

Clean. Reliable. Resilient.

Board of Directors

Baduwa't Watershed Resilience Initiative

Humboldt Bay Municipal Water District

Regular Board Meeting • September 10, 2026

Presented by Michiko Mares, P.E., General Manager

Agenda

- 1 The Baduwa't: one connected system
- 2 What the Watershed Resilience Initiative is
- 3 The watershed flight, and why we flew
- 4 What we saw, and why it matters
- 5 The coalition coming together
- 6 Next steps and requests

SECTION 01

One Connected System, Headwaters to Tap

From the Yolla Bolly Mountains to the families at the tap, every part of the region the Baduwa't touches shares its future. "Yolla Bolly" comes from the Wintun language where "yo-la" means snow covered and "bo-li" means high peak.

BACKGROUND

The Baduwa't (Mad River)

A single source supplies clean drinking water to roughly 94,000 residents across the Humboldt Bay region. When this system is at risk, the whole region is at risk.



The river flows from its headwaters in the Yolla Bolly Mountains of Trinity County, past R.W. Matthews Dam and Ruth Lake, to its mouth near McKinleyville, then across Humboldt Bay to the communities it serves, including disadvantaged and vulnerable bay-shore communities on the Samoa Peninsula and at King Salmon and Fields Landing.

KEY TAKEAWAY

This watershed has never been studied as one connected system. Proposition 4 gives us a rare chance to change that.

Baduwa't Watershed Resilience Initiative

A headwaters-to-Pacific coalition for integrated watershed planning, convened ahead of new Proposition 4 funding.



Why now

Prop 4 dedicates roughly \$100M statewide through DWR's Watershed Resilience Program, designed for complex, multi-jurisdictional watersheds like ours. The coalitions that reach the short list will be the ones that came together early.



Built on partnership

Grounded in partnership with the watershed's tribal nations, resource agencies, conservation and research organizations, private owners, and both Humboldt and Trinity Counties.



What HBMWD brings

As the regional wholesale supplier for 70-years, a deep, working knowledge of the river from headwaters to tap: the Yolla Bolly wilderness, reservoir, collectors, treatment, transmission system, and communities served. HBMWD brings the water-supply and infrastructure perspective, its instream flow work under Section 1707, and a trusted role as regional convener.

Yolla Bolly Headwaters



Yolla Bolly Headwaters

The Baduwa't rises in the Yolla Bolly high country, the same rugged headwaters that give rise to the Middle/North Forks of the Eel, the South Fork Trinity, and Cottonwood and Thomes Creeks flowing to the Sacramento River. The Yolla Bolly sits at the divide of the Klamath, Sacramento, Eel and Baduwa't Rivers. Our drinking water begins in one of the most hydrologically significant landscapes in Northern California.

Upper Ruth Lake



Upper Ruth Lake

Looking west at Upper Ruth Lake, where the 2020 August Complex scars are visible. The August Complex was California's first mega-fire at over one million acres, which burned through the Yolla Bolly high country leaving behind denuded slopes and unstable soils that continue to shed sediment into Ruth Lake and drive turbidity downstream.

Hetten Cove and Boyscout Camp



Hetten Cove & Boyscout Camp

Looking south-west at Hetten Cove where the road culvert is failing due to increased erosion, sediment, and downed trees.

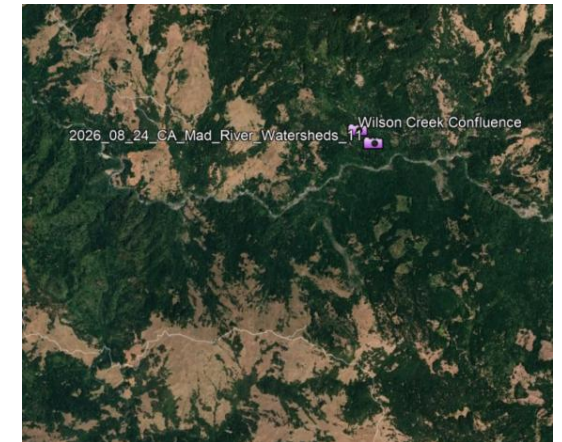


Down toward Kneeland



Down toward Kneeland

The mid-watershed working lands and river canyons, most of it behind private and federal gates with no public access. Facing downstream with McAlvey ridge (Showers Pass Road) to the west.

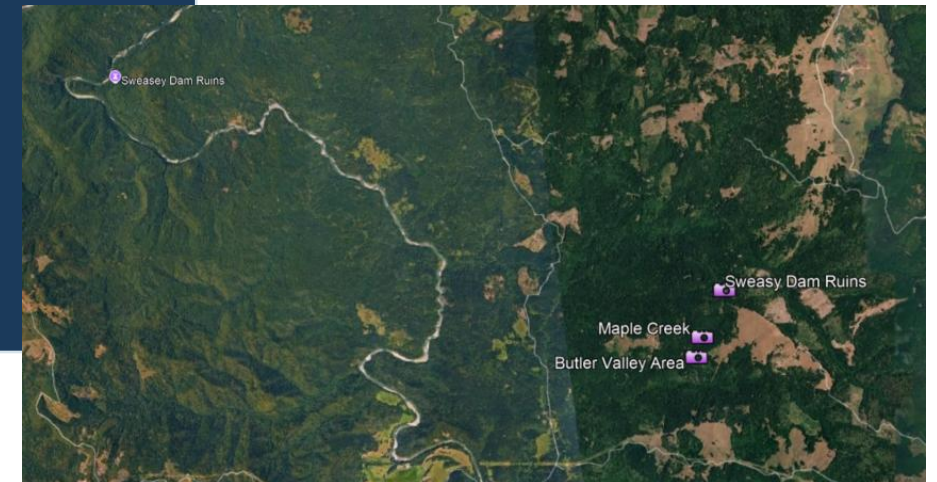


Turned back by fog in the lower watershed



Turned back by fog in the lower watershed

Coastal fog ended the flight near Kneeland. Facing downstream in the direction of the Sweasy Dam ruins.



