

West Slope Regional Focus of the Winter 2026 Plenary for Water – Summary

March 5, 2026

El Dorado Water Agency (EDWA) convenes the Countywide Plenary for Water (Plenary) at least once per year for the purpose of promoting a shared understanding of and opportunities for collaboration on water resource challenges and issues in El Dorado County and surrounding watersheds through collaborative discussions with representatives from planning departments, cities, water purveyors, and local organizations. On Thursday March 5, 2026, EDWA convened a special Regional Focus of the Plenary around the theme **“Pathways to Resilience: Managing Water for the West Slope.”** Approximately 20 representatives from local and regional water suppliers, utilities, land use agencies, and community interests attended the Plenary, held in Shingle Springs. This gathering was subsequently reported in EDWA’s [Press Release](#) and the [Mountain Democrat](#).

WELCOME, TABLETOP ACTIVITY, AND PRE-PLENARY SURVEY RESULTS

Rebecca Guo, General Manager of EDWA, welcomed attendees and shared the goal for the West Slope Regional Focus of the Plenary to gather input from stakeholders on the development of EDWA’s long-term roadmap for water resources management in the region. Ms. Guo provided an overview of EDWA’s role and responsibilities as a countywide integrated water resource management agency. She highlighted that EDWA’s 2026-2030 Strategic Plan calls to develop a long-term West Slope Water Blueprint (Blueprint West Slope) which will include an implementation roadmap covering water supply development, drought resilience, regional water storage and conveyance, stormwater management, and other water security-related issues. This gathering provided a space for dialogue to enhance mutual understanding of shared challenges in the West Slope and gather input to inform the Blueprint West Slope development process.

Following the opening remarks, Plenary participants were invited to introduce themselves at their tables and share what they enjoy most about living and working in the West Slope. **Marisa Perez-Reyes**, Facilitator at Stantec, presented a summary of takeaways from the pre-Plenary online survey that prompted attendees to assign a numerical value to their level of concern for El Dorado County’s future as it relates to 13 challenge areas. Top areas of concern included:

- **Increasing regulations and unfunded mandates**
- Lack of **sustainable funding** for long-term improvements
- Challenges in maintaining **affordability** of water for health and human safety
- Limited support and advocacy for long-term sustainable **planning ahead of emergencies**
- Need for a **cohesive, multi-benefit economic development strategy**

PANEL PERSPECTIVES: West Slope’s Long-Term Economic Development

Emily Finnegan, Facilitator at Stantec, introduced the panelists and prompted them to provide background on their agency/ organization/ community’s perspective on the future of economic development for the West Slope.

Derek Delfino, Vineyard and Orchard Manager at Delfino Farms, emphasized the role of agritourism in the county's economy and offered suggestions for boosting its contributions, including enticing day-travelers to stay overnight and helping to shift the perception of agriculture as a seasonal business to a business that can attract visitors year-round.



Bryce Miller, Senior Planner and Executive Director of Business of Marshall Hospital and Strategic Economic Enhancement Development (SEED) Committee Member, spoke about creating a dynamic healthcare system that covers all types of insured individuals to create a diverse patient mix that supports the health and wellbeing of the county's residents.

Karen Garner, Director of El Dorado County Planning and Building Department, highlighted how her department is uniquely positioned to serve a connecting role between different sectors of the county's economy, and the importance of establishing development guardrails to prevent any undesirable effects of tourism, which has happened in other recreation-focused economies.

Lauren Hernandez, Cofounder of El Dorado Economic Generator & Germination (Our EGG), discussed OurEGG's vision for the land to sustain its residents' livelihoods and how their organization's community engagement approach shapes their initiatives.

Ms. Finnegan also prompted the panelists to share what they consider to be the **key characteristics of sustainable growth** for the West Slope. Key characteristics centered around enhancing **connectivity across industries** (e.g., establishing **complementary goals**, providing **venues for information sharing**, bringing all voices to the table) and planning for growth (including providing early **career opportunities**, emphasizing **quality of place**, promoting a **circular economy**, and protecting the county's well-known assets).



Following the Panel, Plenary participants met in **independent tabletop discussion** to reflect on the perspectives represented in the panel and consider which of the water-resource related concerns from the pre-

Plenary survey they consider to be the most urgent to address, in light of the sustainable growth characteristics identified by the panel. The small groups also discussed how their own agency/ organization / community's work fits into the West Slope's future economic development.

Several groups highlighted takeaways from their tabletop discussions, including the possibility of bringing back industries that used to be active in El Dorado County (such as lumber processing and nurseries); the nexus between enhancing recreational opportunities and corresponding improvements in transportation and access infrastructure such as along Highway 50; the need for sustainable funding for infrastructure improvements; and the observation that while water availability and affordability are essential for economic activity, those responsible for accommodating that demand are not the ones driving development decisions and there is a need for improved long-term coordinated planning.

