



A fire engine crew battles a structure fire during the Palisades Fire as it burned through Las Virgenes Municipal Water District's service area.

Photo courtesy of LVMWD

ACWA Conducts Outreach, Education on Southern California Fires

Shortly after the devastating wildfires began burning in Southern California, ACWA began outreach to key state legislative committees and elected officials to establish ACWA as a point of contact and resource about the role of public water systems function.

ACWA anticipates a multitude of bills will be introduced in the state Legislature related to the wildfires and will closely monitor and analyze them.

As part of this outreach, ACWA staff has developed a fact sheet intended for legislators. In addition, ACWA is reaching out to partner organizations to coordinate efforts to assist member agencies.

This outreach builds on the creation of resources for members immediately following the explosive wildfires, such as a dedicated webpage with legislative updates, links to the governor's Executive Orders, funding opportunities, communication resource examples and other helpful links. The page can be viewed at www.acwa.com/wildfire-resources and will be updated as necessary. Member login is required.

Of the four fires – Palisades, Eaton, Hughes, and Border 2 – there are no reported damages to ACWA JPIA assets, according to ACWA JPIA, which provides ACWA members

FIRES continued on page 4

ACWA Launches Strategic Plan to Enhance Water Policy Leadership

After nearly a year of collaborative effort, ACWA's Board of Directors has approved a new strategic plan aimed at strengthening the association's influence in California water policy. Adopted in September 2024 and with the implementation plan approved in January, it includes 50 key performance indicators tied to four primary goals: advocacy, connections, education and organizational effectiveness.

This comprehensive plan was crafted by a task force representing all 10 of ACWA's regions, ensuring diverse perspectives from across California's varied water landscape. The strategic plan is designed to make ACWA more effective in shaping water policies that reflect the needs and priorities of its approximately 470 member agencies, particularly as the state faces increasing water management challenges.

A significant part of the plan includes the formation of a new 10-region task force, led by ACWA Vice President Ernie Avila and Region 9 Vice Chair Carol Lee Gonzales-Brady, that will evaluate how ACWA develops and approves water policy initiatives and their implementation to meet its advocacy goals. This task force will play a



STRATEGIC PLAN continued on page 3

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Water Rights Issue Returns to Legislature

ACWA is tracking and advocating on a growing number of bills, including two water rights bills nearly identical to legislation from last year in which ACWA had significant concerns.

AB 263 (Rogers, D-Healdsburg) would keep in place emergency regulations adopted by the State Water Resources Control Board for the Scott River and Shasta River watersheds until permanent rules implementing long-term instream flow requirements are adopted. ACWA has an oppose position on the bill because it would set precedent for extending emergency regulations in place of following established processes for emergency regulations in times of drought.

The second bill, AB 362 (Ramos, D-Highland) would define “tribal water uses,” designate them as a beneficial use of water and allow tribal water uses to be a primary factor in determining the highest water quality that is reasonable in all regulatory decisions. ACWA would like to work with the author and bill proponents to maintain water reliability for ACWA members and has adopted an oppose-unless-amended position.

Water Supply

In 2023, Sen. Anna Caballero (D-Merced) introduced SB 366, co-sponsored by the California Municipal Utilities Association, California State Association of Counties and California Council for Environmental and Economic Balance, to revise the California Water Plan process and require the Department of Water Resources to develop long-term water supply targets. ACWA adopted a support

position on the bill and provided written and oral support for the bill throughout the process; however, the bill was ultimately vetoed by Gov. Gavin Newsom due to fiscal concerns.

Caballero re-introduced the provisions of SB 366 in January as SB 72 with the same co-sponsors. ACWA’s State Legislative Committee has adopted a support-and-amend position, and staff will continue to advocate for the bill to the Legislature and Newsom Administration.

