ACWA NEWS
VOL. 53 | 05 May 30, 2025



ACWA President Cathy Green addresses attendees from the Main Stage at the Spring 2025 ACWA Conference & Expo, which attracted more than 1,500 members of California's water community to Monterey.

Spring Conference Covers Top California Water Issues

The Spring 2025 ACWA Conference & Expo attracted more than 1,500 attendees to Monterey May 13-15 for presentations, panel discussions and keynote addresses focused on issues surrounding the state's most vital resource.

Panels explored disaster responses ranging from catastrophic wildfire impacts in Los Angeles to how water agencies throughout California can prepare for natural disasters of all types. The conference also featured programs on improving watershed health, recharging groundwater basins with diverted floodwater and enhancing water supply coordination between local, state and federal water managers.

Additionally, National Water Supply Alliance President Katherine Zitsch delivered the Wednesday keynote address and outlined her perspectives on water supply challenges shared in common by California and the U.S. Southeast. Family Farm Alliance Executive Director Dan Keppen spoke Thursday, with his keynote address including insights from his career in advocacy on behalf of Western farmers and ranchers.

The conference also included a Water Talk speaker on Wednesday, with Justin Wren delivering an inspiring presentation based on his experiences as a humanitarian and mixed martial arts fighter.

By the numbers, the latest ACWA conference featured 25 educational sessions, 15 committee and task force meetings, nine ACWA regional membership meetings and 80 Exhibit Hall booths, along with receptions and myriad opportunities for professional network building. The conference was supported by 46 sponsors.

The summaries below highlight just a few of the programs and panel discussions during conference.

Groundwater

Title: "A Practical Guide to Diverting Flood Water for Groundwater Recharge"

Panelists: Paul Gosselin, Deputy Director, Sustainable Groundwater Water Management, Department of Water Resources; Ryan Bezerra, Senior Partner, BKS Law Firm; Erik Ekdahl, Chief Deputy Director, State Water Resources Control Board; Stefanie Morris, Principal, CalNeva Water

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ACWA News is a publication of the Association of California Water Agencies

Periodicals postage paid at Sacramento, CA.

POSTMASTER:
Send address changes and subscription requests to ACWA News,
980 9th Street, Suite 1000
Sacramento, CA
95814-3514

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USPS 334030

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ACWA INTERIM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MARWAN KHALIFA

ACWA D.C. Advocacy Fighting for Water Funding



I had the privilege of working alongside the ACWA East Team earlier this month during a visit to Capitol Hill. I stayed just long enough to feel like a local, automatically referring to coffee shops, restaurants and office locations not only by name, but also by their proximity to either the House or Senate side of the Capitol.

Our ACWA East Team, led by Director of Federal Relations Ian Lyle, includes Federal Relations Representative Caleb Raspler and Federal Relations Representative Libby Spekhardt. Together, we met with members of California's congressional delegation and federal agency officials to advocate for critical water infrastructure funding and policies that affect ACWA member agencies.

ACWA also hosted a water policy luncheon that brought together many of the water policy professionals that advocate on behalf of ACWA's members on federal issues along with representatives from national water organizations and staff from several congressional offices.

It was a timely visit. The Trump Administration had just released a summary of its fiscal year 2026 budget proposal. The proposal recommends a sharp decrease in water-related investments including estimated cuts of $2.4 billion to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Clean and Drinking Water State Revolving Fund, $609 million for U.S. Department of Interior's Bureau of Reclamation, $391 million for forest service operations, and $7 million to eliminate the U.S. Army Corps' Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act, also known as the WIFIA program.

During our visits, we highlighted the critical need to ensure and restore funding for these and other water-related investments during the congressional appropriations process.

Additionally, we urged Congress to support the Water Systems PFAS Liability Protection Act. This bill would exempt water systems from PFAS liability under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability, or CERCLA, and hold polluters — not passive receivers — accountable for PFAS contamination.

