document management systems. In 2001, the Administrative Division had 22 allocated positions.

2.3 Engineering and Resource Planning Division

The Engineering and Resource Planning Division is responsible for providing design engineering, contract administration and construction management, surveying, right of way, drafting/GIS, technical writing, and resource planning services. The use of interns, consultants,

and temporary help will continue to be part of the overall management strategy to help meet temporary peaks in work or short-term special needs.

In the short term, the Agency plans to eliminate or keep vacant two Water Agency Engineers, one Engineering Programmer II, one Technical Writing Specialist, and three Engineering Technician IIIs, and one Capital Projects Manager when these positions are vacated.

In order to conduct as much work as possible under this staffing plan, the work assignments of some existing staff will be modified, although these new assignments will still be consistent with their respective job descriptions. In general, engineering design, implementation of capital projects, and planning activities will be reduced under this plan due to limited staff resources.

These changes will reduce the number of allocated positions in the Engineering and Resource Planning Division from 42 to 34. In 2001, the Engineering and Resource Planning Division had 41 allocated positions.

2.4 Environmental Resources and Public Affairs Division

The Environmental Resources and Public Affairs Division provides environmental services for design, construction, operations and maintenance of water supply, flood protection and sanitation systems owned or operated by the Agency. This division also provides water conservation and public education program services and supports legislative, funding acquisition, and public outreach efforts. The use of interns, consultants, and temporary help will continued to be part of the overall management strategy to help meet temporary peaks in work or short-term special needs.

Over the next two years three Senior Environmental Specialists, one Principal Programs Specialist, and one Water Agency Programs Specialist positions would be eliminated or kept vacant. Reductions in Environmental Specialist positions while implementation of the BO is being undertaken will result in a reduced capability for participating in some recovery planning efforts and other regional coordination programs. Use of temporary seasonal workers has been expanded to address the reduced numbers of Environmental Specialists and could continue to be utilized to address field season workload including BO work and other Agency fisheries monitoring work. In addition, increased use of outside consultants may be needed for environmental documentation and permitting work. Depending the difficulty in implementation of the BO including negotiations with property owners, environmental documentation needs to address flow changes, and regulatory agency requirements to implement operational changes, the reduced number of Environmental Specialists may not be adequate if this work is more complicated or time consuming than currently estimated.

Because Water Programs Specialist work has been shifted due to changes in the program and pending program needs in the future, the number of existing staff may be adequate to meet Agency workload needs. In the short term there will be only one full-time specialist assigned to Water Education so any changes to that program or additional outreach and collaboration with other entities will be very limited. There is also a clear need for a supervisory/management position to lead the water conservation program and assist the Agency in developing and

collaborating on regional and statewide conservation programs. This could be filled by promoting an existing staff member to a Public Information Officer position and then eliminating a staff level position so that the number of staff is not increased.

These changes will reduce the number of allocated positions in the Environmental Resources and Public Affairs Division from 29 to 24. In 2001, the Environmental Resources and Public Affairs Division had 29 allocated positions.

2.5 Maintenance Division

The Agency's Maintenance Division is responsible for maintaining water supply, flood control and sanitation systems and currently contains 58 allocated positions. Reductions in water deliveries have occurred resulting from changes in the flows into Lake Mendocino from the Potter Valley Project and because of the adoption of the BO. This has caused the Agency to cease operation of certain water supply and transmission facilities via a temporary impairment. The Agency has also sold off much of its heavy fleet vehicles and will rent such equipment on an as needed basis to achieve a cost savings. The Agency will continue to rely on seasonal temporary maintenance staff to provide flood protection services that must be done during a relatively short window of time each year.

In the short term, one Lead Water Agency Mechanic, two Water Agency Mechanics, one Heavy Equipment Mechanic position, one Water Agency Lead Maintenance Worker and four Water Agency Maintenance Worker II positions would be eliminated or left vacant when they are vacated. Maintenance of the water and wastewater could be impacted, including possible reduced reliability of these systems. The Agency will continue to utilize temporary staff during the summer and fall for seasonal stream and collection system maintenance.

These changes will reduce the number of allocated positions in the Maintenance Division from 58 to 49 under the minimum staff scenario. In 2001, the Maintenance Division had 65 allocated positions.

2.6 Operations Division

The Operations Division is responsible for operating the Agency's water and wastewater systems, implementing industrial waste programs, performing regulatory compliance reporting and water quality testing for these systems, management of the computerized maintenance management system, information technology and electrical system maintenance, and operations engineering.

