

Southern Sonoma County Integrated Regional Watershed Management DAC Water Needs Assessment

May, 2020



Southern Sonoma County Integrated Regional Watershed Management DAC Water Needs Assessment

Executive Summary

Sonoma Ecology Center (SEC) and Daily Acts Organization (DAO) partnered with our community in Southern Sonoma County to conduct outreach and needs assessments to collect information about the issues and needs related to water facing our disadvantaged communities (DACs) in Petaluma and Sonoma Valley.

“Authentic community engagement is possible when systemic and historical barriers to participation in decision-making processes are broken down. Our hope is to provide vulnerable communities facing disproportionate environmental burdens with equitable voice in determining futures.” – Environmental Justice Center for Water (EJCW), 2018

Outreach Methods and Data Collection

- Conducted bilingual outreach and survey
- Targeted Latinx outreach
- Attended events to engage community members
April 2019 - January 2020
- Reviewed existing reports
- Facilitated listening sessions with partners
- Made direct observations

Collected information about the following:

- Drinking water
- Well water
- Rain water or flooding
- Trash, dumping, and pollution
- Community improvements

Community Partners: La Luz, Teen Services, Sonoma Valley Community Health Center, North Bay Organizing Project, Vía Esperanza, Altamira Middle School, Redwood Empire Food Bank, McDowell Elementary School, and Santa Rosa Junior College, Springs Municipal Advisory Council, Hannah Boyes Center, and Burbank Housing.



Southern Sonoma County Needs Assessment Findings Summary

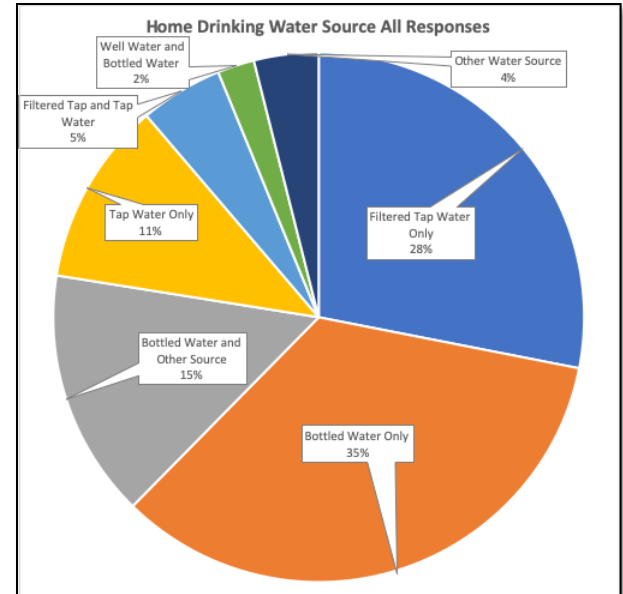
Tap Water: Many people, especially in the Latinx community, do not trust tap water for drinking. They are choosing to purchase bottled water, or to filter their tap water in place of drinking tap water as delivered. In both Petaluma and the Springs communities, only 11% said they exclusively drink tap water.

Well Water: Of the few responses from people using well water, most of them did not report any issues with the water quantity or quality.

Storm Water Management: For both Petaluma and the Springs community, over 65% of responses indicated that street flooding was the most common rain water issue observed. This was followed by trail or sidewalk



flooding, and then concern about erosion and other flooding. Sewer overflow from manholes was observed by some respondents in both communities.



In Sonoma Valley, Sanitary Sewer Overflows (SSOs) of from 10,000 to over 100,000 gallons have occurred in the Springs in the neighborhoods between Hwy 12 and Sonoma Creek. Many overflows have occurred in this area over the last 10 years, some close to schools. Addressing this storm water and waste water management issue is a priority for southern Sonoma County.

Pollution and Dumping Issues: In both Petaluma and the Springs, respondents identified small litter, dumping of larger items, and homeless camp waste as the primary pollution issue the community is aware of. Animal waste was also considered to be an issue.

Desired Community Improvements: The highest priority for community improvements identified for both communities were more parks and more creek cleanups. This was closely followed by playgrounds and trails. In the Springs the priority for playgrounds was slightly higher, and in Petaluma, the priority for trails was slightly higher. Both communities also expressed interest in rain barrels, public landscaping, and other improvements.

Needs Assessment Framework and Outreach Methods

The Southern Sonoma County Water Needs Assessment was funded by Bay Area Disadvantaged Community Involvement Program (BA DACIP) through California Proposition 1 funding and was distributed through the Department of Water Resources (DWR) Integrated Regional Water Management (IRWM) Disadvantaged Community Involvement Grant Program. This study is part of a DWR program to conduct a water needs assessment of disadvantaged communities and tribal lands throughout the State of California. In southern Sonoma County, the areas of focus for this study were determined by the [DWR DAC Mapping Tool](#) based on the census data definition of disadvantaged communities, and further refined based on a local knowledge including a Sonoma County study that included a Human Development Index: [A Portrait of Sonoma County](#).