Southern California Fires

ACWA staff are also continuing outreach related to the catastrophic wildfires in the Los Angeles area in January. This includes reaching out to key state legislative committees and legislators whose districts have been affected or have districts near the affected areas. More details are covered in a page one article about the fires.

First Deadline Approaches

State legislators have until Feb. 21 to introduce bills, marking the first major deadline of the 2025-’26 session. While some bills have already been introduced, hundreds more are expected to be introduced over the final days leading up to the deadline. Many of those bills will be spot bills, which are placeholders that can be amended into full bills later in the year.

Legislative leaders announced in December that they would reduce the number of bills that Assembly and Senate members could introduce during each two-year session from 50 to 35 in the Assembly and from 40 to 35 in the Senate. ♦

AWARDS

SPRING 2025



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Newsom Executive Order Eases Stormwater Capture and Storage

Gov. Gavin Newsom on Jan. 31 issued an Executive Order that made it easier to divert and store excess water from the latest round of winter storms. The Executive Order was similar to ones issued by Newsom in 2022 and 2023 that facilitated the diversion of stormwater to use in recharging groundwater supplies.

Newsom signed the latest Executive Order (N-16-25) following a briefing on forecasts of atmospheric river storms

that hit Northern California in early February. It directed the Department of Water Resources and other state agencies to take action to maximize diversion of excess flows to boost the state's water storage in Northern California, including storage in San Luis Reservoir south of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta.

"ACWA applauds the governor for his swift action to empower California water managers to blunt the destructive impact

of flooding while quickly diverting excess water to recharge groundwater supplies," stated ACWA President Cathy Green in a Jan. 31 news release from the association. "This Executive Order highlights the critical need for modernizing our water infrastructure along with our permitting process to better reflect the state's ability to remain flexible in the face of climate change." ♦

Bipartisan Bill Aims to Create Atmospheric River Forecasting Program

U.S. Senators Alex Padilla (D-CA) and Lisa Murkowski (R-AL) on Feb. 4 announced bipartisan legislation that aims to reduce flood risks and bolster emergency preparedness by improving atmospheric river forecasting. The bill, supported by ACWA, would require the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to establish a forecast improvement program within the National Weather Service.

In addition to ACWA, the bill is endorsed by a number of member agencies, including Contra Costa Water District, Irvine Ranch Water District, Kings River Conservation District, Orange County Water District, San Bernardino Valley Municipal Water District, San Diego County Water Authority, Santa Clarita Valley Water Agency, San Francisco Public Utilities Commission, Solano County Water Agency, Sonoma Water, Valley Water and Yuba Water.

Atmospheric rivers can carry water vapor equivalent to multiple Mississippi Rivers — cause more than 80% of flood damage across the West. Climate change will only make these storms increasingly catastrophic: by 2090, atmospheric rivers are expected to cost \$2.3 to \$3.2 billion in annual damages and increase in width by nearly 25%.

"For the past several years, California communities have witnessed firsthand the ongoing threat of destructive flooding caused by increasingly intense and frequent atmospheric river storms," stated Senator Padilla in a news release. "California has led the way in improving our understanding of these storms, and this bipartisan bill will strengthen forecasts to reduce flood risks while bolstering our water supply and drought resilience."

Specifically, the bill proposes to direct NOAA to establish a standalone atmospheric river forecast improvement program that would:



Photo courtesy of the Scripps Institution of Oceanography, University of California San Diego.

- Develop accurate, effective, and actionable storm forecasts and warnings in collaboration with public and private partners across the weather forecasting sectors;
- Evaluate innovative observation tools and emerging technologies to improve atmospheric river analysis, modeling, forecasts, and warnings;
- Authorize NOAA to procure equipment, aircraft, and personnel contracts to fully monitor atmospheric river events each winter; and
- Improve atmospheric river hazard communication. ♦

STRATEGIC PLAN continued from page 1

critical role in refining the association's policy processes, ensuring that advocacy efforts are both efficient and reflective of the collective interests of its members.

