

3. Building Resilience with a Watershed Network

3.1 Why a Network?

The Watershed Network serves a critical purpose of convening watershed stewards across water resource sectors and communities to acknowledge the effects of climate change and to collaborate on adaptation strategies to build resilience.

Figure 3-1. Watershed Network Paddle on the Russian River (September 17, 2025)



The Watershed Network is central to advancing the priorities of the Watershed Resilience Program, ensuring that resilience planning reflects the unique and diverse perspectives and knowledge of the communities within the Russian River Watershed.

As described in Chapter 1, the Watershed Resilience Program (WRP) nests within themes of the Water Plan Update 2023, addressing climate urgency, strengthening watershed resilience, and achieving equity in water management (California Department of Water Resources, 2024a).

The Watershed Resilience Program Principles advanced by DWR (California Department of Water Resources, 2024b) articulate the purpose of convening a Watershed Network:

- Promote multi-sector, multi-benefit resilience strategies,
- Integrate and prioritize equity and social justice as part of the planning and implementation process,
- Focus on watersheds and interdependencies of water resource systems,
- Build and strengthen diverse watershed networks through collaboration, relationships, and trust,
- Apply best available science and promote best practices, approaches, and tools for climate resilience planning,
- Build a robust understanding of climate risks and embrace uncertainty by considering a range of plausible future conditions
- Promote outcomes-based management with watershed performance indicators and a focus on implementation.

3.2 Building the Network

The Russian River Watershed Network brings together diverse perspectives and knowledge from across water sectors, communities, and the watershed. The Network is currently composed of 125 active individuals spanning a wide range of organizations including cities and towns, counties, federal and state agencies, groundwater sustainability agencies, Native American Tribes, non-governmental organizations, resource conservation districts, special districts, and watershed associations.

Member organizations collectively represent the full breadth of the watershed's resource interests, including agriculture, economic development and hydropower, equity, flood management, groundwater, land use, recreation, Tribal Knowledge, and water quality. The Network was intentionally designed to include organizations with the capacity to implement or promote adaptation strategies, those with management responsibility for the resources of the Russian River Watershed, advocates for frontline and under-represented communities, and Tribal community representatives. To advance equity and remove financial barriers to participation, compensation was made available to Network participants without institutional support. A full list of Watershed Network member organizations is available in Appendix A.

-
- *The Watershed Network brought together over 100 organizations across the watershed and across sectors to collaborate on understanding the risks of climate change to the Russian River watershed.*
 - *Network members contributed local knowledge regarding vulnerabilities and risks to resources and systems and suggested hundreds of adaptation strategies to address those risks.*
 - *There is broad agreement that the Watershed Network should continue to work together to implement the collaboratively developed Watershed Resilience Plan and advance identified adaptation strategies.*
-

3.3 Network Governance

3.3.1 Network Charter

To establish clear roles and responsibilities, a Network Charter was developed and shared with all members. The Charter outlined expectations for Network members, including:

- Participate and prepare for Network meetings by reviewing materials in advance and attending sessions to contribute insights from their agency, organization, or Tribal perspective
- Contribute to the development of the WRP through meeting discussions and online engagement opportunities
- Adhere to meeting guidelines that emphasize respect, understanding, and making space for diverse voices
- Collaborate with members from diverse backgrounds, perspectives, and water resource sectors

The complete Network Charter is included in Appendix A.

A significant product of the charter process was a collaboratively designed Vision Statement that captured the shared purpose of the Network:

Vision Statement

Actively steward the resources of the Russian River watershed to be increasingly climate resilient by working together across water resource sectors in collaboration with local and Tribal communities.

3.4 Network Activities

3.4.1 Engagements

The Network meeting schedule was designed to welcome collaboration and input at each major milestone of the Watershed Resilience Plan development. Meetings were structured with the intention of creating a two-way learning environment where Network members both contributed local knowledge and expertise and gain additional understanding of climate science, vulnerability assessment methods, and adaptation strategies. This approach aligns with the Watershed Resilience Program principles of applying best available science while building diverse networks through collaboration and trust.

Over the 18-month study period, six virtual Network meetings were held each corresponding to key project milestones as shown Table 3-1. Two additional technical deep dive meetings were added at the request of the Network. Across these eight scheduled events, 110 organizations participated in the Russian River Watershed Network.

Additional focused outreach efforts were conducted to key groups and agencies. A key feature of the outreach design was to encourage two-way information sharing among the project team and the network.