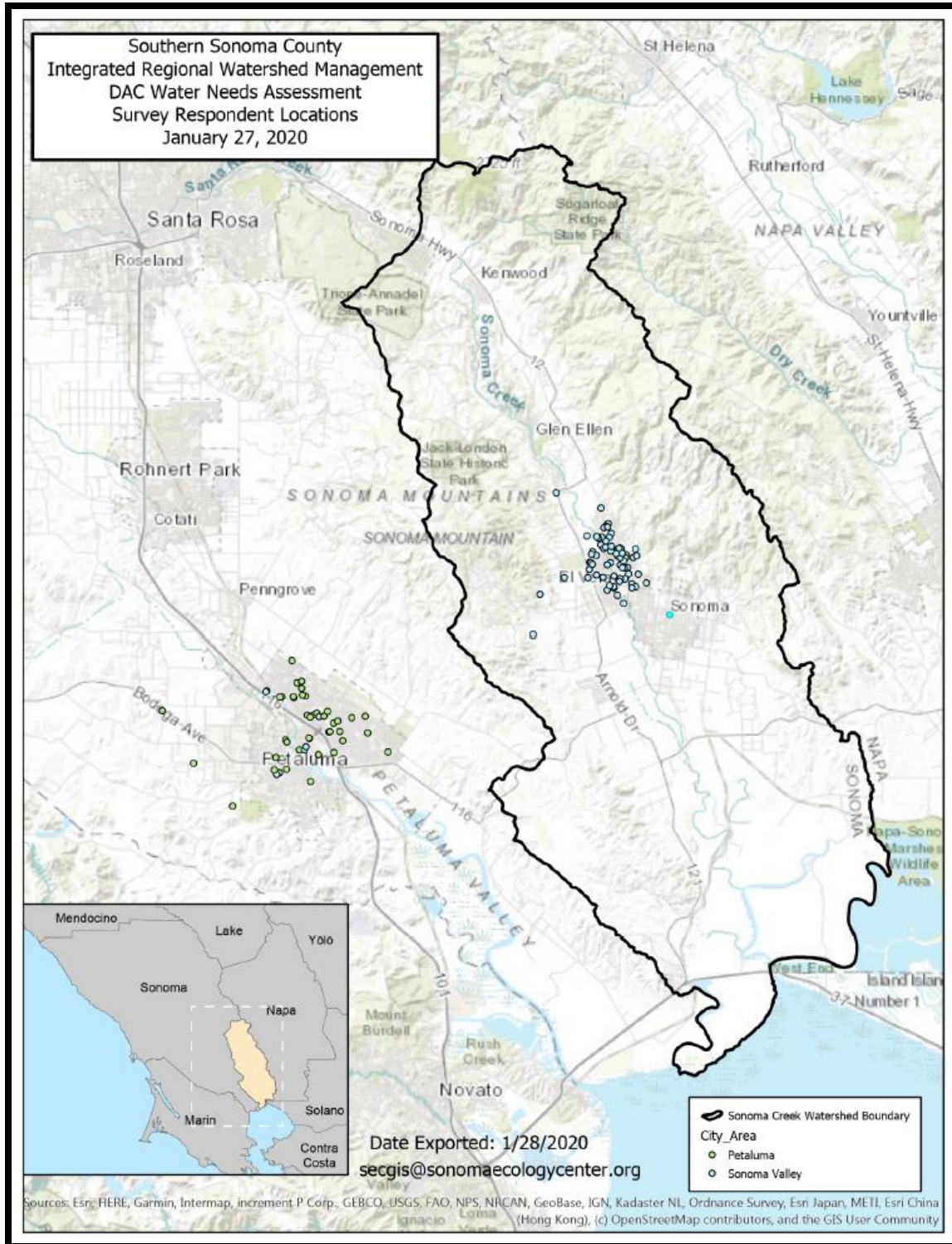
The needs assessment was conducted through community outreach from spring 2019 through January 2020. Our goal was to reach a representative group of our DAC community to learn about the various issues or challenges community members experience related to water, and to begin to develop a strategy of how to address the issues identified. We developed a survey to define the data collection parameters and to use as a tool to guide conversations and listening sessions. The survey was available online, but the vast majority of data collection was done through conversation and interviews with community members. SEC hired a bilingual outreach specialist who is a native Spanish speaker and trained her in the IRWM needs assessment goals and survey data collection. SEC and DAO staff developed Spanish language outreach materials and attended numerous community events and collected information through conversations with community members in Spanish and English.

Sonoma Valley outreach events where information was collected included: Earth Day, weekly Farmer's Market at Sonoma Plaza, back to school event at Altamira Middle School, free immigration clinics, Dolores Huerta event at Hannah Boyes Center, sustainable groundwater community meetings, the Springs Municipal Advisory Council, and a Burbank Housing event. The outreach specialist also organized connections with staff at several Sonoma Valley organizations (La Luz, Teen Services, Sonoma Valley Community Health Center, North Bay Organizing Project, and Vía Esperanza) and collected information from them based on their experience working in the community.