The plan also places a strong emphasis on networking and education, fostering stronger connections and knowledge-sharing among member agencies. By

investing in these areas, ACWA aims to create a more unified and informed membership base. Additionally, the focus on organizational effectiveness will ensure that ACWA remains agile and responsive to its members' evolving needs.

With this strategic plan, ACWA is poised to lead with greater clarity and impact,

providing its members with the tools and support needed to navigate California's complex water issues. Members can expect more streamlined advocacy efforts, increased collaboration opportunities and a stronger voice in state and federal water policy discussions. ♦



Photo courtesy of LVMWD

FIRES continued from page 1

with insurance coverages and risk management resources.

“Unfortunately, multiple JPIA member agencies have reported that some employees living in the fire areas have lost their homes. Our thoughts are with everyone affected by the fires,” said ACWA JPIA CEO Adrienne Beatty.

ACWA responses to the wildfires have included a news release with a statement from association President Cathy Green that accompanied an outline of key facts around water agency involvement in firefighting, along with ACWA’s previous and ongoing work connected to forest health and wildfire mitigation.

Drawing statements from multiple member agencies, ACWA’s news release emphasized that water supply did not hinder firefighting efforts and that reservoirs in California are at or above average storage levels for this time of year,

thanks in part to years of proactive water management — a point incorporated into a Jan. 27 news release from the office of Gov. Gavin Newsom that sought to correct misinformation about the fires.

Supply vs. Demand

“A lie can travel halfway around the world while the truth is putting on its shoes,” Mark Twain once observed. In Los Angeles, misinformation about why fire hydrants ran dry spread almost as fast as the flames. But regional water supply was not the issue. It was the immense scale of the catastrophe as the Santa Ana winds turned fires into miles-wide blowtorches that incinerated entire neighborhoods, straining urban water systems far beyond their intended design.

ACWA and member agencies used multiple communication efforts, locally and statewide, seeking to correct misinformation. A key point

was emphasizing the vast difference between fighting one or three structure fires at a time as opposed to hundreds simultaneously, relying on fire hydrants connected to a single water system, resulting in significant drops in water pressure and flow.

The Palisades Fire destroyed 108 homes within the Las Virgenes Municipal Water District’s service area, according to Mike McNutt, the district’s Public Affairs and Communications Manager, who pointed out another major factor.

“What people don’t talk about is when a structure burns down, water continues to flow through the meter unabated. That means that the system is hemorrhaging water, and you can’t stop the hemorrhaging until it’s safe to access what’s left of the structure,” McNutt said. “This adds additional stress to an already overwhelmed water system.”



The site of a daily briefing that included water agency representatives among first responders.

Photo courtesy of CVWD

Mutual Aid

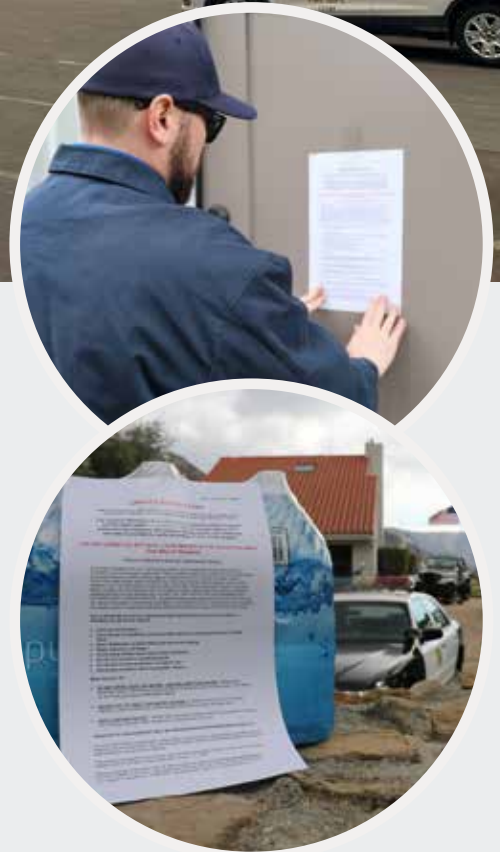
Mutual aid between water agencies and coordinated through organizations such as the Public Water Agencies Group Emergency Preparedness Partnership played a critical role in supporting agencies' operations during the fires. For example, the Walnut Valley Water District (WVWD) supported neighboring Los Angeles area water agencies with mobile generators, operational support, fuel deliveries and N95 masks.

