Tahoe Basin Water Blueprint Workshop #1 - Summary

April 15, 2026

El Dorado Water Agency (EDWA) convened a regional working group to build a shared understanding of and alignment around the development of the Tahoe Basin Water Blueprint (Blueprint Tahoe), a Water Security Program initiative of the El Dorado Water Agency (Water Agency). As an initial step in its development, participants were invited to work collaboratively to clarify and refine key regional vulnerabilities. This is the first in a series of five workshops.

Convening and Setting Intention

Rebecca Guo, El Dorado Water Agency (Executive Sponsor), and Hannah Romero, El Dorado Water Agency (Project Lead), introduced the Blueprint Tahoe initiative, which is directly tied to the agency's 2026–2030 Strategic Plan (SP30+) and the 2024 update to the Water Resources Development and Management Plan (WRDMP24). The initiative, expected to be completed by June 2027, is envisioned as a proactive, collaborative process to help shape a shared vision for the region's water future. A similar initiative is planned for the West Slope.

Participants were invited to share their interest in engaging in the initiative and represent a range of perspectives and roles. They highlighted several organizational and regional issues driving their involvement, including regulatory responsibilities; water quality concerns such as PCE and arsenic contamination; funding needs; public and legislative pressures; rate constraints; the future of groundwater sustainability under SGMA; water supply reliability; climate impacts (including rain-on-snow); well drilling; and infrastructure issues. They also highlighted opportunities to align with ongoing strategic planning efforts and the implementation of large capital improvement programs.

Blueprint Tahoe - Scope and Development Process

Hannah Romero reiterated that this effort is intended to align with the WRDMP24, SP30+, the El Dorado County Drought Resilience Plan (CDRP), and other regional plans, including those led by the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency (TRPA), the County, and regional partnerships. It builds on scoping meeting outcomes and is designed to address changing conditions. While other planning efforts have longer timelines, this initiative is intended to be nested within the WRDMP timeline, acknowledging the need for collaboration, as proposed regional actions may extend beyond a single purveyor. The plan will also benefit from aligning with current strategic planning efforts of participating organizations, including STPUD and TCPUD.

Yung-Hsin Sun, Sunzi Consulting, shared that the initiative is organized around three areas of integrated water management: water supply, water quality, and public safety. The Blueprint Tahoe planning framework includes the identification and development of stressors, vulnerabilities, measures, and screening, which will be incorporated into the roadmap as project portfolios. The framework is intended to take on a regional focus that is grounded in diverse perspectives.

Key outcomes from this process are expected to support improved regional resilience through stronger coordination among organizations and agencies, increased capacity to address shared challenges, and policy or infrastructure changes where needed. The process also seeks to enhance community awareness of regional water issues and the collective actions required to address them. It was emphasized that community awareness is a key challenge, as infrastructure is often out of sight and out of mind, and customers are not informed about the significant cost of infrastructure. Other issues that need to be elevated for public awareness include challenges that purveyors are addressing individually, such as water resource allocation, PFAS issues, and arsenic MCL requirements, which will affect everyone. Additional topics include emerging concerns like microplastics, and the costs associated with metering for small purveyors.

Tom McCarthy, Santiago Water Strategies, shared an example of groundwater contamination concerns in the "Y" Area, which was identified in the WRDMP to illustrate the approach that will be used to develop the Blueprint framework and accompanying project portfolios. Although the subbasin is classified as medium priority under SGMA, there are questions regarding the relative impact of the contamination on regional groundwater basin health and overall water supply reliability. Tom reviewed the identified vulnerability, pathway, and consequence associated with this challenge, which led to the identification of potential actions, including engaging with regulators to clarify conditions, continuing to meet all regulatory requirements in a timely manner, illustrating successful groundwater management to support communication with the State for potential relief, and considering sustainable governance for the TVS Subbasin.

Blueprint Tahoe: Regional Vulnerabilities

Stephanie Ard, Water Systems Consulting, introduced a draft list of vulnerabilities, pathways, and associated impacts previously identified in the 2025 Regionally Focused Countywide Plenary for Water and other relevant planning documents. Yung-Hsin Sun provided a more detailed description of key vulnerabilities documented in a set of handouts, which included information and maps illustrating how these vulnerabilities manifest across the region and in specific areas.

Working Group Input and Discussion

Below is a summary of comments and edits, by category, that were identified during small group discussions where participants were invited to review and provide input on the list of vulnerabilities, pathways, and associated impacts to inform future development of project portfolios for inclusion in the Tahoe Blueprint.

Water Supply

Participants discussed vulnerabilities related to limited alternative water sources and inadequate infrastructure, both of which constrain system flexibility and resilience. Contributing factors include regulatory barriers, rising costs of managing existing supplies, Prop 218 constraints on infrastructure investment, uneven ability to develop redundancy across purveyors, and limited treatment capacity to meet evolving water quality requirements.

Water Quality

Participants generally agreed with the water quality vulnerabilities identified. Wildfire-related watershed disturbance was viewed as having limited historical water quality impacts in the basin, though participants noted that more research is needed to better understand risks from future fires. Sewer infrastructure located in environmentally sensitive areas, including meadows and along the lakeshore, was identified as a key vulnerability and noted as being closely linked to flooding concerns discussed in the Public Safety section. Participants noted that septic and legacy sewer systems are no longer present in the basin; instead emphasized aging private sewer laterals as an increasing risk of leakage or failure. Participants also noted that stormwater infiltration has introduced runoff contaminants into some groundwater sources.