In Petaluma, Daily Acts focused on building partnerships with organizations such as the Redwood Empire Food Bank, McDowell Elementary School, and Santa Rosa Junior College. Outreach events attended including collecting needs assessments at the weekly Petaluma Eastside Farmers' Market, canvassing at Lucchesi Park, attending a creek cleanup at McDowell Elementary School, attending food distribution events, as well as having a presence at the Día de los Muertos celebration at the Santa Rosa Junior College in Petaluma.

Needs Assessment Findings

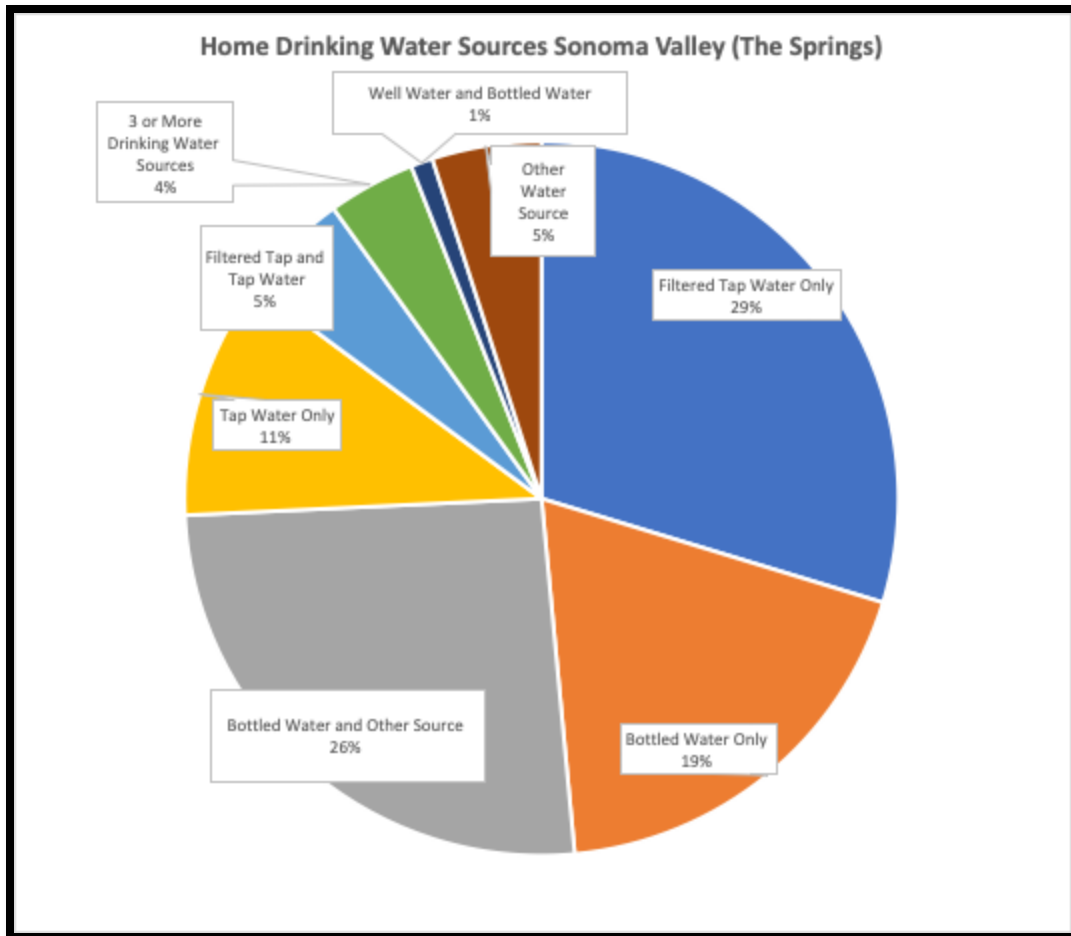
203 respondents: 40% from Petaluma, and 60% from Sonoma Valley.

