



**Agenda Item C.2**  
**DISCUSSION/ACTION ITEM**  
**Meeting Date: January 20, 2026**

**TO:** Mayor and Councilmembers

**SUBMITTED BY:** Robert Nisbet, City Manager

**SUBJECT:** Goleta West Sanitary District Sewer Spill and the Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board Proposed Settlement Agreement

**RECOMMENDATION:**

Receive a presentation from staff on the Goleta West Sanitary District sewer spill at Goleta Beach on February 16 and 17, 2024 and the Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board Proposed Settlement Agreement.

**BACKGROUND:**

On February 16 and 17, 2024 the Goleta West Sanitary District (GWSD) violated federal and state law when it discharged over 1,000,000 gallons of untreated wastewater (commonly known as sewage) from a broken 24-inch force main to an un-named tributary to Tecolotito Creek, the Goleta Slough State Marine Conservation Area and its estuary and the Pacific Ocean off Goleta Beach. Goleta Beach was closed for 23 days due to the spill.

On October 16, 2025, the Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board (Water Quality Control Board) proposed a settlement of this infraction by posting a public notice of Proposed Settlement Agreement and Stipulation for Entry of Administrative Civil Liability Order R3-2025-0074 for Discharge of Untreated Wastewater from Goleta West Sanitary District Sanitary Sewer System. A copy of that public notice can be found in Attachment 1 and a link in the notice leads to the 60-page draft Settlement Agreement.

On November 17, 2025, Supervisor Laura Capps, Mayor Perotte, and then Councilmember (now Mayor Pro Tempore) Smith sent a letter to the Water Quality Control Board voicing their opposition to the Settlement Agreement. This letter was shared with City Council at the November 18, 2025, regular Council meeting (see Attachment 2).

The Water Quality Control Board will hold a regular meeting on February 26 and 27, 2026 in San Luis Obispo and will consider the draft Settlement Agreement. The Water Quality Control Board will take public comments during this meeting.

**DISCUSSION:**

The purpose of this item is for the Council to discuss the Goleta West sewer spill, the Water Quality Control Board's proposed Settlement Agreement for that spill, the letter sent by Supervisor Capps, Mayor Perotte, and Councilmember Smith and decide what further, if any, action to take. The Council could decide whether the Mayor, and/or other councilmembers should speak at the upcoming Water Quality Control Board meeting in alignment with the letter that was sent. By Council policy, the Council could agree with the message to be delivered to the Water Quality Control Board and thus, any Councilmember who speaks could acknowledge that they are speaking on behalf of Council. On the other hand, if there is not agreement among Councilmembers on what message to deliver to the Water Quality Control Board, individual Councilmembers could speak on behalf of themselves.

**FISCAL IMPACTS:**

There are no new budget appropriations or funding commitments that are associated with this item. Depending on the Council's discussion and agreement, there could be some potential travel costs if a member of the Council attended the Water Quality Control Board's meeting in person in San Luis Obispo, and any such costs would be absorbed in the existing City Council Conferences, Meeting, and Travel budget (1100).

**LEGAL REVIEW BY:** Isaac Rosen, City Attorney

**APPROVED BY:** Robert Nisbet, City Manager

**ATTACHMENTS:**

1. October 16, 2025, public notice of proposed action by Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board. (Document includes link to proposed Settlement Agreement)
2. Letter sent to the Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board on November 17, 2025, voicing opposition to the Board's proposed Settlement Agreement

## **ATTACHMENT 1**

October 16, 2025, public notice of proposed action by Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board. (Document includes link to proposed Settlement Agreement)

**From:** [Anderson, Tamara@Waterboards](mailto:Anderson_Tamara@Waterboards)  
**To:** [Anderson, Tamara@Waterboards](mailto:Anderson_Tamara@Waterboards)  
**Subject:** Public Notice for Opportunity to Comment on Central Coast Water Board Proposed Settlement with Goleta West Sanitary District  
**Date:** Thursday, October 16, 2025 2:02:37 PM