"As part of our mission to ensure reliable water services, we're proud to collaborate with our neighbors during emergencies," stated WVWD General Manager Sheryl Shaw in a news release. "The Eaton Fire demonstrated the importance of mutual aid and the strength of regional partnerships in ensuring communities have access to safe and reliable water."

Crescenta Valley Water District (CVWD) survived the Eaton Fire unscathed but helped the firefighting effort by contributing two recently purchased mobile HeloPods to the Los Angeles County Fire Department as helicopter dip sites. The district also extended mutual aid to neighboring water districts, ranging from delivering lunches to employees to supplying mobile generators and dispatching water operators to help shut down lateral lines to residences, said CVWD General Manager James Lee.

Water agencies were also invited to participate in daily briefings among emergency responders at the Rose Bowl.

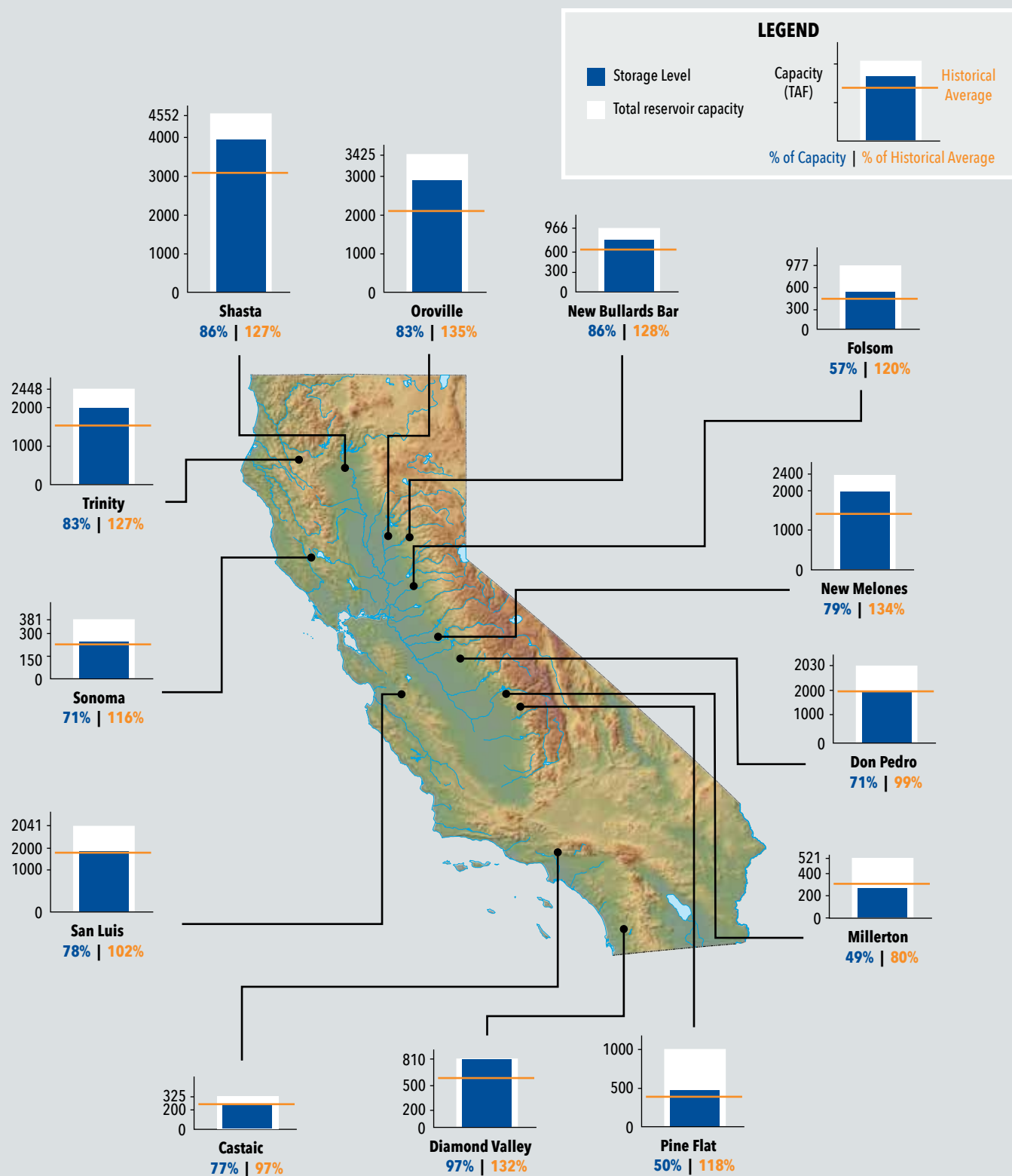
"That was a bright spot in the situation, and it was good to see water agencies acknowledged as first responders," Lee said. ♦