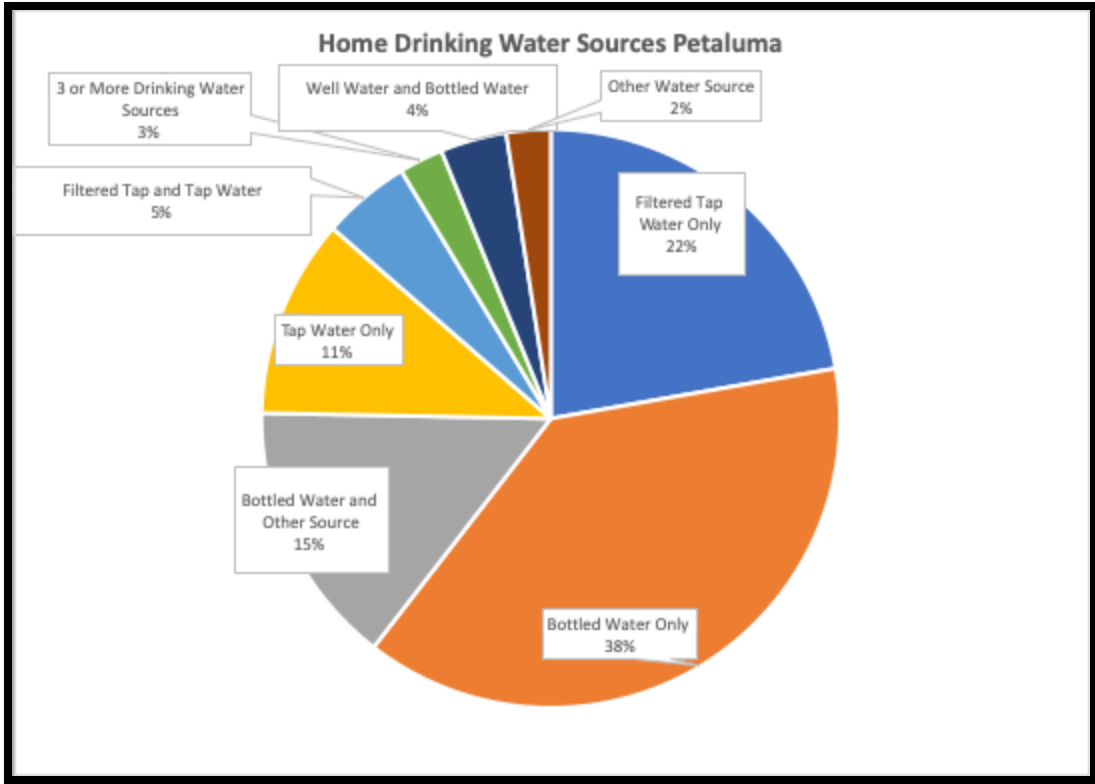


Water Supply and Water Quality

Tap Water

Many people, especially in the Latinx community, do not trust tap water for drinking. They are choosing to purchase bottled water, or to filter their tap water in place of drinking water directly from the tap. In Sonoma Valley, 48% said they only drink bottled water or filtered tap water. In Petaluma, 60% said they only drink bottled water or filtered tap water. Only 11% said they primarily drink tap water.





What people said regarding why they are not drinking unfiltered tap water:

“I think that tap water is not safe to drink”

“I don’t trust tap water”

“I don’t like the taste and I worry about my health”

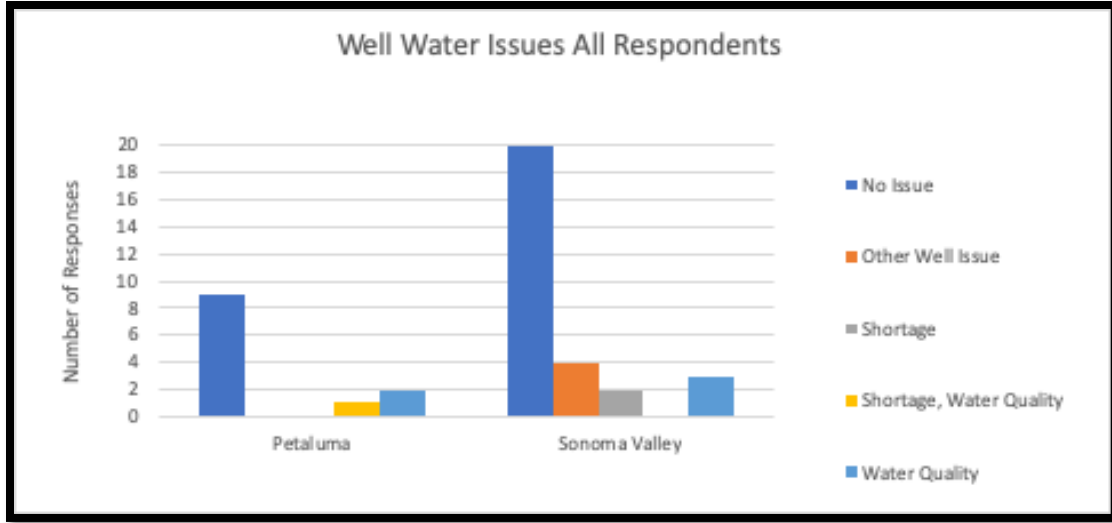
“I don’t like the smell of [the tap] water”

“Our concern is that unfiltered water is not clean enough to drink. In my household we are big fans of reusable bottles and having a water filter is more economical”

“[Tap] water tastes bad”