Table 3-1. Meeting Schedule and Topics

Meeting Details	Study Milestones	Meeting Topics	Products for Review & Input
Virtual Network Meeting 1 February 26, 2025	Setting the Stage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Watershed Resilience Pilot Process ▪ Network Charter ▪ Draft Goals & Vision ▪ Watershed Boundary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Project Fact Sheet ▪ Network Charter ▪ Draft Goals & Vision ▪ GIS Watershed Boundary
Virtual Network Meeting 2 May 06, 2025	Explore Hazards/ Assess Vulnerabilities & Risks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Historical Hazards & Impacts ▪ Future Hazards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Historical Hazard Summary ▪ Projections of future hazards ▪ Gap Analysis of studies needed for analysis ▪ Draft vulnerability metrics
Virtual Technical Call 1 July 19, 2025	Assess Vulnerabilities & Risks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Indicators & Metrics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Draft vulnerability metrics
Hybrid Network Meeting 3 September 16, 2025	Assess Vulnerabilities & Risks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Vulnerability & Risk Assessment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Draft Vulnerability & Risk Assessment
Virtual Network Meeting 4 December 10, 2025	Assess Vulnerabilities & Risks/ Develop Adaptation Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Vulnerability & Risk Assessment (Revised) ▪ Initial Adaptation Strategies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Refined vulnerability and risk assessment results ▪ Initial list of adaptation strategies
Virtual Technical Call 2 January 20, 2026	Assess Vulnerabilities & Risks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Technical details on modeling efforts across resource areas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Initial list of adaptation strategies
Virtual Network Meeting 5 February 24, 2026	Develop Adaptation Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Review revised adaptation strategies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ List of draft adaptation strategies and evaluation
Virtual Network Meeting 6 March 24, 2026	Implement & Monitor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Strategy implementation paths 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Draft implementation paths for strategies and recommendations for plan

3.4.2 Information Exchange

To maximize accessibility and engagement, multiple pathways were established for distributing information to Network members. Five meetings were held virtually to facilitate broad participation. One meeting was held in a hybrid format to encourage relationship building but still remain accessible for those who were not able to join in person. Materials were also made available through a dedicated project website, <https://russianriverwatershedresilience.org/> which served as a central repository for meeting agendas, presentation materials, draft work products, and supplementary resources.

Recognizing that different participants have varying preferences and capacities for providing input, the project team implemented multiple avenues for collecting feedback and ideas from Network members. Input was collected through interactive polling during meetings using Mentimeter, which allowed for real-time feedback and prioritization exercises. Meeting chat functions provided an opportunity for participants to share thoughts without interrupting discussions. Verbal input was welcomed and encouraged in real time during discussions. Written comments could be submitted via email after meetings,

-
- *110 Communities and Organizations*
 - *Six Watershed Network Workshops*
 - *Two Interactive Mapping Tools*
 - *18 Kayaks floating down the Russian River to visit key landmarks*
 - *Two Technical Deep Dives Meetings*
 - *16 Meetings with key partners in the Region*
 - *Two Meetings with Mendocino, Lake, Sonoma Tribal Environmental Professionals (MLSTEP)*
 - *One Vision and One Plan*
-

accommodating those who preferred to reflect on or consult with their organization or community before responding. Additionally, GIS tools were utilized to gather spatially specific input on vulnerability areas and potential adaptation strategy locations, enabling members to contribute to location-based knowledge and priorities.

3.4.3 Tribal Participation

Tribes remain active partners in ongoing watershed restoration, resource management, and climate adaptation efforts. Recognizing the critical importance of Tribal participation and sovereignty, Sonoma Water, as the project convener and the Pilot team offered formal government-to-government consultation process, as well as participation in the Watershed Network, or both. With the assistance of the California Native American Heritage Commission, 29 Tribes were identified within the Russian River Watershed boundary. A full list of Tribes is in Appendix A. Some Tribes requested formal consultation, some joined the network, while others did both. Sonoma Water, as convener of the Pilot, continued to share Watershed Network meeting invitations and notes, materials, and opportunities for feedback to the Tribes in the watershed throughout the duration of the Pilot.

To support Tribal engagement, the team consulted with California Indian Environmental Alliance (CIEA) who kindly conducted additional outreach to Tribes within the watershed, attended and contributed insight regularly at Watershed Network meetings, and advised on options for receiving feedback from tribal communities. These conversations helped bridge communication and approach efforts while incorporating learnings from previous joint management initiatives.

Several key considerations were identified: data sovereignty, diversity of tribal interests, the incorporation of Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), preservation of government-to-government consultation, direct consultation with Tribes outside of a network environment, and the timing of the Pilot grant cycle

being a potential barrier to tribal participation. The expedited timing of the Pilot did pose a challenge to establishing new, meaningful relationships with Tribes in the watershed, and to incorporating formal feedback at each milestone before moving to the next. However, tribal participation perspectives were shared throughout the Watershed Network meetings. Tribes shared key insights on historical hydrologic conditions, fire management practices, ecosystem management, metrics for tribal beneficial use, and land stewardship models.

The project team is appreciative of being able to attend two meetings convened by the Mendocino, Lake, Sonoma Tribal Environmental Professionals (MLSETP) which provided focused discussion opportunities for Tribal environmental staff working on climate and natural resource issues.

The project team would like to acknowledge that the scope, terms, and completeness of Tribal participation are determined by each Tribe, not by the pilot or its administrators. Sonoma Water will continue conversations with Tribes for consultation and discussions beyond the study time period.

3.4.4 What's Next for the Watershed Network

The Watershed Network process has created a strong foundation for the implementation of adaptation strategies identified through the collaborative planning process. The Network established deep cross-sector knowledge, strengthened relationships among diverse parties, and deepened ongoing collaboration that will extend beyond the grant period.

To ensure the sustainability and longevity of the Network, several mechanisms have been put in place. The project website will continue to serve as a resource hub for watershed resilience information and a platform for ongoing engagement. While future funding and governance has yet to be established given the exploratory nature of the Pilot study, these investments in network infrastructure position the Russian River Watershed to continue advancing climate resilience well into the future.