CASE STUDY: Mammoth Lakes Sustainable Recreation Program

John Wentworth, CEO of Mammoth Lake Trails & Public Access Foundation (MLTPA), presented about how the Mammoth Lakes community prioritizes ecosystems services and sustainable outdoor recreation in their economy, through the Eastern Sierra Sustainable Recreation Partnership, which coordinates closely with local cities, towns, counties, State, and federal agencies and land managers and recreation representatives. This partnership used grants to conduct robust engagement with the public to develop a ground-up set of priorities for investing in recreation activities enjoyed by the region's approximately 7 million visitors per year.

Dillon Osleger, Natural Resources & GIS Manager at MLTPA, added considerations for enhancing connectivity between communities, valuing watershed assets, and working with locals and U.S. Forest Service (USFS) to identify abandoned assets, such as fire roads, that could be leveraged. He concluded with thoughts on how lessons learned from Mammoth Lakes and the Eastern Sierra can help inform El Dorado County's efforts to prioritize a sustainable outdoor recreation-focused economy.

BREAKOUT GROUP DISCUSSION: How Water Purveyors, Planners, and Communities Experience Water-Resource Related Challenges in the West Slope

Plenary participants joined one of three breakout groups based on which perspective best represented their affiliation: (1) community (business, economic, and agricultural interests), (2) planners (County of El Dorado and land use authorities), or (3) water providers and utilities (urban water purveyors, small water systems, and utilities). Each group was prompted to discuss how their community/ organization/ agency experiences the water-resource related challenges or vulnerabilities identified in the 2024 Water Resources Development and Management Plan for the West Slope, for the categories of water supply, public safety (localized flooding), and water quality. After the breakout group discussions, the facilitator from each group highlighted key takeaways for each topical area.

- **Water Supply** Key Takeaways: (1) the condition of existing infrastructure is highly variable, with geography driving unequal conditions; (2) new development should be prioritized in areas where water supply and infrastructure are already available, while acknowledging that new conveyance and supplies may be needed to take advantage of growth opportunities around working landscapes; (3) further coordination between businesses, suppliers, the County of El Dorado, and real estate developers/agents can help clarify expectations for new property owners around well permitting requirements and associated development opportunities; and (4) there is a balance to strike between maintaining the county’s rural character and growing the rate base enough to spread costs and maintain/improve affordability.
- **Water Quality** Key Takeaways: (1) aging infrastructure, including domestic wells on private property, can result in reduced water quality; (2) shifting weather patterns, including increasing temperatures exacerbating algal blooms, and wildfires affect surface water quality; and (3) there is a lack of funding for small systems that are starting to fail (typically, State funds are only available after a system has reached “failing” status).
- **Public Safety (Flooding)** Key Takeaways: (1) risks posed from flooding after fires, landslides, and precipitation variability are highly localized, which means it can be difficult to develop regional solutions; (2) most flood-related maintenance activities fall to the County in unincorporated areas where many of the flooding issues occur; (3) existing stormwater infrastructure is outdated and not suited to the modern setting; and (4) there may be opportunities for implementing small-scale stormwater capture systems, given the lack of centralized drainage systems.



PREPARING FOR THE BLUEPRINT WEST SLOPE: Approaches to Addressing Water-Resource Challenges While Supporting a Sustainable Economy

Lastly, Plenary participants were prompted to switch seats to comingle community representatives, water providers and utilities, and planners. In these final groups, participants were encouraged to generate ideas for what should be considered as part of the Blueprint West Slope development process. Key considerations included:

- The importance of coordination and strategic planning to leverage shared resources and knowledge to maximize planning strategies and advocate for foothill communities in State and federal policy
- Engaging community perspectives to inform the General Plan and enhancing education/ awareness around current conditions and challenges
- Considering redevelopment opportunities, including reviewing the County of El Dorado's ordinance that limits infill development
- Support for small water systems struggling to develop long-term, sustainable solutions for operation
- Support discussions around possible local funding mechanisms to meet water and economic development goals.



Lastly, breakout groups shared additional resources that should be considered for the West Slope Water Blueprint, such as the County of El Dorado's Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan, the Parks and Trails Master Plan, County Department of Transportation's trail updates, Our EGG's working lands economic master plan (in progress), and the anticipated County General Plan Update effort.

CLOSING REMARKS

Hannah Romero, Water Resources Principal at EDWA, concluded the Regional Focus of the Countywide Plenary by thanking attendees for their participation and how this information will be used to scope the Blueprint West Slope in the coming months.