In the short term a Water Agency Plant Operator, Water Agency Senior Plant Operator, Water Agency Coordinator - Electrical, Programmer Analyst, and Technical Writing Specialist would be eliminated as the positions are vacated. It is also anticipated that if one of the Agency's two Technical Writing Manager positions is vacated, the remaining position would reside in the Engineering Division. An Electrical/Instrumentation Technician was vacated through the early retirement incentive program.

The elimination of the Programmer Analyst position will be monitored to ensure that the Agency can continue to provide needed IT services and assumes the implementation of new accounting/financial management system will take place as currently planned. Currently, approximately one full time staff person is required to maintain the Agency's legacy financial, cost-accounting, and timecard systems. The elimination of the Electrical/Instrumentation Technician position will also be monitored to ensure that the Agency can continue to provide needed electronic/instrumentation services as the number of permanent staff decreases. It should be noted that there will not be an opportunity to have an Operator-in-Training once the Water Agency Plant Operator position is eliminated.

It is anticipated that once the Water Agency Coordinator – Electrical position is vacated the Principal Engineer - Electrical will directly supervise/manage the Water Agency Engineer and the Electrical/Instrumentation Technicians.

These changes will reduce the number of allocated positions in the Operations Division from 53 to 46. In 2001, the Operations Division had 57 allocated positions.

3.0 LONG TERM – STRATEGIC RESTORATION

This plan component, covering a timeframe of 5-10 years, envisions a workforce with greater staff resources to meet the increasingly complex challenges anticipated by the Agency's management in a more proactive manner than would be available under the short term plan described above. Accordingly, the plan envisions that the role of the Agency will continue to transform from a water utility to a resource management agency.

3.1 General Management Division

For the purposes on this plan no changes are proposed.

3.2 Administrative Services Division

In the future, as technology continues to contribute to overall productivity and as the Agency's funding issues become more demanding, the nature of the clerical and accounting sections will require staffing changes. Over the next few years it is anticipated that (1) this staff will need more information search and retrieval capabilities and (2) there will be less demand for typing and document formatting services. In accounting it is anticipated that the analysis of data will take more time while transaction processing will take less. Finally, the financing of Agency projects will demand more grant writing and grant administration (e.g. follow-up and reporting).

In response to these changes in skills there will likely be fewer clerical staff and the skill set will change to include expertise in use of our electronic document management and control systems. The number of clerical staff will possibly decrease by one additional position while a higher level position will be added. Within the Account Services Section, it is likely that an Account Clerk III position would be eliminated after it is vacated, and a Department Analysts would be added to better fit the organization's needs. The Department Analyst positions could potentially

report directly to the Water Agency Division Manager, flattening the organization. There is also the potential for replacing an Administrative Services Officer with a Departmental Analyst position depending on workload. The Agency does not have sufficient personnel resources to adequately pursue grant opportunities or to manage grants awarded to the Agency. Therefore, it is possible that an additional staff position may be needed to better take advantage of grant opportunities. These anticipated changes would decrease the size of the Administrative Services Division from the current 23 to 21 positions.

3.3 Engineering and Resource Planning Division

The Engineering Division will experience both areas of growth and contraction or static workload within its business operations during the next 3 to 5 years. The changes are likely to be consistent with recent trends. In response, managers will continue to proactively manage staff resources to adapt to the changes to their business environment and to optimize the skill set and staff utilization to address the Agency's needs. The use of interns, consultants, and temporary help will continue to be part of the overall management strategy to help meet temporary peaks in work or short-term special needs.

Over the next several years, it is anticipated that the workload for the Design Engineering section will remain relatively static. This workload will include capital projects to address natural hazard vulnerability and operational reliability of the water transmission system, continued sanitation projects to meet regulatory requirements, and BO-related projects. Staff within this section also provides sanitation review services for new developments requesting connection to Agency management sanitation systems. In particular, it will be important for this section to develop expertise in stream habitat restoration projects. It is anticipated that this expertise will be developed through training of existing staff or during hiring from outside the Agency as positions become vacant.

Due to declining capital projects, the Contact Administration/Inspection Section has experienced a reduced workload, a trend which is expected to continue under this scenario in the future. In response, several measures are underway to diversify the skill sets and services provided by staff of this section to other areas of need within the Agency.

In the Drafting/GIS Section it is anticipated that additional staff will be necessary to continue to meet workload demands and evolve to changing circumstances that the Agency will face. Specifically, new skill sets related to web-based data management systems will need to be acquired. The expected future workload for the Survey and Right-of-Way Section is expected to remain static, however, the type of work will continue to diversify. The workload has shifted from capital projects to studies, stream maintenance support, mapping/data record, and O&M support activities. In terms of skill sets, right-of-way staff should be trained to take advantage of the latest advances in remote sensing and measurement, including GIS and other databases that are available now or may become available.

