



Building Water Resilience: 10 Years of Progress

Ten years ago, Santa Cruz faced one of the most severe droughts in its history. In response, the community came together to take a closer look at our water future and to help shape it.

In 2014, the City convened the Water Supply Advisory Committee (WSAC), a community-led group of residents, experts, and stakeholders. Through an open and public process, the committee developed a long-term roadmap towards water supply reliability. That roadmap continues to guide the City's work today.

Over the past decade, that roadmap has moved from planning into action. This work requires ongoing effort to maintain and make significant investments in the system over time, helping ensure it continues to serve the community reliably in both wet and dry years.

The Water Department has advanced a range of strategies to make our system more resilient, including expanding conservation efforts, developing ways to store excess winter rainfall in local aquifers for use during dry periods, and investing in infrastructure to allow for water transfers with neighboring agencies. Together, these efforts help build a system that can adapt to changing conditions while continuing to deliver safe, reliable water every day.

Santa Cruz's water system is unique. Unlike many communities, we rely entirely on local rainfall, with no access to imported water supplies. At the same time, climate change is bringing more extreme swings between drought and intense storms. In some cases, storm conditions can create water quality conditions in our flowing sources that are challenging to treat.

That's where the community continues to play a critical role. Santa Cruz residents have built one of the strongest conservation cultures in the state. Even as the population has grown, water use today remains lower than it was decades ago. That collective effort has made a meaningful difference. Together with ongoing system improvements, this shared commitment helps support a reliable water supply for the entire community.

At the same time, conservation alone is no longer enough to meet future needs. A reliable water system depends on a diverse and flexible approach. This approach must adapt to changing conditions while continuing to protect our local environment and support fish habitats.

As we mark this 10-year milestone, we recognize the role our community has played in getting us here. The work ahead continues to build on that foundation, with a focus on resilience, reliability, and responsible stewardship of our local water resources. This ensures the system is maintained and strengthened to serve the community now and into the future.



Explore Your Water System in Action

Explore the City's new interactive StoryMap to learn where your water comes from, how it is treated and delivered, and the infrastructure that keeps it flowing every day. It offers a behind-the-scenes look at the systems and work that supports a safe, reliable water supply. Scan the QR code to learn more or visit santacruzca.gov/water



Santa Cruz Drinking Water Meets All Standards

The City's 2025 Water Quality Report is now available, providing an annual update on the safety and quality of Santa Cruz's drinking water.

Once again, Santa Cruz's water meets all state and federal drinking water standards. Thousands of tests are conducted throughout the year to ensure the water delivered to homes and businesses is safe, clean, and reliable.

Santa Cruz's drinking water begins in protected local watersheds and is carefully treated and monitored before reaching your tap. This ongoing work helps maintain high water quality and protects public health every day.

The report is issued annually as required by the State of California Division of Drinking Water and offers a transparent look at where your water comes from and how it is treated. Read it at santacruzca.gov/waterqualityreport



Expanded Utility Assistance Now Available



Santa Cruz Municipal Utilities (SCMU) is expanding support for customers through the Utility Customer Assistance Program (UCAP), making it easier for more households to access help with utility costs.

UCAP now includes assistance for both customers who receive a direct SCMU bill and households in multi-unit housing where utility costs are included in rent or paid through a third party. This expansion reflects a continued focus on customer service and ensuring support reaches more members of the community.

For customers with a SCMU account, enrolled participants receive a monthly credit applied directly to their bill. For those living in apartments or multi-family housing, eligible households can receive a one-time assistance payment to help offset utility costs built into rent or other housing expenses.

UCAP is available to income-qualifying households within SCMU's service area. Information and enrollment forms are available in both English and Spanish. If you or someone you know may benefit, we encourage you to learn more about available options at santacruzca.gov/UCAP

Statewide Changes for Nonfunctional Turf Irrigation

California is phasing in new requirements that limit the use of drinking water for irrigating nonfunctional turf, or decorative grass that is not used for recreation or community activities.

Beginning in 2027, these changes will apply to certain property types, including commercial, industrial, and institutional sites, as well as common areas in homeowners associations. Most home lawns are not affected.

Nonfunctional turf includes ornamental grass such as lawns in medians, parking lots, or along sidewalks and buildings. Functional turf, like parks, sports fields, and playgrounds, may continue to be irrigated.

