

# North Tulare County Regionalization Community Workshop #3

## Meeting Notes | June 18, 2025

### Overview

The State Water Resources Control Board hosted a community workshop in the Orosi High School Cafeteria on 41815 Rd 128 in Orosi, CA. This meeting was part of a series aimed at exploring and evaluating potential long-term drinking water solutions and governance options to support a sustainable regional drinking water approach for seven neighboring communities of Cutler, East Orosi, Orosi, Monson, Sultana, Yettem, and Seville. Attendance included community members; community-based organizations and other agencies involved in local water issues; and board members from Cutler, Orosi, Monson, Sultana, Yettem, and Seville. The presentation featured a recap of the project goals, an overview of the governance structures presented by [Dr. Kristin Dobbin](#) from U.C. Berkeley, two breakout session activities, a case study discussion, and ended with next steps.

### Why We are Here & What We Heard, Stater Water Board

In this portion of the presentation, the State Water Board outlined the purpose of the project, which is to build a stronger regional drinking water future for Northern Tulare County. The shared goal is to ensure that every community in the region has long-term, sustainable, affordable access to safe drinking water. The State Water Board described how it can support this effort by creating space for open dialogue to shape a shared regional vision; funding studies to explore solutions that benefit the entire region; sharing examples of successful regional governance partnerships from other areas; supporting the preparation of strong funding applications if there is broad community interest; and providing technical assistance to help take the next steps toward implementing regional drinking water solutions.

The team also summarized key feedback from the previous meeting, which included concerns about costs and funding, issues with pipes impacting water quality, the need to set clear expectations within communities about project results and timelines, as well as discussions around private wells, and the importance of public education, engagement, and outreach.

### Governance Structure, Kristin Dobbin (U.C. Berkeley)

Dr. Kristin Dobbin from U.C. Berkeley presented an overview of her report, [Designing Water System Consolidating Water Systems](#), which outlines governance structures and considerations for regional drinking water solutions. She explained that the benefits, challenges, and outcomes of any regionalization effort will depend on two main factors: how the regionalization is structured along with how the resulting entity is governed.

Dr. Dobbin described three primary options for structuring regionalization:

1. Umbrella organization
2. Merger
3. Acquisition

Dr. Dobbin also outlined five options for the governing entity that could oversee the regional system:

1. Independent Special District
2. Dependent Special District (County Service Area)
3. Joint Powers Authority
4. Investor-Owned Utility
5. Mutual Water Company

Dr. Dobbin posed the question: *With so many different options and combinations possible, how do we choose?* Her answer emphasized that options should be evaluated based on the specific needs and priorities of each community and the region as a whole.

This presentation set the stage for Activity #1, where participants discussed community challenges and goals for regionalization.

### **Activity #1 - What Are We Trying to Achieve?**

In this activity, participants discussed the most pressing challenges facing their communities and water systems today, as well as their goals for regionalization. Key challenges identified included contaminated and dry wells, unsafe drinking water, reliance on bottled water, high service costs, aging infrastructure, limited governance capacity, and lack of community engagement. Residents shared that through regionalization, they hope to decrease costs, achieve long-term sustainability, improve infrastructure, eliminate reliance on unsafe wells, ensure fair representation, and foster stronger collaboration between communities.

After the activity, the group reconvened for a case study presentation on the Ukiah Valley Water Authority. Kristen shared the background of the Ukiah Valley Water Authority, which includes five water systems (one city and four county water districts) that undertook managerial regionalization in 2024. The structure selected was an umbrella organization, and the governing entity is a Joint Powers Authority. Previous regionalization attempts had occurred in the 1990s and again in 2016.

Following the case study discussion, the workshop moved into Activity #2, where participants evaluated governance alternatives for their own region using the [Evaluation Tool for Consolidation Proposals](#).

### **Activity #2 – Evaluation of Governance Alternatives**

During this activity, participants were divided into groups to evaluate three governance alternatives for regional water system consolidation using an Evaluation Tool for Consolidation Proposals. Groups

assessed each alternative's structure, benefits, and trade-offs across considerations like affordability, representation, technical capacity, and sustainability. Although each model had its own structure, role, and implications, several similar priorities and concerns emerged across all groups. These included the need for fair and balanced representation, especially for smaller or historically underserved communities; affordable and equitable cost structures; and greater trust, transparency, and community involvement in decision-making. Participants also noted challenges related to aging infrastructure, the importance of increasing technical and managerial capacity, and the need for long-term sustainability and climate resilience. Overall, while preferences differed, participants agreed that success will depend less on the specific governance model chosen and more on how well the structure supports equity, community voice, and sustainable implementation.

## Next Steps, State Water Board

In the final portion of the presentation, the State Water Board outlined the upcoming process and timeline for the regional drinking water project.

### Process and Timeline:

By fall 2025, the goal is to finalize a governance decision and begin the engineering report process. If the communities commit to moving forward as a regional entity, the State Water Resources Control Board **may** fund the engineering report. This report will determine how much it will cost to operate and maintain the system and will also include a preliminary rates study. In parallel to the engineering report, the communities would continue discussing the creation of a governance entity to apply for funding, completion of a funding application covering design and environmental impact analysis, and ultimately the submission of a construction funding application by the established governance entity.

### Upcoming Meetings:

- Wednesday August 27, 2025, Cutler Elementary School Cafeteria 40532 Road 128, Culter, California 93615 (Corner of School Avenue and Road 128)
  - The fourth joint community meeting will be held to narrow down preferred project alternatives and governance structures, with report-outs from each participating water board.
- Tuesday December 9, 2025 Monson Elementary School Cafeteria 10643 Avenue 416, Sultana, California 93666 (Corner of Avenue 416 and Road 106)
  - Another joint community meeting will confirm community alignment on the preferred alternative, governance structure, and community interest in moving forward.

For any questions about the meetings or the project, community members are encouraged to reach out to [SAFER@waterboards.ca.gov](mailto:SAFER@waterboards.ca.gov).