The Technical Writing Section has traditionally been involved in preparing construction specification packages and professional service agreements. Recently, this section has diversified its services to Agency customers by working on grant writing, water rights, research

and report writing, and other various activities. Because of the diverse nature of services provided by this section, it is possible that staffing within this section would remain either static or would need to increase over levels identified in the short term component of this plan. Additional training of staff in key areas of need (e.g., water rights) is a strategy that should be pursued.

The Resource Planning Section is an area where additional growth is needed under this scenario. Given the BO and other critical planning needs for comprehensive water resource management for the region (e.g., climate change, peak use reduction, and river management strategies), additional staff and skill sets will be needed if the Agency is to work towards ensuring a reliable and sustainable water supply. Increased capabilities in the areas of water rights, hydrology, groundwater, water quality, and water demand management measures are needed. One to two additional staff positions are recommended for this section to meet these needs.

A new area of growth for the Agency, that is not adequately addressed in the current staffing or the short term plan, involves implementing programs and projects to increase the Agency's operational water and energy efficiencies and developing sustainable practices in resource consumption. To meet future needs, a new section could be formed to focus on resource efficiency and sustainability, including development of renewable energy. Because the business model for this section must be developed so that over time it can be self-sustaining, it is recommended that the initial program focus on activities that will result in near-term outcomes that promote cost reduction such as promoting operational efficiencies. An important component of this section's work will be ensuring that the Agency's daily operations are as efficient as possible to comply with ISO 9000 and 14000.

The initial composition of the section would require one additional Water Agency Principal Engineer and the transfer of an Engineering Technician III (from the construction inspection section), a Public Information Officer (Capital Projects), and a Water Programs Specialist (from the Environmental Resources and Public Affairs Division).

Under the long term plan, the Engineering and Resource Planning Division would contain 37 allocated positions.

3.4 Environmental Resources and Public Affairs Division

Water Programs Specialists from this division provided key assistance during implementation of the 2009 Summer Youth Ecology Corps program. Currently, the Agency only has one permanent Water Programs Specialist position to implement the Water Education Program. Temporary Water Programs Specialists are used and supplemented with other Water Programs Specialist staff assigned to water conservation to help implement the Agency's water education program during the school year. An addition of one Water Programs Specialist to provide water education services during the school year, further collaborative programs such as working with the US Army Corps of Engineers on teaching the Headwaters to Ocean curriculum, and assist with summer youth employment programs is recommended should such summer programs become regularly funded or other additional funding be available.

The transfer of one Water Programs Specialist from the Environmental Resources and Public Affairs Division to assist in resource efficiency and sustainability work in the Engineering and Resource Planning Division is noted under Section 3.3. It is anticipated that the skill set needed for this position would be best filled by a Water Programs Specialist that currently implements water conservation programs for the Agency or from an outside recruitment. All existing Water Programs Specialists are fully utilized at this time to implement the Agency's conservation programs and assist with water education and other public outreach efforts, including website maintenance and updates. Unless there is a substantial reduction in water conservation work required by the Agency, including the extensive regional level conservation documentation that has been required in the last several years by the State Water Resources Control Board, or there is a reduction in participation in regional and statewide initiatives, it is recommended that if a position is transferred to the Engineering and Resource Planning Division, an equivalent Water Programs Specialist position vacancy is created and then filled in the Environmental Resources and Public Affairs Division.

The fish hatchery at the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) Warm Spring Dam includes a coho broodstock program. The Agency has been requested to provide staff to assist in implementation of this program under a potential funding agreement with the USACE. In the short-term, temporary staff can be used to help implement this program under direction of an existing Senior Environmental Specialist staff. The addition of one to two Senior Environmental Specialist positions is recommended to support the coho broodstock program in the long-term. In addition, the position(s) would assist with implementing the habitat restoration and monitoring programs required under the BO, furthering restoration and research programs that support endangered species recovery in the Agency service area, providing assistance if needed to implement the youth and young adult employment programs described under the Maintenance Division below, and reducing the amount of outside consulting needed to provide CEQA compliance services on Agency projects. Depending on the type and physical extent of sustainability and energy efficiency programs the Agency participates in, any additional Environmental Specialist staff can also be used to prepare environmental and permitting documentation and funding requests for such projects. Funding for these positions would be partially offset by funding from the USACE for the coho broodstock program and with potential reductions in temporary staff and consultant use.