Another major point of focus included support for the Federal Emergency Management Agency's Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) program. Established under the first Trump administration, BRIC serves as an annual funding source for pre-disaster mitigation projects. We strongly advocated to maintain funding for this program, especially since investments to prevent natural disasters are more cost-effective than post-disaster recovery. California has received over $1.2 billion from the BRIC program and is among the top three state recipients with the most funding from the program.

California water managers have a lot riding on the outcome of multiple issues, and you can count on our ACWA East team to keep your interests front and center in our nation's capital.

Nationwide Search Underway for ACWA Executive Director

The ACWA Board of Directors has selected the human resources and executive search firm of WBCP to lead a nationwide recruitment process for hiring an Executive Director to lead the association's day-to-day management.

The Board launched a recruitment effort in January following the departure of former ACWA Executive Director Dave Eggerton, naming Marwan Khalifa as Interim Executive Director. Khalifa previously worked as Chief Financial Officer and District Treasurer for Mesa Water District, also serving on the ACWA Board, Executive Committee and as Chair of ACWA's Finance Committee.

Khalifa will be considered among any candidates for Executive Director. ACWA President Cathy Green formed a 10-member committee to oversee the recruitment process and the committee expects to have a new Executive Director in place by fall.

"Finding the right Executive Director to take this association to the next level is a critical decision that I don't take lightly," Green said. "The ACWA Board of Directors is eager to get someone in that critical position, but we also want to take the time to make sure it's the right person with the qualities and qualifications this association needs."

WBCP is based in Rogue River, Oregon and also has offices in California, Washington and Texas.

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Key issue(s): In January, Gov. Gavin Newsom signed an Executive Order making it easier for local and regional agencies to apply state laws to maximize groundwater recharge. This built upon previous Executive Orders that supported recharge efforts during 2023's historic winter storms. Panelists discussed how water managers can use the orders and apply current regulations to fight floods while replenishing groundwater supplies.

Bezerra quote: "The law is always a lagging indicator. … We haven't caught up at all to the perspective of what happens if you're diverting flood water out of a stream and put it in the ground and who's got rights to it."

Ekdahl quote: "There is far, far more capacity to store water underground than there is on the surface. It's pennies on the dollar. …We need more storage, and our basins have more space than all the surface water combined."

Bay-Delta

Title: "Building Trust in Delta Decision Making Through Shared Science"

Panelists: E. Joaquin Esquivel, Chair, State Water Resources Control Board; Louise Conrad, Lead Scientist, Department of Water Resources; Robyn Grimm, President and CEO, California Water Data Consortium; Jessica Pearson, Executive Officer, Delta Stewardship Council; Jay Ziegler, Delta Watermaster, State Water Board



State Water Resources Control Board Chair E. Joaquin Esquivel, center, speaks during a panel discussion about building trust in Bay-Delta decision making.

Key issue(s): Effective management of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Bay-Delta requires shared data and the best available science to guide decision making. This panel explored how state agencies are advancing an integrated, responsive science and data system. The goal is taking a "One Delta, One Science" approach that will build trust, inform adaptive management and leverage partnerships to improve water supply, ecosystems and communities.

Esquivel quote: "This is our opportunity as a state, as collective agencies and, importantly, you all as water users, to come together and expect more as you unpack the various proposals within the Water Quality Control Plan update. We're also trying to make sure that we're actually bringing voices that I think are missing, are missing from this panel now, communities that have suffered inequities, because those needs and issues and perspectives should be a part and a continuum of how we view, moving forward together as Californians and society, around one of the most critical resources we have, which is our Bay-Delta."

Water Management

Title: "State, Local and Federal Efforts to Enhance Water Supply"

Panelists: (Moderator) Sarge Green, Vice Chair, ACWA Region 6; Dorene D'Adamo, Vice Chair, State Water Board; Adam Nickels, Acting California-Great Basin Regional Director, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation; Johnny Amaral, Chief of External Affairs and Chief Operating Officer, Friant Water Authority

Key issue(s): Presented by ACWA Region 6 and Region 7, this panel looked at water managers' and state efforts to increase water supply and capture

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Revised Budget Released, Key Water Bills Advancing in Legislature

Gov. Gavin Newsom released his May Revised Budget Proposal, which lowers state revenue projections through fiscal year 2025-'26 by approximately $16 billion from his original Jan. 10 budget proposal. Cuts proposed within the proposed budget could affect Association priorities such as dam safety and recycled water, and ACWA state legislative advocacy will engage on preserving funding in these areas.