---

Interested Parties –

**A public notice has been posted on the Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board's [Enforcement Program website](#) regarding the Proposed Settlement Agreement and Stipulation for Entry of Administrative Civil Liability Order R3-2025-0074 for Discharge of Untreated Wastewater from Goleta West Sanitary District Sanitary Sewer System.**

Santa Barbara County – The Central Coast Water Board Assistant Executive Officer and the Goleta West Sanitary District (GWSD) have agreed to settle the alleged violation of the State Water Resources Control Board's (State Water Board) Statewide General Waste Discharge Requirements for Sanitary Sewer Systems, Order 2022-0103-DWQ (Statewide General Order), California Water Code section 13376, and Federal Clean Water Act section 301 for \$1,551,145 in administrative civil liability. The proposed Settlement Agreement and Stipulation for Entry of Administrative Civil Liability Order R3-2025-0074 (proposed Order) is hereby published on October 16, 2025, for public comment through November 17, 2025. The proposed Order alleges that GWSD violated federal and state law when it discharged at least 1,071,696 gallons of untreated wastewater (commonly known as sewage) from a broken 24-inch force main to an un-named tributary to Tecolotito Creek, the Goleta Slough State Marine Conservation Area and its estuary and the Pacific Ocean on February 16, 2024. The proposed Order allows GWSD to pay \$1,551,145 of the total liability towards the completion of a supplemental environmental project (SEP) which provides 1) well sampling for local and state small water systems and domestic drinking water wells in Santa Barbara County and 2) for wells exceeding safe drinking water standards, provides replacement drinking water for households and/or the construction and maintenance of Point of Entry (POE) or Point of Use (POU) treatment systems, with a priority focus on providing access to safe drinking water for Underrepresented Communities. If comments or information received during this public comment period do not significantly affect the proposed settlement, the Assistant Executive Officer plans to present the proposed Order to the Central Coast Water Board, or its delegatee, for adoption as an order by settlement at its regularly scheduled meeting in December 2025 or February 2026. The public may submit written comments to: Central Coast Water Board, Attn: Tamara Anderson, 895 Aerovista Place, Suite 101, San Luis Obispo, CA 93401, or may email comments to [Tamara.Anderson@waterboards.ca.gov](mailto:Tamara.Anderson@waterboards.ca.gov).

[Proposed Settlement Agreement and Stipulation for Entry of Administrative Civil Liability Order R3-2025-0074](#)

Public Comments Due November 17, 2025

## **ATTACHMENT 2**

Letter sent to the Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board on November 17, 2025, voicing opposition to the Board's proposed Settlement Agreement



## COUNTY OF SANTA BARBARA

November 17, 2025

Tamara Anderson Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board  
895 Aerovista Place, Suite 101  
San Luis Obispo, CA 93401  
Email: Tamara.Anderson@waterboards.ca.gov

Re: Comments on Proposed Settlement Agreement and Administrative Civil Liability Order R3-2025-0074  
– Goleta West Sanitary District Sewer Spill

Dear Ms. Anderson,

We submit the following comments regarding the proposed Settlement Agreement and Stipulation for Entry of Administrative Civil Liability Order R3-2025-0074 between the Central Coast Water Board and the Goleta West Sanitary District (GWSD). In our view, the agreement does not go far enough to address the devastation caused by the massive spill and the clear shortcomings in management by the District.

The February 2024 sewage spill, which discharged more than one million gallons of untreated wastewater into Tecolotito Creek, the Goleta Slough, and adjacent coastal waters, had a profound impact on the beaches of Goleta and Santa Barbara – negatively affecting untold thousands of community members who rely on these areas daily. This incident closed a cherished public recreation area, disrupted coastal ecosystems, and caused understandable public concern about the adequacy of local wastewater infrastructure and emergency notification procedures. The fact that the notification system did not work only added insult to injury, causing justifiable community alarm and doubts about the management of the District.