It is also anticipated that if the Environmental Resource Coordinator Position or one of the Principal Environmental Specialist positions is vacated due to retirement or attrition, one of the two Principal Environmental Specialist positions will be eliminated. The other Principal Environmental Specialist position would then be converted to an Environmental Resource Coordinator Position, eliminating one position overall from the Environmental Resources and Public Affairs Division. This organizational change would provide the management level positions needed to implement and carry out the environmental work and public outreach required by the BO, prepare the increasingly complicated documentation needed to obtain environmental permits, implement the requirements of such permits once obtained, track changing regulations and legal requirements under CEQA and NEPA and other environmental laws that the Agency is subject to, and assist the Agency in developing and implementing strategies to provide an adequate and sustainable water supply. Depending on the timing, this

organizational change could also be implemented under the short term portion of this plan since it results in reduced staffing and costs.

The Environmental Resources and Public Affairs Division would contain 26 allocated permanent positions under this part of the plan.

3.5 Maintenance Division

The Agency plans to perform more collaborative efforts with outside organizations associated with stream maintenance activities. During the past summer, the Agency worked with 14 crews composed of youth and young adults that qualified for Federal stimulus funding through the ARRA. The Agency could continue to promote such programs that provide benefits that extend beyond the flood protection and habitat improvements such as decreased crime and increased education for at risk populations. Management of this program on an ongoing basis would benefit from additional staff with an environmental science background.

A modification of the existing Lead Maintenance Worker job description is recommended to allow a four-year college degree in environmental science to be an option for meeting the minimum qualifications.

As a result of recent retirements, the Mechanic Services Section has decreased by three positions and the Maintenance Worker Services Section has decreased by 2 positions. It is unknown whether the remaining staff will be able to adequately maintain the Agency's facilities long-term. For the purposes of this plan, it is assumed that two Water Agency Mechanic positions and one Maintenance Worker II position would need to be refilled under this scenario in about 3 years. While this number of Maintenance Worker positions may be sufficient to maintain the collection systems at the standard level, it may not be sufficient to proactively take on new projects and improvements. Taking on new projects and improvements would likely require additional staff, which would need sufficient revenue from sewer service charges.

The Maintenance Division would contain 52 allocated positions after the restoration of these three maintenance positions.

3.6 Operations Division

It is expected that the Agency will experience difficulties in recruiting qualified, dual-certified operators in the future as the current trend of fewer and fewer operators being certified in California continues. Adding a Water Agency Plant Operator and/or a Water Agency Operator Apprentice to the Operations Division is anticipated to provide a position for the Agency to use in order to have the opportunity to develop hard-to-find certified operators from within. Additionally, a new, two-tiered job class that combines a Chemist and Water Agency Plant Operator/Senior Plant Operator position could be created that provides incentive through pay to obtain certifications required for both a Chemist and Water Agency Plant Operator/Senior Plant Operator. It should be noted that until a Chemist position is vacated, such a position would remain unfilled.

The other sections that should be addressed in the future are the Computer Instrumentation/Electronics Maintenance and Computer Instrumentation/Applications Support (CIAS) sections. Overall management of both of these sections is currently the responsibility of a Water Agency Principal Engineer – Electrical. This Principal Engineer has been directly supervising the CIAS staff for over a year, in addition to managing and/or supervising the other staff in these sections. Supervising the CAIS section has worked out to date because the particular individual fulfilling this role has both an IT and power systems background. It is highly unlikely that the Agency will be able to recruit another engineer with both of these skill sets. Additionally, the work undertaken by both sections continues to become more and more important to the Agency’s 24/7 operations and should be shared equally by two managers, requiring the group be split. As stated above, one section would be directly managed by the Principal Engineer – Electrical.

Concurrently, a second manager would need to be hired (note: a new job specification may need to be developed) to manage IT and directly supervise the CAIS staff. This manager should be formally trained in IT, have supervisory experience, be able to develop and implement a “vision” for the Agency’s IT future, and provide some technical services (i.e. part-time database management) for the Agency. Ultimately, the CAIS section would consist of an IT Manager, two Network Analysts and four Programmer Analysts, assuming the legacy systems mentioned above are replaced.

The Operations Division would contain 48 allocated positions under the long term plan.

4.0 SUMMARY

Over the next 5 to 10 years, Agency staff anticipates (1) a continuing need to effectively provide core water supply, flood control, and sanitation services; (2) a limited need for expanded infrastructure to provide these services, and (3) an increased need to understand how various water resource components interact. Additionally, the Agency also needs to implement the BO, secure Federal funding for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to meet its BO obligations, and develop alternative energy sources.

The Agency recognizes that it will be facing significant fiscal uncertainties over the next few years. These uncertainties are associated with general economic downturn, limits on water deliveries associated with changed water supply conditions and the compliance Biological Opinion for the Russian River, and future water supply projects. This staffing plan attempts to reduce staffing operating costs in the short term while planning for strategic staffing restoration to meet its long term needs.