LVMWD workers posted notices not to use or drink tap water as a precaution after the fires. They were lifted after the district confirmed tap water was safe.

Photos courtesy of LVMWD

Major California Reservoir Levels as of Feb. 10



Source: California Department of Water Resources

THIS MONTH IN ACWA HISTORY

10 years ago

The San Diego County Water Authority began wet testing at the Claud “Bud” Lewis Carlsbad Desalination Plant as it neared completion. The testing involved pulling seawater into the system, which would become the largest desalination plant in the nation when it went online by year’s end.

20 years ago

Attendees at ACWA’s Washington D.C. Conference received a briefing on priorities of the administration of President George W. Bush and heard from a selection of federal agency decision makers and elected officials, including freshman U.S. Rep. Jim Costa (D-CA).

30 years ago

Record precipitation and an extremely high snowpack was on track to allow the Central Valley Project to make full or 75% deliveries to customers. Runoff in the Sacramento River basin was expected to top 20 million acre-feet. Full deliveries were restricted, in part, due to new water quality standards in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Bay-Delta.



Attendees of ACWA’s 2005 D.C. Conference gather for a photograph on the steps of the U.S. Capitol.

40 years ago

Voting before a standing-room only crowd, the State Water Resources Control Board unanimously ordered the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation to clean up and abate hazardous waste at the Kesterson National Wildlife Refuge.

50 years ago

The Department of Water Resources announced a one-year delay on

construction of the Peripheral Canal to give the incoming administration of Gov. Jerry Brown more time to study the project. Construction had been scheduled to start during the late summer of 1975. Intensive debate and numerous legislative attempts to get the project back on track failed and the canal instead became a political lightning rod for decades to come. ●

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Department of Water Resources (DWR) employees conduct the second manual snow survey of the season on Jan. 31. DWR reported well below average conditions because of a lack of snow-building storms during January. The next snow survey is scheduled for Feb. 28.