The Legislature will now hold budget subcommittee hearings to consider the governor's proposals and is required to pass a budget by June 15.

ACWA state legislative advocacy also remains focused on several key priorities affecting member agencies. Below are summaries and updates as of May 27 on a few among many of bills on which ACWA advocacy staff is engaged.

SB 394/Water Theft

Author: Sen. Ben Allen (D-Santa Monica)

ACWA position: Co-sponsored with Las Virgenes Municipal Water District

What it would do: Allow local water agencies to adopt an ordinance with enhanced penalties for water theft from a fire hydrant. Additionally, the bill would remove the one-year reset on existing penalties for the third and additional violations for water theft committed via meter tampering and other methods. It would also help agencies recover damages by authorizing utilities to pursue civil remedies against any person who tampers with or diverts water from a fire hydrant without authorization.

Status: SB 394 is headed to the Senate floor for a vote.

SB 454/PFAS

Author: Sen. Jerry McNerney (D-Pleasanton)

ACWA position: Co-sponsored with League of California Cities

What it would do: Create a funding tool to help water and wastewater agencies pay for PFAS contamination treatment costs that would otherwise be covered by local ratepayers on their water and wastewater bills. There are currently multiple sources of funding aimed at addressing PFAS contamination (current and potentially future legal settlements, federal funding, state bond funding, etc.) that could be directed to this fund.

Status: SB 454 passed out of the Senate Appropriations Committee on May 23 and is now headed to the Senate floor for a vote.

AB 794/PFAS

Author: Assemblymember Jesse Gabriel (D-Encino)

ACWA Position: Oppose-Unless-Amended

What it would do: Require the State Water Board to adopt an emergency regulation initiate a primary drinking water standard for PFAS consistent with the current federal standard, which would circumvent the state's existing process for setting drinking water standards that appropriately includes scientific review, evaluation of cost and public input.

Status: AB 794 passed out of the Assembly Appropriations Committee May 23 and is now headed to the Assembly floor for a vote.

AB 263/Water Rights

Author: Assemblymember Chris Rogers (D-Healdsburg)

ACWA position: Oppose

What it would do: Set precedent by keeping in place emergency drought regulations adopted by the State Water Resources Control Board instead of following established processes. The bill stems from the State Water Board's adopting emergency regulations implementing long-term instream flow for the Scott and Shasta river watersheds during the last drought.

Status: AB 263 is currently scheduled for a June 10 hearing in the Senate Natural Resources and Water Committee.

LIRA/SB 350

Author: Sen. Maria Elena Durazo (D-Los Angeles)

ACWA position: Oppose-Unless-Amended

What it proposed: Required the State Water Board to create a statewide low-income rate assistance (LIRA) program. ACWA believes a water and wastewater low-income rate assistance program — if designed in a reasonable, efficient and effective manner — is an appropriate approach. ACWA worked closely with the bill's proponents to amend the bill into a version that was workable for water providers. The bill had been significantly amended and was nearing a version that would allow ACWA to remove opposition. A funding source for the bill, which was expected to cost several hundred million dollars annually, had not yet been identified.

Status: SB 350 died in the Senate Appropriations Committee on May 23.

Water Quality/SB 601

Author: Sen. Ben Allen (D-Santa Monica)

ACWA Position: Oppose

What it would do: Inject regulatory uncertainty and almost certain litigation into water supply and treatment operations. It would create a classification of water call "nexus waters," a newly defined category of protected waters intended to cover all waters previously protected under federal authority prior to the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling on *Sackett v. EPA*. The bill would amend the Porter-Cologne Act in a manner that applies the more stringent federal Clean Water Act permitting regulations to

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Ag, National Water Leaders Deliver Conference Keynotes

ACWA's conferences are known for hosting informative and engaging keynote speakers on a variety of water policy issues, and the 2025 Spring Conference & Expo delivered just that with a fresh look at what California can learn from other states and insights from renowned leader from within the Western agricultural irrigation community.