This statewide effort supports long-term water conservation and helps communities prepare for more frequent and severe drought conditions. Learn more about what's changing and who is impacted at santacruzca.gov/nft



Loch Lomond: Where Water and Recreation Meet

Loch Lomond Reservoir is the City's only water storage facility, providing a reliable water supply for Santa Cruz. The Loch Lomond Recreation Area offers a unique way to experience this important resource while enjoying the outdoors.

Open throughout the summer, the reservoir stores water for use during dry periods and plays a key role in our water system. It also provides opportunities for boating, fishing, hiking, and picnicking in a scenic redwood setting. Boat rentals are available, including rowboats, kayaks, pedal boats, and motor boats.

Visitors can take part in the Loch Lomond Learning Series, featuring guided walks and boat tours led by local experts on topics such as native plants, birding, and watershed protection. Free monthly pontoon tours aboard the Newell Jewell offer a closer look at the reservoir and surrounding watershed.

Loch Lomond is open daily, except Wednesdays, through Labor Day, with weekend hours continuing into the fall. Swimming is not permitted, and dogs are welcome on leash. Plan your visit at santacruzca.gov/lochlomond

Please note: as part of ongoing efforts to protect water quality and prevent the spread of invasive species, fish stocking at Loch Lomond remains paused.



Go Behind the Scenes of Santa Cruz Recycling



Ever wonder what happens after your recycling and food scraps leave the curb?

This summer, the City of Santa Cruz is offering public tours of the Resource Recovery Facility, giving community members a behind-the-scenes look at the systems, equipment, and staff that help process Santa Cruz's waste and recycling every day.

Held on Fridays from June through August, the guided tours allow visitors to see firsthand what happens to the 30 to 50 tons of material placed into local recycling bins daily and learn why "recycling right" matters.

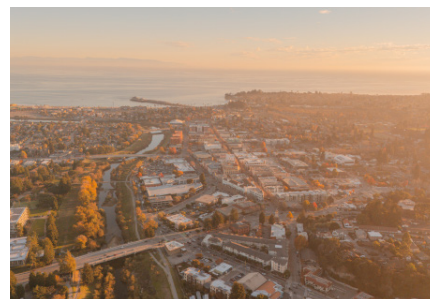
Tours also include the facility's scrap metal area, Household Hazardous Waste Program, and food scrap pre-processing equipment. Food scraps collected locally are processed and transported to Monterey One Water, where they help generate renewable biogas energy.

The tours offer a hands-on way to better understand how everyday actions at home support waste reduction and sustainability efforts across the community. Learn more and sign up at santacruzca.gov/tours

Planning for Santa Cruz's Water Future

The City of Santa Cruz recently adopted its 2025 Urban Water Management Plan and Water Shortage Contingency Plan. Updated every five years, the state-required plan evaluates Santa Cruz's water supply, conservation progress, drought planning, and future water needs. The draft outlines strategies to strengthen long-term reliability, including aquifer storage and recovery, regional water transfers, conservation efforts, and major infrastructure improvements.

Because Santa Cruz relies entirely on local rainfall and water sources, long-term planning remains essential as climate change increases swings between drought and intense storms. Learn more at santacruzca.gov/uwmp





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Reliable Services, Shared Stewardship

Santa Cruz Municipal Utilities connects customers with essential services that support daily life in our community, including water, sewer, refuse, and recycling. These services are easy to take for granted when everything is working as it should, but they require ongoing maintenance, modernization, planning, and investment to remain reliable.

Across the Water and Public Works departments, our teams are focused on maintaining dependable service while preparing for the future. Climate change, aging infrastructure, changing regulations, and growing service needs all require thoughtful planning and continued system improvements.

This work happens in many ways, from operating and maintaining treatment facilities, pipelines, pump stations, vehicles, and collection systems to supporting customers, responding to service needs, protecting local resources, and planning long-term projects. Each part of the system plays a role in keeping services safe, dependable, and responsive to the needs of our community.

We are grateful for the staff who keep these services running and for the customers who do their part by conserving water, sorting waste properly, reporting issues, staying informed, and participating in programs that support our shared community goals.

Thank you for your continued trust and partnership as we work to care for Santa Cruz now and into the future.



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