Photo courtesy of DWR

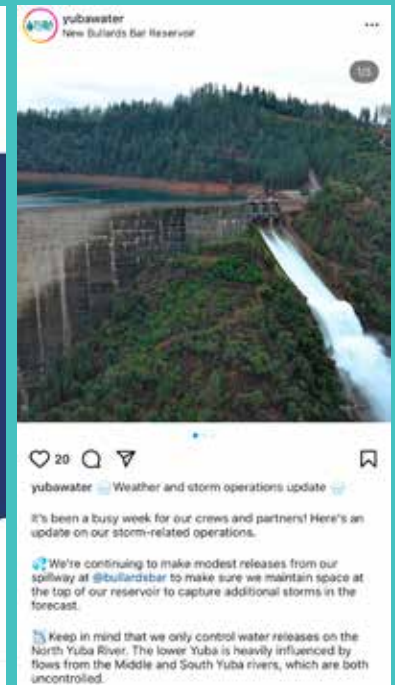
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EXPLORING THE WATER WORLD ACROSS SOCIAL MEDIA

Wet weather is an important time for water districts to engage with customers via social media. When it comes to water use efficiency, it is a great time to remind customers to turn off sprinklers, as Goleta Water did on X and North Marin Water District on Facebook.

It is also a great opportunity to showcase how water infrastructure helps protect local communities. Reclamation District 108 shared a photo on X showing the Tisdale Weir full of water, while Yuba Water took to Instagram to provide an update on storm-related operations, including the release of water at Bullards Bar.

Check out all the mentioned examples below.



To see more social media examples from ACWA members, be sure to follow along on

[f](#) [X](#) [in](#) [o](#) @ACWAWater

TUD Completes Mt. Provo Water Transmission Project

Tuolumne Utilities District (TUD) has announced the completion of the Mt. Provo Water Transmission Project. This crucial infrastructure enhancement signifies a major step forward in TUD's mission to deliver dependable and high-quality water to its customers while bolstering the region's fire resilience.

The project was made possible by a \$2.84 million grant from the Department of Water Resources Urban and Multibenefit Drought Relief Grant program and involved the installation of approximately 14,000 feet of 8-inch water main pipeline along with two pressure reducing valve

stations strategically positioned along Mt. Provo Road in the Ponderosa Hills area.

The consolidation of the Ponderosa Water Treatment Plant, four tanks, and five booster stations will reduce future operational and maintenance costs. In addition to improving water reliability and consolidation, the project increases fire and climate resilience by adding 10 new fire hydrants in high fire danger zones.

The completion of this project is a testament to the successful partnership between TUD and the Tuolumne Band of Me-Wuk Indians. The Ponderosa water

system, which serves as the main water supply to the Tuolumne Band of Me-Wuk Indians community, will significantly benefit from these enhancements.

"We are committed to ensuring a dependable water supply for residents of the Rancheria, as well as securing adequate and reliable fire flow for use in defending our community from the threat of fire," stated Tuolumne Band of Me-Wuk Indians Chairman Kevin Day in a news release. "The collaborative partnership with TUD was integral in completing this important work." ♦

Regional Agencies Partner to Help Disadvantaged Community

San Geronio Pass Water Agency (SGPWA) recently supported its regional partner South Mesa Water Company's (SMWC) advancement of clean, reliable water services at the Hillcrest Mobile Home Park during a ribbon-cutting celebration in January.

SMWC concluded a successful park consolidation in January, made possible by a \$10.2 million grant from the State Water Resources Control Board and awarded under the Safe and Affordable Funding for Equity and Resilience (SAFER) program. Through its gap funding program, SGPWA bolstered SMWC's efforts to deliver safe, affordable water to a community classified as severely disadvantaged.

SMWC's consolidation at Hillcrest resolved ongoing challenges with contaminated groundwater wells. The predominantly senior community faced issues with nitrate levels linked to agricultural runoff. The consolidation also addressed Hillcrest's need for essential fire protection, required now more than ever. The project delivers a dependable water



supply for drinking water needs and fire safety at the same time.

"When we work together to strengthen water resilience throughout the region, the results are powerful," stated SGPWA Board President Mickey Valdivia in a news release. "SGPWA will continue to collaborate closely with our project partners to provide our community with safe and stable water resources for years to come."