Katherine Zitsch

Speaking Wednesday, National Water Supply Alliance President Katherine Zitsch compared how California and the U.S. Southeast share several issues in common. Both suffer from severe droughts, feature water challenges facing urban and agricultural communities alike and have a wary eye on the emergence data centers as a new type of high demand water users.

During the late 2000s, drought brought Atlanta to within a month of running out of water, said Zitsch, who also serves as Senior Water Policy Advisor at the Georgia Water Planning and Policy Center. But as in California, conditions radically reversed with the arrival of severe flooding. Water concerns easily cross regional and political differences.

"It is red, it is blue, it is urban, it is rural, it is all of the above," Zitsch said.

The certainty of there always being a drought around the next corner makes conservation a perennial topic, as well as the need for more water infrastructure funding. Georgia's transportation and energy sectors are booming, with the latter fed by increasing demand from new data centers.

"We're accelerating, but people don't talk about the water supply, which is used for cooling," Zitsch said. "And so my thing is, that during any dinner party that you hear somebody say 'infrastructure' and they're talking about something, you need to say, 'and water.'"

Zitsch closed with a call for collaboration on water advocacy.

"Water is a team sport," Zitsch said, later adding "When we get to Congress, we have to be doing it together. It's why I'm so excited to be here today."



Keppen Keynote

Family Farm Alliance Executive Director Dan Keppen delivered the Thursday keynote address drawing on his quarter-century of experience advocating on behalf of Western growers and ranchers. He plans to retire by the end of the year.

Keppen emphasized the critical importance of agriculture and the incredibly stressful work of farmers who contend with water supply difficulties, rising operating costs and increasing regulatory pressures. At the same time, rising food costs are hitting all Americans, who are paying 11.2% of their disposable income on food compared to 6.2% in 2005. And yet, educating people on where exactly their food comes from remains a challenge in communicating the unique story of American irrigated agriculture, Keppen said.

"One of the biggest challenges that we face in agriculture is trying to explain to policy makers and the public in general, 'where does their food come from?'," Keppen said.

"Lots of folks just assume it comes from, you know, Vons or Ralphs or Safeway. You all know where your food comes from, right? It comes from farmers and ranchers, and nobody does it better than American producers."

Keppen highlighted alfalfa as an example of people misunderstanding the link between farming and their food.

"If you like milk and steak and burgers and ice cream and cheese and yogurt, you'd better like alfalfa," Keppen said. "Alfalfa contributes to the environment, it provides healthy soils, clean water, clean air, and where I live, wildlife habitat like you wouldn't believe."

He also called on all members of the water community to get engaged.

"Regardless of where you get your water or what you use it for, there are so many critical challenges facing our industry this year," Keppen said. "Really, your voice now is really needed more than ever."





Left: Leading groundwater policy experts discuss rules regarding floodwater diversion for recharge purposes.
Right: Federal, state and local water leaders share perspectives on enhancing water supplies within the current policy environment.

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water. Panelists discussed how they are working with communities and building partnerships as well as the impacts this is having on the San Joaquin Valley's water supply.

D'Adamo quote: On water rights modernization, "When we have periods of drought, we'll actually issue a curtailment that there's not enough water to meet all of the water rights holders' demands. That system only works if people trust the information we have. … We're actually trying to improve that system so that it's more refined, more detailed, more transparent."

Amaral quote: "In the last few months, I've heard both the federal administration and the state administration saying, 'I'm going to be better than the other guy as a water operator.' And I'm telling you, we should be here for that discussion. I've never witnessed that before. … Shame on us if we don't seize this opportunity that exists before us right now."