Looking Back to the Headwaters

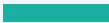


Looking back to the Yolla Bolly

Looking south-east from above Redwood and Panther Creeks to Black Rock Mountain within the North Yolla Bolly.

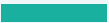
Why we flew with EcoFlight

EcoFlight is a nonprofit that uses small aircraft to give people an aerial view of the lands and waters they are working to protect. The flight was made possible through EcoFlight.



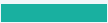
The aerial perspective

From the air, the connections between headwaters, forest, reservoir, and river become visible in a way no map or meeting can convey. It shows partners how the pieces of the watershed fit together as one system.



A neutral platform

EcoFlight is nonpartisan and works with all sides of an issue. The airplane becomes common ground, a place where partners with different roles and viewpoints share the same view and the same conversation.



A catalyst for coalition

Flights are a proven way to build shared understanding and spark collaboration. Putting future partners in the plane together, seeing the watershed as one, helps a coalition form around a common picture.

Partners in the plane

The flight brought together partners from across the watershed to see the river as one system, the kind of shared experience a coalition is built on.

County leadership

Elected county representatives from both Humboldt and Trinity Counties, spanning the length of the watershed.

Conservation & fisheries

National, Statewide and regional conservation, fisheries, and watershed organizations working on river health and restoration.

Watershed Research & Training Center

The watershed's research and training partners and a local watershed non-profit, bringing on-the-ground capacity and knowledge.

Resource conservation

Resource Conservation District partners who connect landowners, agriculture, and forest interests across the watershed.

State funding partner

A representative from the Department of Water Resources, seeing the watershed firsthand at the earliest stage of planning.

HBMWD

The regional wholesale water supplier, anchoring the water-supply and infrastructure perspective.

The challenges we face

The questions in this watershed are connected, and none of them can be answered by any one organization alone.



Fire & post-fire recovery

The August Complex burned a large share of the headwaters. What grows back, and how the next fire behaves, shapes the whole river.



Roads & sediment

Failing roads and culverts and post-fire erosion are moving sediment downstream, reducing Ruth Lake storage and driving turbidity.



Flooding & channel change

Changing flood patterns reshape the river channel, the floodplain, and the infrastructure that sits within them.



Groundwater & the collectors

How surface water and groundwater interact drives the Ranney collectors that supply the region and requires better understanding.



Salinity & sea level rise

Some of the fastest sea level rise on the West Coast combined with Bay subsidence, threatens the bay crossings and raises saltwater intrusion risk for water supply.



Climate adaptation

Warmer, more variable conditions stress flows, supply, fisheries, and the estuary, and demand a watershed-scale plan to adapt.

A regional coalition, coming together now

We have begun outreach to dozens of organizations across the watershed, from the headwaters in Trinity County to the coast in Humboldt County, and the early response has been strongly positive.

Who is at the table

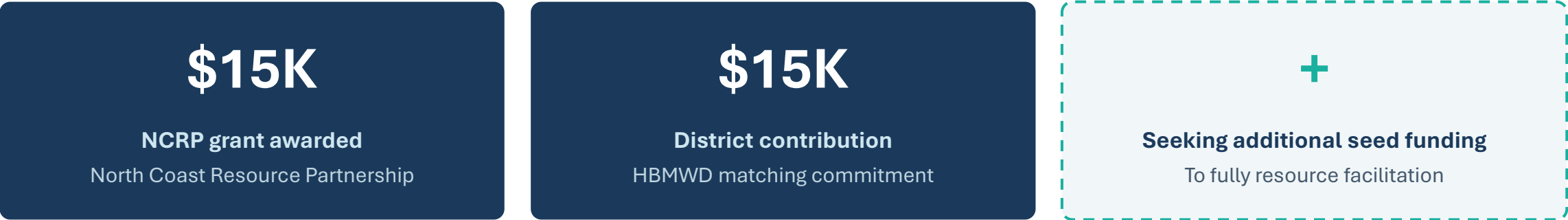
Humboldt and Trinity County staff and elected officials	State elected officials	Wholesale customers
Local, state, and federal non-profits	Resource Conservation Districts	Cal Poly Humboldt academic research on regional resilience
Tribal nations	Private property owners	State and federal agencies

How this connects to DWR & Proposition 4

A shared vision	The coalition is organizing around exactly the watershed-scale, headwaters-to-tap, cross-sector approach DWR's Watershed Resilience Framework describes.
A rural North Coast test case	A chance for DWR to see how the program works for a remote rural, tribal, disadvantaged, vulnerable, and geographically vast watershed at the very start of its planning.
Early dialogue	We are engaging DWR while the coalition and the questions are still taking shape, well ahead of any solicitation, and co-hosted DWR on the watershed by air.

Technical assistance & seed funding

To convene the coalition well, we are seeding third-party facilitation, so the coalition is shaped by a neutral hand rather than any one organization.



What the facilitation would do

- Bring the coalition together and build trust
- Establish partnership agreements
- Define each partner's level of participation
- Define a shared vision statement, in partners' words
- Surface the questions the coalition needs to answer
- Explore what is possible for the watershed

NEXT STEPS

Where we go from here

- Secure the technical assistance grant and seed funding for third-party facilitation
- Convene the coalition to define a shared vision and levels of participation
- Continue outreach to remaining partners
- Track DWR's guidelines and solicitation, and shape the application together – **anticipated application March 2027**

Questions & Discussion

Michiko Mares, P.E. • General Manager • gm@hbmwd.com • (707) 443-5018

Clean. Reliable. Resilient.