SGPWA provided gap funding to ensure the completion of this critical work. This enables water retailers to utilize state funding even when they lack the financial reserves to manage the up-front cash flow requirements. The funding acts as a bridge, making sure state funds are applied toward vital regional water reliability and conservation projects. ♦

Member Agency Boards Name Officers, Swear in Directors

West Basin Municipal Water District



The West Basin Municipal Water District Board of Directors has selected officers for 2025, voting for **Gloria Gray** to serve as President, **Donald L. Dear** as Vice President, **Scott Houston** as Treasurer and **Desi Alvarez** as Secretary.



Gray, first elected to the Board in 2006, is a past member of the ACWA Board of Directors and also served as Chair of the Metropolitan Water District of Southern

California between 2019 and 2022.

The Board also accepted the resignation of **Harold C. Williams**, who was first elected to serve on the Board in 2014. He concludes his service on the West Basin Board after nearly three terms in office.

Orange County Water District



Fred Jung has joined the Orange County Water District (OCWD) Board of Directors representing

the City of Fullerton. Jung currently serves as Fullerton Mayor and has been on the City Council since 2020. He replaces **Bruce Whitaker**, who had served on the OCWD Board since 2012.

San Bernardino Valley



The San Bernardino Valley Municipal Water District Board of Directors has unanimously appointed

Jose Velasquez to the seat left vacant by the passing of **Dr. June Hayes**.

Velasquez brings more than 15 years of leadership in the water industry including financial experience in budgeting, investment management and infrastructure planning.



Nevada Irrigation District

The Nevada Irrigation District Board of Directors has selected **Ricki Heck** as President and **Chris Bierwagen** as Vice President for 2025.



The Board also welcomed **Brad Fowler** as a new member. **Rich Johansen**, who ran unopposed, was sworn

in for his second term.

Otay Water District



The Otay Water District Board of Directors has selected **Jose Lopez** as President for 2025, marking his second consecutive term. The Board also elected **Gary Croucher** as Vice President and **Francisco Rivera** as Treasurer.



Lopez has served most recently on the district's Board since 2020, and previously from 2001 to 2016.



Beaumont-Cherry Valley Water District

The Beaumont-Cherry Valley Water District Board of Directors has approved the following reorganization for calendar year 2025,



naming **Daniel Slawson** as President, **Lona Williams** as Vice President, **Andy Ramirez** as Secretary and **David Hoffman** as Treasurer.



East Bay Municipal Utility District

The East Bay Municipal Utility District Board of Directors recently welcomed new members **Joey D. Smith**, **Jim Oddie** and **Valerie Lewis**.



The Board also appointed **Marguerite Young** as President and **April Chan** as Vice President for 2025. Past Board members **Lesia R. McIntosh**, **Doug A. Linney** and **William B. Patterson** retired in

2024 after serving a cumulative 79 years.

Cucamonga Valley Water District



The Cucamonga Valley Water District Board of Directors have selected **Randall James Reed** as President. Reed has served on the Board since 2003.



The Board also appointed **James V. Curatalo Jr.** as Vice President. Curatalo has served on the Board since 1999.

Desert Water Agency



The Desert Water Agency Board of Directors has selected **Paul Ortega** as President, **Jeff Bowman** as Vice President and

continued on page 11

FIRE continued from page 10



Kristin Bloomer as Secretary-Treasurer.



Ortega and Bloomer ran unopposed in the November election and started new four-year terms this year. This is Ortega's second term on the Board and Bloomer's third term. Bowman was elected in 2022.

Western Water District



The Western Municipal Water District (Western Water) Board of Directors has appointed **Laura Roughton** as President for 2025.



Fauzia Rizvi will serve as Vice President and **Brenda Dennstedt** will assume the role of Secretary-Treasurer.



Before joining the Western Water Board in 2021, Roughton served on the Jurupa Valley City Council. Rizvi joined the Board in 2020 and Dennstedt has served on the Board since 2007.

