



COUNTY OF HUMBOLDT

For the meeting of: 2/15/2022

File #: 22-138

To: Board of Supervisors

From: Sheriff-- Drought Task Force

Agenda Section: Time Certain Matter

SUBJECT:

9:30 am - Update from the Drought Task Force addressing whether to maintain the drought proclamation, decision on whether irrigation water for cannabis should be curtailed, update on addressing wells use and direction to create a resiliency coordinator.

RECOMMENDATION(S):

That the Board of Supervisors:

1. Receive the Report from the Drought Task Force; and
2. Receive an update on the Resiliency Coordinator position and direct staff to return to the Board with the necessary documentation to create and allocate the position to the Office of Emergency Services.

SOURCE OF FUNDING:

General Fund (1100), Public Health Fund (1175)

DISCUSSION:

- 1. Drought Proclamation.** The early rainfall brought hopes that the drought was over but the rainfall did not continue into January. Precipitation in Humboldt County is currently below normal for this time of year. It is unlikely that heavier than normal rains in February and in the spring months will alleviate this situation, as the long term forecasts do not anticipate heavier than normal rainfall. Long-term precipitation outlooks are indicating some uncertainty what late winter and early spring may bring, with equal chances of below average and above average rainfall at least through April, 2022.

The US Drought Monitor currently indicates that the Southeastern and Northeastern portions of the county continue to experience “Severe Drought” conditions, while the majority of the county is experiencing “Moderate Drought” conditions. The factual data points to continued concern for continued drought within the county and State of California. In looking at this it does not seem warranted to remove the drought proclamation completely as that may give people the wrong impression that the drought is over.

There are two recommended options that would address the continued drought concern in Humboldt County:

- a) Maintain the current Local Emergency Proclamation for drought until information is received demonstrating that the drought conditions no longer exist. This could be late April/early May of 2022.
- b) Modify the drought proclamation to only apply to areas subject to “Severe” drought conditions.

The uncertainty of precipitation levels in the coming months makes it difficult to forecast what future drought-related impacts Humboldt County might endure or when drought conditions will diminish. Though the County has seen improvements in drought intensity rating over the past several months, a dry winter and spring could lead to worsening conditions moving into early summer and beyond.

2. **Curtailment of Cannabis Irrigation.** At this point with potential drought still affecting the summer months, a cautious approach is appropriate. The drought is not so severe that curtailment of cannabis cultivation should be declared now. Depending upon what happens during the remainder of the wet season, it may be appropriate to curtail cultivation later in the season (July - August) unless there is existing water storage on site. The April update of drought conditions will give more precise answers for how to address late season water use. Those who have been able to catch rainwater sufficient for their cultivation would not be affected by any curtailment decision.
3. **Well Permitting Regulations.** The county continues to work on regulations to address permitting of wells. Unfortunately, the complexity of Humboldt County’s geology makes it difficult to develop clear standards that can be applied to many different circumstances. This work is progressing, and we anticipate having something to review by the end of March.
4. **Resiliency Coordinator.** The Drought Task Force considered the need for a Resiliency Coordinator and for the same or different position to address the policy issues associated with climate adaptation. The Task Force finds that there is enough work that this needs to be more than one position to be effective.

The Office of Emergency Services is responsible for maintaining and coordinating the implementation of the Humboldt County Operational Area Hazard Mitigation Plan (HMP). There are currently 24 projects identified for unincorporated Humboldt County that need to be implemented as part of this plan, with additional projects identified for 22 other jurisdictions within the Humboldt County Operational Area (OA). The projects identified in the HMP are intended to lessen the negative impact of disasters in Humboldt County through strategic planning and the creation of community resilience. Identified projects focus on a broad range of mitigation and resiliency strategies, such as the development of sea level rise adaptation plans, new land use policies and regulations to mitigate against all hazards, and community education and outreach campaigns to reduce community risk and promote resilience.

Given that there is an existing program which is very similar to the purpose of a Resiliency Coordinator's role, and that current program is currently understaffed to accomplish the projects that need to be undertaken, the preferred approach is to allocate the Resiliency Coordinator in OES and expand the nature of the Hazard Mitigation Plan to encompass resiliency as the focus. OES is a good location for this as the office already maintains interjurisdictional relationships with other departments, agencies, and special districts. This is a natural fit of form and function.

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

Expenses related to the Local Drought Taskforce are being paid for out of the administrative budgets of the participating departments (Sheriff's Office, Department of Health & Human Services - Environmental Health, Planning & Building, UC Cooperative Extension, Agricultural Commissioner, Public Works). There has been no additional funding allocated for these functions included in the FY 2021-22 budget. The primary action impacting the General Fund may be the creation of the Resiliency Coordinator position. It is not immediately known how much this position will cost to fund, and long term how much of the position can be funded through grant funding. This will need to be addressed as part of the annual budget cycle.

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK:

This action supports your Board's Strategic Framework by enforcing laws and regulations to protect residents

OTHER AGENCY INVOLVEMENT:

National Weather Service of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric

ALTERNATIVES TO STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Alternatives for the Board's consideration are addressed in the narrative sections above.

ATTACHMENTS:

- Attachment 1: U.S. Drought Monitor
- Attachment 2: U.S. Seasonal Drought Outlook
- Attachment 3: Hazard Mitigation Projects (Unincorporated Humboldt County)

PREVIOUS ACTION/REFERRAL:

Board Order No.: [Click or tap here to enter text.](#)

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