Well Water

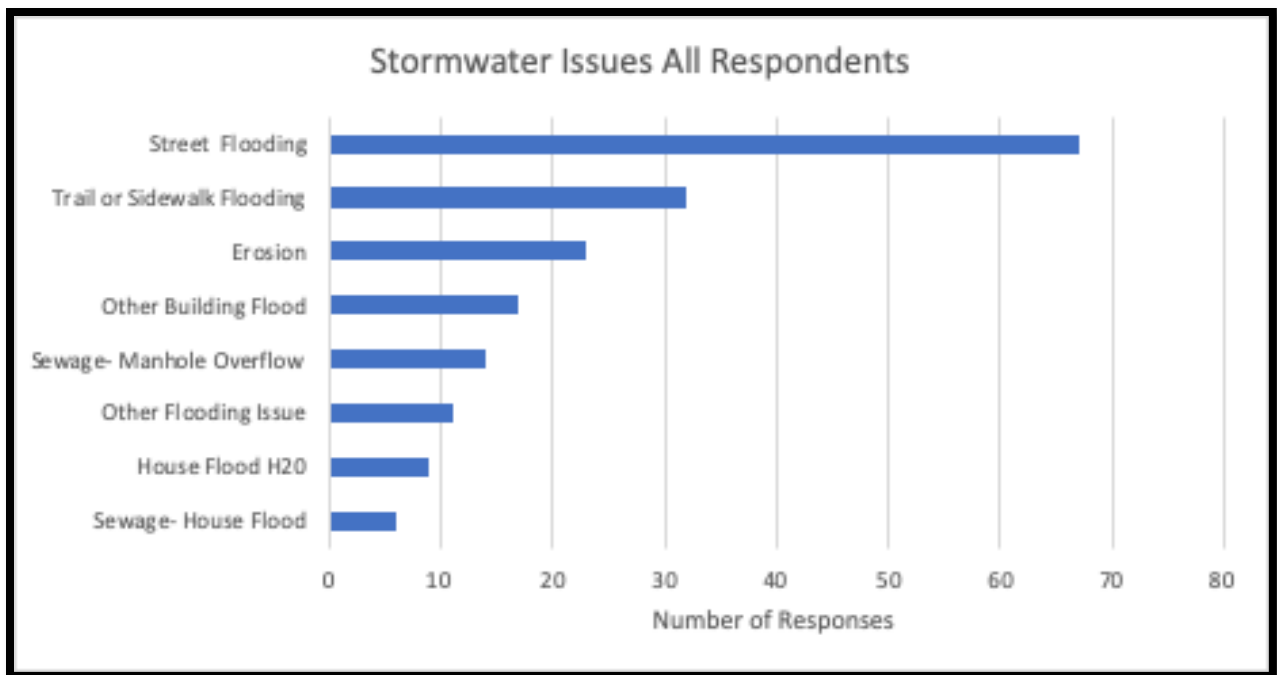
Only 14% of responses to the needs assessment survey were from people using well water. Of the responses from people using well water, most of them did not report any issues with the well water quantity or quality.



Flood Protection and Storm Water Management

For both Petaluma and the Springs community, over 65% of responses indicated that street flooding was the most common storm water issue observed. This was followed by trail or sidewalk flooding, and then concern about erosion and other flooding. Sewer overflow from manholes was observed by some respondents in both communities.

In the Springs, street flooding and erosion, particularly around Sonoma Creek, are a concern that has been confirmed by many stakeholder conversations. Sanitary Sewer Overflows near schools where children are playing is a particular concern.