Mesa Water District

The Mesa Water District Board of Directors in December named **Marice H. DePasquale** as President and **Shawn Dewane** as Vice President for 2024-2026.

The Board also swore in **James R. Fisler**, **Fred R. Bockmiller**, as well as DePasquale, all of whom were reelected in November to serve four-year terms. ♦



Rick Aragon

Western Water Names Aragon as AGM/CFO

Western Municipal Water District (Western Water) recently named **Rick Aragon** as its new Assistant General Manager and Chief Financial Officer (AGM/CFO).

Prior to joining Western Water, Aragon served as AGM/CFO at Rancho Water. His career also includes serving as Senior Advisor to the State of Alaska's Public Utility Commission and in accounting roles throughout Southern California and Alaska.

He succeeds **Kevin Mascaro**, who retired after more than 20 years of service at Western Water.

Aragon's experience also includes serving as a CFO at Coachella Valley Water District, Central Basin Municipal Water District and Rainbow Municipal Water District. ♦



Dr. Maryam Bral

United Water Names Bral as AGM

The United Water Conservation District (UWCD) has named **Dr. Maryam Bral** as its new Assistant General Manager.

Bral brings more than 20 years of water resource management experience to the role and originally joined UWCD in 2018 as Chief Engineer and Chief Dam Safety Engineer. Her career includes advancing the \$330 million Santa Felicia Dam Safety Improvement Project at Lake Piru.

Bral holds a Ph.D. in civil engineering and obtained her master's degree in chemical/civil engineering and bachelor's degree in chemical engineering from the Technical University of Denmark. ♦



Laura Jensen

California Water Commission Names Jensen as Executive Officer

The California Water Commission has appointed **Laura Jensen** as its Executive Officer. She replaces **Joseph Yun**, who has served in the role since 2017 and is retiring.

Jensen has served as the Commission's Assistant Executive Officer since 2020. She previously managed ecosystem restoration and community programs for the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta Conservancy, served as an environmental scientist with the Department of Water Resources and worked as a project manager with the Nature Conservancy. ♦

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MARCH 2025
7-8

WATER EDUCATION FOR LATINO LEADERS 2025 ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Water Ed for Latino Leaders | Garden Grove

Water Education for Latino Leaders is hosting their annual conference from March 7 - March 8, 2025 in Garden Grove, California at the Hyatt Regency Orange County.

MARCH 2025
11

WOMEN IN WATER LEADERSHIP SEMINAR 2025

CWA | Downey

The seminar will include keynote speakers, breakout sessions, and opportunities for networking, bringing women together working on water issues. The all-day event will be held at the SoCalGas Energy Resource Center.

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Snowpack Dips Below Average in
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MARCH 2025
26

ACWA 2025 LEGISLATIVE SYMPOSIUM

ACWA | Sacramento

Join ACWA at this annual event where water district directors, general managers, attorneys, and staff from across California come together for an afternoon of insightful discussions on the latest water policy issues.



APRIL 2025
10

WATER 101 WORKSHOP: THE BASICS & BEYOND

WEF | Sacramento

The Water Education Foundation's popular "Water 101 Workshop" offers a one-day deep dive into California's water history, geography, legal aspects, and current issues. It explores key topics affecting the state's water management.

APRIL 2025
16

ACWA REGION 4 TOUR & PROGRAM

ACWA | Manteca

Join ACWA Region 4 and FISHBIO for a tour of Sturgeon Bend to see the fyke trap and an electrofishing demo at River Islands on the San Joaquin River. The tour will include a discussion on nonnative fish impacts on native salmon recovery, highlighting studies on the rivers.



APRIL 2025
23-25

CENTRAL VALLEY TOUR

WEF | Sacramento

Join the Water Education Foundation on their Central Valley Tour to explore the challenges of sustaining the San Joaquin Valley, a key agricultural region dependent on imported water and dwindling groundwater.