In Attachment A to the proposed Settlement Agreement between the Board and the District, the State Water Board's Enforcement Policy methodology is followed step-by-step and determines that this spill scores a 9 out of 10 in terms of severity and harm to the public and environment. But, in the 2nd step of the methodology, the Prosecution Team determines arbitrarily that the Water Board should only apply a \$2.00 per gallon fine, rather than the maximum \$10.00 per gallon fine (see page 9 of Attachment A).

However, the Board's Enforcement Policy clearly states:

***“In most cases, the Water Boards shall apply the above per gallon factor to the maximum per gallon amounts allowed under the Water Code for the violations involved. However, recognizing that the volume of certain discharges can be very high, the Water Boards may elect to use a value between \$2.00 per gallon and \$10.00 per gallon...”*** (emphasis added)

The Section goes on to provide examples of the types of spills that would allow the Board to consider a per gallon amount less than \$10.00:

***“Examples of discharges that could be subject to a reduction include, but are not limited to, wet weather sewage spills, partially-treated sewage spills, discharges from irrigated agricultural operations, potable water discharges, and construction or municipal stormwater discharges.”***

This spill is not one of the examples cited above. This spill was over 1,000,000 gallons of raw sewage that did incalculable damage to the environment, public health, and a loss to coastal recreation for 23 days—

hence the score of 9 out of 10.

Finally, from the same section of the Enforcement Policy, it states:

*"The Water Boards should be thoughtful when reducing the per gallon liability in order to avoid rewarding or incentivizing the failure to mitigate the number of gallons discharged and to further consistency in enforcement."*

Using the appropriate \$10.00 per gallon fine, the correct assessment should be 5 times the amount in the Settlement, or **\$7,755,725**.

We recognize and appreciate that the proposed Supplemental Environmental Project (SEP) aims to expand access to safe drinking water for underrepresented communities in Santa Barbara County—a goal we strongly support and would hope happens without the force of settlement agreement. Given that the spill's impacts were concentrated at Goleta Beach and the Goleta Slough, we respectfully urge the Regional Board to ensure that any settlement maintains a reasonable nexus between the violation and the resulting community harm.

Specifically, we recommend that the SEP addressing countywide drinking water access be in addition to other community benefit or financial mitigation actions directly tied to the spill area. The Goleta Beach corridor and adjacent environment remain vital ecological, economic, and recreational resources for our region. Restoration, monitoring, or public access improvements in that vicinity would more appropriately respond to the localized harm caused by this discharge event.

Additionally, we wish to emphasize the critical importance of upholding the public trust through transparent governance and rigorous accountability. Incidents such as the February 2024 spill—and the delays and discrepancies in public notification—underscore the need for the Goleta West Sanitary District to fully embrace its responsibility for open communication and responsive management, not just during emergencies but in all aspects of district operations. The entire incident has raised many questions about the management of the District, especially given the close proximity of a neighboring sanitary district.

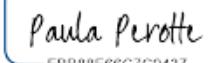
Robust, transparent engagement with affected constituents and commitment to timely, accurate disclosure are essential to restoring trust and ensuring that future decisions protect both public health and the local environment. To that end, the Board should require the District to immediately develop and adopt a comprehensive Action Plan for public notification and response should another sewer spill occur. Additionally, to guarantee real accountability, the Action Plan must specify that meaningful financial penalties will be imposed if notification protocols and response measures are not strictly followed.

Thank you for considering these comments and for your ongoing efforts to protect our coastal and community health. We look forward to continued partnership to ensure strong accountability and meaningful recovery following this significant spill of more than a million gallons.

Sincerely,



Second District Supervisor, Chair  
Santa Barbara County

DocuSigned by:  
  
FBB88E66C7C0437...

Paula Perotte, Goleta Mayor

Signed by:  
  
0712A47EF24642B...

Jennifer Smith  
Goleta City Councilmember