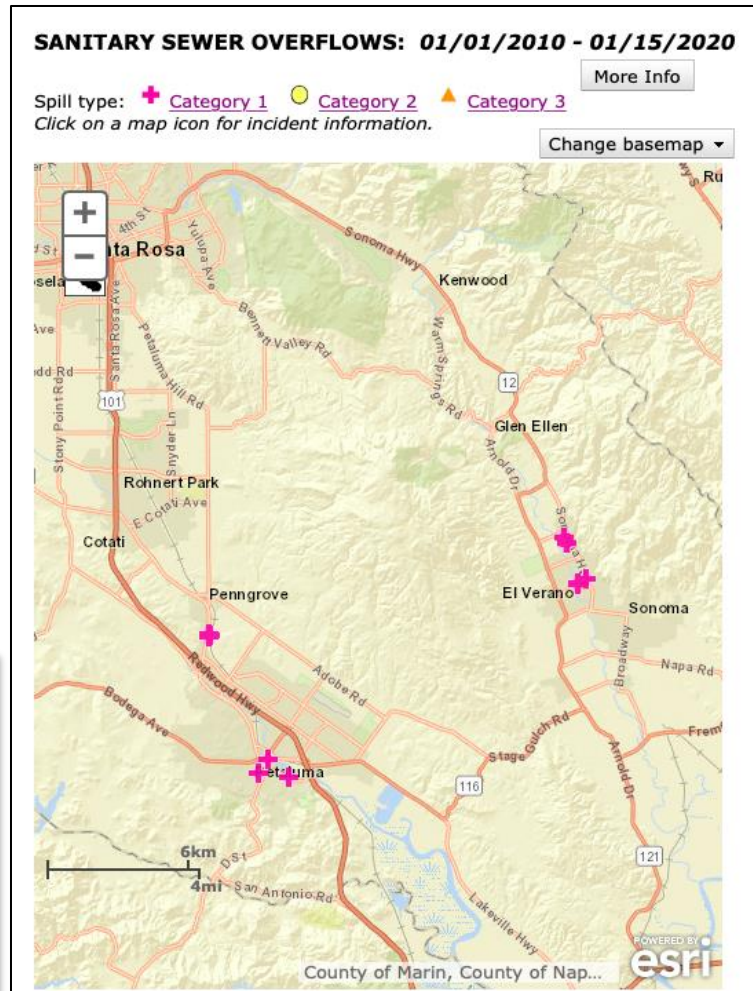


Wastewater and Recycled Water

Sanitary Sewer Overflows

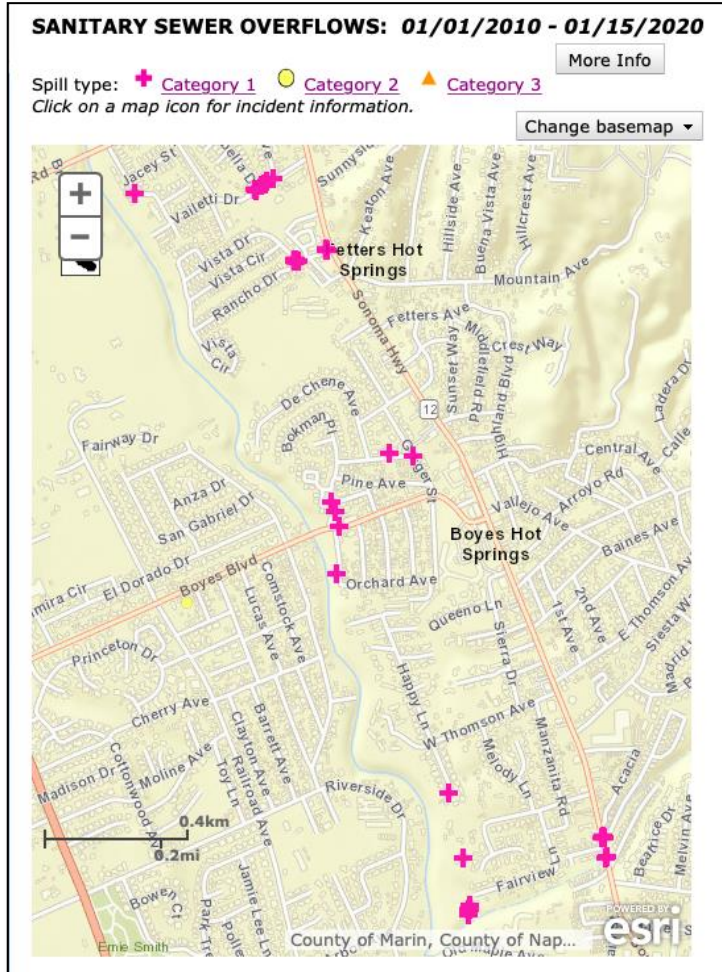
Although we did not have a specific question about waste water, through our community conversations about storm water we found out that Sanitary Sewer Overflows (SSOs) are an issue in both the Springs and some areas of Petaluma. SSOs occur when storm water enters the sewer system which pushes untreated or partially untreated waste out of the sewer system, where it flows into the surface waters.

Several survey respondents (15%) observed SSOs in both the Springs and Petaluma, although more people have identified this as an issue in the Springs. The State Water Resources Control Board tracks reported SSOs, and provides public information about them on their website. Over the last 10 years, there have been a handful of SSOs of over 100,000 gallons, which have occurred in both Petaluma and Sonoma Valley. Locations of these larger SSOs in Southern Sonoma County are shown in the map to the right.

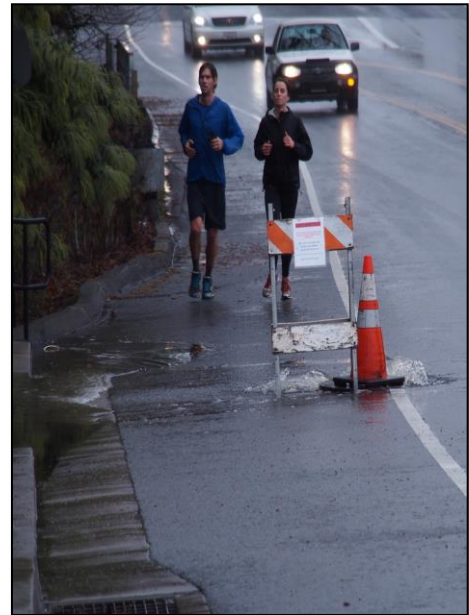


Map Source: [CA EPA Water Resource Control Board, 2020.](#)

In Sonoma Valley, Sanitary Sewer Overflows (SSOs) of over 10,000 gallons have occurred many times over the last 10 years in the Springs primarily along the area of Route 12 corridor and Sonoma Creek. The map below shows the location of these various size SSOs over the period between 2009 and 2020. There are two elementary schools near frequent SSO locations: Sonoma Charter School by Vailetti Dr, and Flowery Elementary School by Rancho Dr. Addressing this storm water and wastewater issue is a priority for southern Sonoma County and will require expensive infrastructure work in order to remedy this issue.