Water Supply Diversification

Title: "Securing a Resilient Water Future: Innovation and Supply Diversification"

Panelists: (Moderator) Craig Miller, General Manager, Western Municipal Water District; Sean Maguire, Member, State Water Board; Dan Denham, General Manager, San Diego County Water Authority; Heather Dyer, Chief Executive Officer and General Manager, San Bernardino Valley Municipal Water District; Willie Whittlesey, General Manager, Yuba Water Agency

Key Issue(s): Water agencies continue to implement wide-ranging strategies to secure a diverse and reliable water supply that is critical for navigating increasingly severe droughts and floods driven by climate change. These strategies include water reuse, desalination, stormwater capture, groundwater recharge, storage expansion and efficiency improvements.

Maguire quote: "We really have to be willing to accept that our climate is changing, that our world is changing and that water supply here in California is just inherently unreliable in many instances. And we've all witnessed that with the drought we had a couple years ago."

Dyer quote: "We need to stop telling ourselves we can't because… We have to get out of our silos because no one agency can solve these problems alone. So, let's stop telling ourselves what we can't do and look around us and look at who is available to help solve the problem."

Whittlesey quote: "But the ultimate goal is to ensure that the forest is resilient and what does that mean? The forest is functioning with its original functionality that it's evolved with over the past millennia and that is, that it experiences wildfire."

Innovation

Title: "Water Agencies Shaping Tomorrow Through Exemplary Projects and Programs"

Panelists: (Moderator) Melissa McChesney, Communications Manager, Padre Dam Municipal Water District; Fernando Baez, Manager of Engineering, Calleguas Municipal Water District; Ed Castaneda, General Manager, Orchard Dale Water District; Robert Grantham, General Manager, Santa Margarita Water District; Betsy Miller Vixie, General Manager, San Bernardino Valley Water Conservation District

Key Issue(s): Water agencies throughout the state are known for their innovative and cutting-edge programs that raise the bar for excellence in the field of water management. Agencies on this panel shared how their best-in-class projects from interconnections and groundwater recharge modeling to increased reservoir capacities can help their communities thrive.

Miller quote: "I was surprised at how much fear there was around the data, and I never want us to be in a place where we are afraid of the data because understanding and looking at the data and results is the only way we can do the feedback loop to make our current operations better — how we improve and how we innovate."

Grantham quote: "People forget that public works projects take a long time,

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even ones that are quick in action. That's what the water industry shares, the idea of a long-term vision: How do we put pieces together that enable us to deal with the here and now, but to also serve our children and our children's children?"

Attorney Program

Title: "Burning Questions: Legal Duties and Risks in Fire-Prone California"

Panelists: (Moderator) Claire Collins, Partner, Hanson Bridgett LLP; Laura Ratcliffe, Senior Counsel, Hanson Bridgett LLP; Kayla Villa, Litigation Manager, ACWA JPIA

Key Issue(s): In the era of increasingly destructive wildfires, this session examined the liability exposures and defenses of water agencies as both landowners and water suppliers. Panelists suggested strategies to mitigate risks and explored potential legislative reforms and opportunities for policy advocacy regarding the nexus between wildfire and public water agencies.

Collins quote: "As a lawyer, understanding what defensible space and vegetation management is, and your local codes, is really important."

Villa quote: "When it comes to mitigating risks, there are a lot of resources available to you — so use them."

Solution Spotlight

Title: "How Apprenticeship Partnerships Are Shaping the Future of Water Operations"

Panelists: Colter Andersen, Chief Revenue Officer, Operational Technical Services, LLC; Lisa Mealoy, Executive Director, ACWA Foundation

Key Issue(s): Many water agencies are struggling to find skilled water operators. This Solution Spotlight overed a new approach: a two-year apprenticeship program by Occupational Training Services. Panelists also discussed how the ACWA Foundation can support regional partnerships.

Andersen quote: "20 years ago, we were talking about Baby Boomers and Gen X. Now we have Millennials and Gen Z'ers and we are seeing that the younger generations are just not learning about careers in water."