Public Safety

Participants noted the potential for ice and beaver dams to increase localized flooding and brought up concerns over unintended flooding consequences associated with recent meadow restoration projects. Stormwater infrastructure was described as limited in much of the basin, with individual property owners expected to rely on low-impact development measures to manage runoff. Participants also confirmed that limited access routes into the Basin can restrict the delivery of fuel and power-generation equipment during major storms and other emergencies, creating a real risk to sustaining critical water and wastewater services during extended emergency conditions.

Cross Cutting

Participants validated the importance of addressing insufficient and uneven public awareness and understanding of water system challenges, which limits community buy-in that is needed to support rate discussions for infrastructure improvements and upgrades, particularly given that much of the system is out of sight. A new vulnerability identified is an insufficient operator workforce, driven by retention challenges related to the high cost of living in the region and an aging workforce that is creating staffing gaps and loss of institutional knowledge. This vulnerability was identified as a moderate to high concern.

Workshop Reflections and Next Steps

Participants were invited to share their reflections about the process and workshop discussions. Participated felt that the workshop allowed for a productive and collaborative discussion that helped highlight shared concerns. They valued hearing different perspectives and approaches, which clarified how vulnerabilities are viewed across organizations. Communication with the public emerged as a key theme, particularly around affordability, rate increases, and infrastructure needs. Participants appreciated the initial list of vulnerabilities as a useful starting point and the opportunity to learn from others working on similar issues.

The participants also selected June 25 and September 15 for Workshops 2 and 3.

Next Steps

The project team will incorporate input provided to refine the list of vulnerabilities and proceed with measures development which will be discussed at the next workshop in June. Participants are invited to provide addition input through the project email address: Blueprint Tahoe Team

Workshop Participation

- Brian Grey, Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board
- Hannah Romero, El Dorado Water Agency
- Jake Sahl, El Dorado Water Agency
- Kim Boyd, Tahoe City Public Utility District
- Mark Seelos, South Tahoe Public Utility District
- Matt Ricci, Lukins Brothers Water Company
- Rebecca Guo, El Dorado Water Agency
- Sarah Viedra, Tahoe Water Suppliers Association
- Shelly Thomsen, South Tahoe Public Utility District
- Megan Colvey, South Tahoe Public Utility District

Project Team

- Yung-Hsin Sun, Sunzi Consulting
- Orit Kalman, Facilitation
- Stephanie Ard, Water Systems Consulting
- Tom McCarthy, Santiago Water Strategies

Small group discussion notes

Water Supply

- Vulnerability – Lack of alternative sources of water
    - Additional pathways identified:
        - Regulatory hurdles limit ability to have flexibility for transitioning between surface water and groundwater.
        - The costs of managing and using current water supplies are increasing.
        - Prop 218 limits ability to invest in infrastructure and treatment

        - Ability to promote redundancy by connecting to alternative water supplies is specific to some, not all, purveyors.
        - Lack of treatment capacity to respond to changes in water quality related regulations
    - Suggested level of concern: Moderate High
- New vulnerability to consider: Challenges related to inadequate infrastructure
    - Pathways identified:
        - Insufficient capacity for storage
        - Aquatic invasive species (AIS) affect system capacity
        - Decentralized treatment
        - Physical consolidation is infeasible resulting in lack of operational flexibility to connect water source to water demand
        - Impacts of natural disasters
        - Funding constraints

Water Quality

- Vulnerability – Burned scar from wildfire in watershed
    - Consider splitting applicable area into surface water and groundwater users.
- Vulnerability – Vehicle use for recreation
    - Suggested level of concern: Moderate High
- Vulnerability – Front country and backcountry recreation
    - Suggested level of concern: Low
- Vulnerability – Sewer infrastructure in environmentally sensitive areas
    - Suggested level of concern: Moderate High
- Vulnerability: Septic tanks and legacy isolated sewer systems:
    - Change to - Private sewer laterals.
        - Septic systems are not permittable in Tahoe Basin
        - Septic and legacy sewer systems have been integrated into STPUD or TCPUD systems.
    - Suggested level of concern: Moderate Low
- Vulnerability: Natural occurrence of contamination in groundwater

- Suggested level of concern: Moderate High
    - Participants noted that they have already implemented mitigation actions for treatment, change operational practices, or well decommission.

Public Safety

- Vulnerability – Community located in the riverine floodplain
    - Additional pathways identified:
        - Increased flooding due to ice and beaver dams.
        - Floodplain changes due to meadow restoration projects.
- Vulnerability – Inadequate water infrastructure for structure protection
    - Suggested change to applicable conditions:
        - Change "rural areas to small water systems (note some are in urban setting).
- Vulnerability – Constrained capacity for sustaining health and safety water delivery in extended emergency conditions
    - Suggested level of concern: Moderate Low

Cross Cutting

- Vulnerability – Insufficient and uneven public awareness and understanding
    - Community buy-ins are needed to support rate conversations for improved infrastructure. The system is invisible.
    - Topics for engagement should include cost of infrastructure improvements
- New vulnerability to consider – Insufficient operator workforce
    - Pathways identified:
        - Retention issues due to the high cost of living in the region
        - Aging workforce leaving workforce gaps as well as loss of institutional knowledge.
    - Suggested level of concern: Moderate High