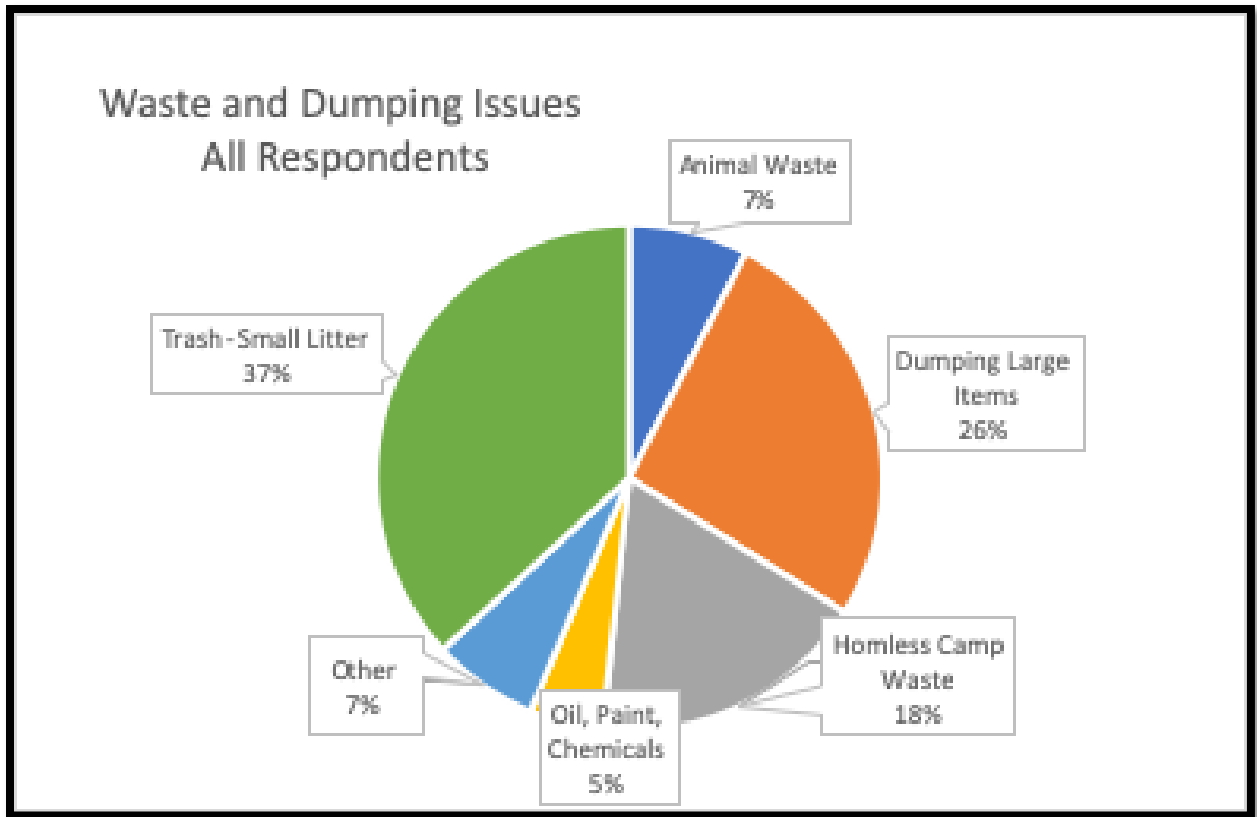


Map Source: [CA EPA Water Resource Control Board, 2020.](#)