Workforce Development

Title: "Data Revolution: Attracting the Next Generation of Leaders"

Panelists: (Moderator) Jenna Shimmin, Director of Water Use Efficiency, Eastern Municipal Water District; Aaron Baker, Chief Operating Officer of Water Utility Enterprise, Valley Water; Erik Ekdahl, Chief Deputy Director, State Water Board; John Horst,

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Top: A panel discussion among Clair Hill Award finalists offers a closer look at innovation driven by ACWA member agencies.

Middle: Panelists share perspectives on how the water industry can recruit the next generation of water professionals.

Bottom: Panelists discuss applying innovation to answering the challenges of securing a reliable water supply.






Left: ACWA President Cathy Green and ACWA Vice President Ernie Avila present the 2025 Excellence in Water Leadership Award to Wes Monier, center. **Center:** (l-r) Andy Coradeschi, Board President, Las Virgenes MWD, and Raul Avila, Board President, Calleguas MWD, receive the Clair A. Hill Agency Award for Excellence on behalf of their districts. **Right:** ACWA President Cathy Green poses with Eastern Municipal Water District's Senior Policy and Governmental Affairs Manager Pacal Cornejo-Reynoso, who received ACWA's annual John P. Fraser Water Leaders Fellowship.

ACWA Awards and Scholarships Recognize Excellence and California Water Leadership

ACWA presented several awards and announced $24,500 in scholarships to outstanding recipients during the 2025 Spring Conference & Expo May 13-15 in Monterey.

Excellence in Water Leadership

ACWA presented its 2025 Excellence in Water Leadership Award to Wes Monier, recently retired Chief Hydrologist for Turlock Irrigation District (TID), for his commitment to water resources issues, especially in utilizing advanced technologies in water management practices. Monier guided TID through significant dry and wet years, utilizing data to develop an in-house Hydrologic Forecast Analysis Model.

Monier was also responsible for developing new partnerships for TID, including programs with NASA and Scripps Institution of Oceanography. He also introduced the district's first green energy rate schedule and first low-income program.

Clair Hill Award

The Clair A. Hill Water Agency Award for Excellence was presented to Calleguas Municipal Water District and Las Virgenes Municipal Water District for their innovative interconnection.

The Calleguas-LVMWD Interconnection allows each agency to better serve its customers by providing an additional source of potable water to improve reliability and flexibility, enhancing the ability to meet demands during periods of reduced imported water supply and reducing the risk for potential water shortages associated with natural disasters.

The annual award program recognizes outstanding achievements by public water agencies. For more information about ACWA's awards, visit **acwa.com/awards**.

ACWA Scholarships

Two $3,500 ACWA Scholarships were awarded to Amelia Flores, an environmental policy analysis and planning student at University of California, Davis and Kirsten Larson, an agricultural education student at California State University, Fresno.

Clair Hill Scholarship

The $5,000 Clair A. Hill Scholarship, sponsored by Jacobs, was awarded to Peter Otoshi, a civil engineering student at Cal Poly Pomona.

Arthur Littleworth Scholarship

The Arthur L. Littleworth Best Best & Krieger Scholarship, sponsored by BB&K, was awarded to Christina Huang, a soon to be civil engineering and environmental engineering student at University of California, Berkeley.

Jerry Gladbach Scholarship

The $2,500 Edward G. "Jerry" Gladbach Scholarship, sponsored by SCV Water, was awarded to Jade Meichtry, a bioresource and agricultural engineering student at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo.

ACWA Fellowship

ACWA presented its sixth annual John P. Fraser Water Leaders Fellowship to Eastern Municipal Water District's Senior Policy and Governmental Affairs Manager Pacal Cornejo-Reynoso.

For more information about ACWA's scholarships, please visit **acwa.com/scholarships**.









ACWA Conference Snaps

Moments, memories and the amazing people who made it all count.



















Left: Experts discuss the liability water agencies could face from increasingly catastrophic wildfires, as well as strategies to mitigate legal risks. **Right:** Communications professionals share crisis communication experiences, and successful strategies, tools and tactics.

