

From: [Thomas Rindfleisch](#)
To: [Clerk of the Board](#); [Jim Beall](#); [John Varela](#); [Nai Hsueh](#); [Rebecca Eisenberg](#); [Richard Santos](#); [Shiloh Ballard](#); [Tony Estremera](#)
Cc: [Drew Combs](#); [Greer Stone](#); [Lisa Gauthier](#); [Nai Hsueh](#); [Cecilia Taylor](#); [Kaia Eakin](#); [Keith Reckdahl](#); [Richard Santos](#); [Ruben Abrica](#); [Margaret Bruce](#); [Melanie Richardson](#); [Ed Shikada](#)
Subject: Comments Against the Proposed Modification of Project E5 Key Performance Indicators
Date: Saturday, July 11, 2026 4:29:47 PM
Attachments: [TCR Input to SCVWD Board Public Comment re E5 KPI Change.260714.pdf](#)

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Dear Santa Clara Valley Water District Board Members, Please find attached my comment letter on the above-referenced subject for your consideration as part of your July 14 meeting on proposed updates to the E5 San Francisquito Creek Safe, Clean Water Program project.

Respectfully, Tom Rindfleisch

Thomas Rindfleisch
Sr Research Scientist, Emeritus
Stanford University

July 11, 2026

Re: Comments Regarding Proposed Modification of Project E5 Key Performance Indicators
— San Francisquito Creek Reach 2 — July 14, 2026 Public Hearing

Dear Chair Estremera and Members of the Valley Water Board.

I am Tom Rindfleisch and I live in the San Francisquito Creek flood zone in northern Palo Alto. I am writing on behalf of the Creek Neighborhood Group, a set of residents with technical backgrounds and two Stanford Civil Engineering faculty members, as well as of the Crescent Park Neighborhood Association, representing over 1,000 resident email addresses.

Crescent Park has been the hardest hit by San Francisquito Creek flooding caused by the Pope-Chaucer bridge. East Palo Alto was also hit hard before Reach 1 was completed. 1,500 homes were badly damaged in the 1998 flood. Now we are facing another rain season with a projected extreme El Niño event, perhaps even stronger than the one of 1997/1998 that brought that flood of record.

Crescent Park and Palo Alto supported Measures B and S since 2012, with over 70% “yes” votes, to fund Valley Water to help protect San Francisquito Creek communities from floods. We expected to benefit from Valley Water’s deep technical and project management expertise. That expertise was demonstrated on Reach 1, which was completed in 2019 on time and met its Key Performance Indicators.

We are therefore alarmed that Valley Water is moving toward a passive funding role on Reach 2, leaving direct responsibility for project delivery to the JPA. The community does not understand how the working relationship that succeeded so well on Reach 1 has seemingly broken down so completely on Reach 2. The San Francisquito Creek Joint Powers Authority Board comprises five independent agencies with little civil engineering experience at the Board level. It has struggled to conceive and manage a coherent Reach 2 project. Valley Water’s technical and project management expertise is needed now more than ever.

As background, I want to comment on the VW San Francisquito Creek Timeline chart prepared for this meeting. In its brief list of events between New Year’s Eve 2022 and the status as of 2024, it left out the fact that prior to the NYE flood in December 2022, Valley Water was taking the lead and homing in on a 90% design for Reach 2. It involved four elements: pinch point/obstruction widening, bank stabilization, flood walls, and bridge replacements, and looked very promising. After the NYE flood, VW staff noticed that there was evidence of overflows (water height marks the day after) that could not be explained by the then current (USACE/Noble) HEC-RAS creek model. Further analysis that spring led VW to conclude that a revised HEC-RAS model consistent with the new creek flow observations meant that the ongoing Reach 2 design could no longer work and it would be impossible to replace the Pope-Chaucer bridge and maintain 7,200 cfs protection downstream (a conclusion presented at a special meeting of the SFCJPA Board on June 8, 2023).

This was stunning information with the apparent result that the north Palo Alto Crescent Park and Duveneck/St. Francis neighborhoods would continue unprotected as “sacrificial” communities, i.e., with no improved flood protection.

The logical reaction of the SFCJPA to this position by Valley Water was to examine this result further. The JPA stepped back and sought a second opinion on recalibrating the HEC-RAS model with the best fit USGS data for the actual flow level, on analyzing how the new model of the creek worked in detail, and on determining how the Reach 2 design might be updated to contain the 7,200 cfs flow goal, including replacement of the Pope-Chaucer bridge. Initiating these studies led to the JPA taking on a role parallel to that of VW to solicit opinions from Schaaf & Wheeler Consulting Civil Engineers to validate the HEC-RAS model, and a study by WRA Environmental Consultants of a set of Reach 2 alternatives that would contain a 7,200 cfs flow. These follow-on studies showed that VW was correct in its update of the San Francisquito Creek HEC-RAS model but that there were several alternative interventions in Reach 2 that could contain flows up to 7,200 cfs and replace the Pope-Chaucer bridge so that all residents affected by Reach 2 flooding would be protected. We understand that after many more months of studying and refining the Reach 2 alternatives, technical personnel in the

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principal JPA agencies, including VW, are now satisfied that there can be a preferred alternative that would protect all residents along Reach 2. Further studies are needed but it is essential that all of the technical and managerial resources in the JPA community cooperate to flesh these ideas out.

It is easy for an outside observer to surmise that this bifurcation of the leadership roles for the SFC Reach 2 project studies in 2023 led VW to reconsider and pull back from its own previous leadership role in the project. To many Palo Alto residents this appears to be a most unfortunate step on the part of VW that may seriously impede the promised solution to the SFC flooding threat.

We have come to understand that VW's internal management and administrative procedures are separate from the technical support VW could continue to make available to the Reach 2 project, including the possibility of being chosen to lead and manage the execution of whatever alternative for Reach 2 flood protection may be chosen. There remains the further question about how the implementation of such a plan could be funded. Obtaining funding will likely be possible only if there is the most professional and experienced project leadership in place and with a consensus that the proposed Reach 2 solution is credible and that its execution will be well-managed by the most experienced agency in the JPA, i.e., Valley Water.

We strongly urge Valley Water to reconsider the step they are proposing today. Specifically, we ask that Valley Water maintain Reach 2 as a full Capital Improvement Project, retain its outcome-based KPI commitment to 70-year flood protection, and re-engage as a joint leading and active technical partner with the JPA in project delivery. As a constructive first step, we suggest that Valley Water designate a working group to meet with a reciprocal JPA Board group to reestablish a productive joint leadership — and finally deliver the Reach 2 conveyance improvements that creek communities were promised.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

Thomas Rindfleisch
Sr Research Scientist, Emeritus
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cc: Greer Stone, Chairperson, SFCJPA Board
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Melanie Richardson, Interim CEO, Valley Water
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