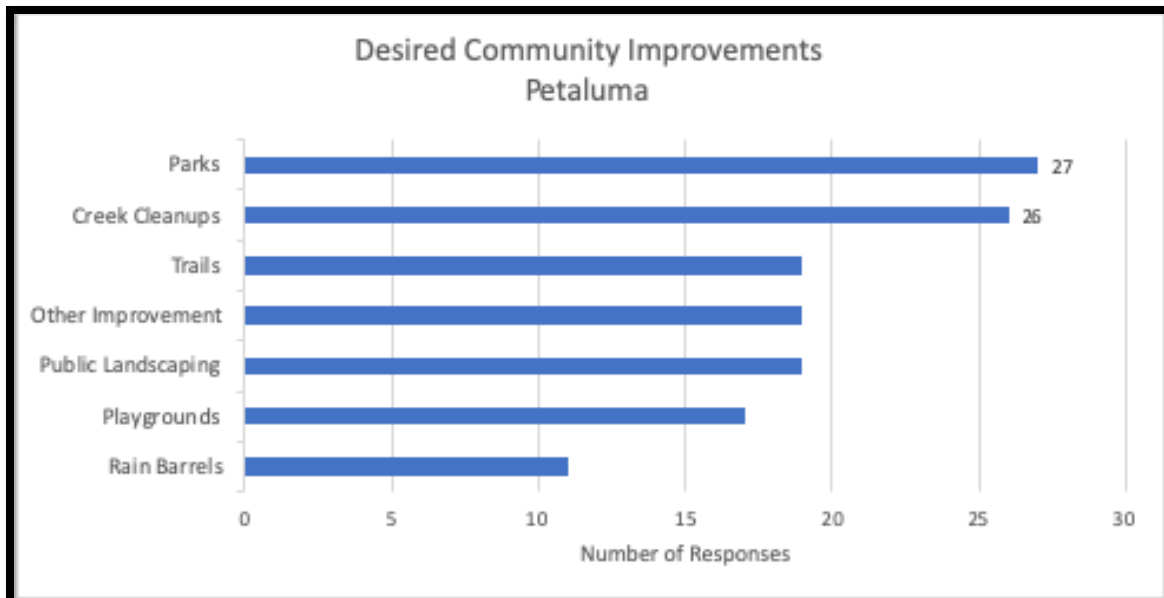
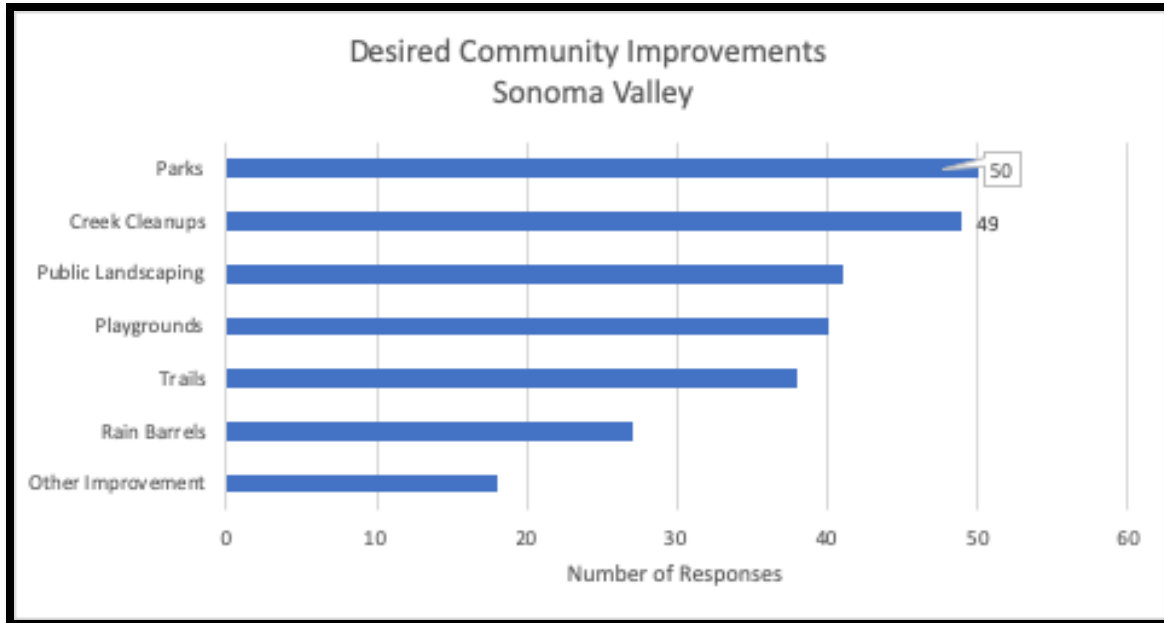
Pollution and Dumping Issues

In both Petaluma and the Springs, respondents identified small litter, dumping of larger items, and homeless camp waste as the primary pollution issue the community is aware of. Animal waste was also considered to be an issue.



Desired Community Improvements

The most common desired community improvements were more parks and creek cleanup events for both communities. This was closely followed by playgrounds and trails. In the Springs the priority for playgrounds was slightly higher, and in Petaluma, the priority of trails was slightly higher. Both communities also expressed interest in rain barrels, public landscaping, and other improvements.



Lessons Learned

- It's difficult for participants to give specific locations for the site of problems. Participants gave very vague actual locations.
- From a data analysis point of view, asking open ended questions does not allow for reporting on specific data points. In the future, we will ask discreet questions like: "Have you seen homeless encampments?" and "Where have you seen them?"
- We'd like to add more specific questions around drinking water such as: "Where do you usually get drinking water?" and "Where else do you get drinking water?"
- The way the survey is set up, participants were able to check multiple boxes for each question. This means that we cannot distinguish which response carries more weight. In the future, we will divide complex questions into multiple questions and provide a likert scale for others.
- Since it was challenging for participants to generate location information, we will provide respondents with a map of the area so they can pinpoint locations visually.
- Throughout the process of administering surveys, we learned that people are far more inclined to have a conversation about water related observations rather than fill out a survey. Most of the data was collected through conversation using the needs assessment survey tool questions.