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Member, Trabuco Canyon Water District Board of Directors; Brad Tackett, Vice President/Business Development Manager, Sundt Construction

Key Issue(s): The water industry is searching for new strategies to attract fresh talent and keep members of younger generations working in water. Panelists discussed the data movement in California that has drawn worldwide attention and connections that translate to attracting future water leaders.

Baker quote: "A lot of data is collected, and we need to have employees that understand what the results look like and how it can improve future operations."

Tackett quote: "When we are hiring, we are looking for innovators, bringing an outside perspective. Something different than what we've just been doing for the past 100 plus years."

Farm Water Partnership

Title: "Great Valley Farm Water Partnership: Collaboration for Sustainable Solutions"

Panelists: (Moderator) Amy Wolfe, Facilitator, Great Valley Farm Water Partnership; Edwin Camp, Board President, Arvin-Edison Water Storage District; Cliff Loeffler, Member, Lindsay-Strathmore Irrigation District Board of Directors; Russell Ryan, Program Manager, Metropolitan Water District of Southern California; Russell van Loben Sels, President, Reclamation District #744

Key Issue(s): Working together and finding common ground is key to advancing solutions to California water challenges. The Great Valley Farm Water Partnership is a voluntary coalition of growers from the Sacramento-San Joaquin Bay-Delta and the San Joaquin Valley who are dedicated to collaboration. Panelists shared the details of the formation of the Partnership, along with work currently being undertaken to address silt removal in the southern Bay-Delta.

van Loben Sels quote: "First thing we had to do is get to know each other, get to know each other's challenges, and get to know the work we have all done to make the system better."

Camp quote: "We want to identify actions that provide more water when water is available."

Crisis Communication

Title: "Preparing and Executing Effective Communications During an Emergency"

Panelists: (Moderator) Kendall Klingler, Partner, Fiona Hutton & Associates; Laura Camp, Public Information Officer, Montecito Water District; Jennifer Guess Mayo, Assistant General Manager for

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COMMENTS ON CONFERENCE



KATHY MAC LAREN-GOMEZ
Board President
Palmdale Water District
Region 8

"At ACWA Conferences you get to strengthen partnerships that you are just starting to have. You break bread and move those relationships along."



JEEVAN MUHAR
Engineer Manager
Arvin-Edison Water Storage District
Region 7, 30th Conference

"I really like seeing a lot of the folks that you work with in a completely different forum and atmosphere than regular meetings."





Left: Water leaders share their experiences stemming from the formation of the Great Valley Farm Water Partnership, which is bringing together growers from the Sacramento-San Joaquin Bay-Delta and the San Joaquin Valley. **Right:** A Leadership Roundtable offers participants an opportunity to share experiences in honing executive-level management skills.

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External Affairs, City of Pasadena; Mike McNutt, Public Affairs and Communications Manager, Las Virgenes Municipal Water District; Betsy Lauppe Rhodes, Communications Deputy Director, San Francisco Public Utilities Commission

Key Issue(s): The public counts on water agencies to distribute timely, accurate and useful information during emergencies. When sharing their successful crisis communication strategies, tools and tactics, panelists agreed that developing partnerships with other agencies is key to ensuring consistent messaging. Repetition of accurate information over multiple channels is also necessary, especially when combatting misinformation from other sources.

McNutt quote: "We are in a place where we are all completely overwhelmed with information. How to get our info in front of people is changing dramatically. It's our job to go and find those places."

Camp quote: "I cannot stress enough how important it is to have relationships (with other first responders) in advance and know that you are not alone."

Executive Edge

Title: "Leadership Roundtable by Executive Edge"

Panelists: (Facilitators) Jennifer Burke, Water Director, Santa Rosa Water; Anjanette Shadley, Assistant General Manager, Western Canal Water District

Key Issue(s): Participants of this roundtable — including alumni of ACWA's Executive Edge leadership program — broke into small groups to discuss leadership development in the water industry, then shared key takeaways with the larger group.

Finance Program

Title: "Long-Range Financial Planning for Water Utilities"

Panelists: (Moderator) Robert Hannay, Treasury Manager, East Bay Municipal Utility District; Matthew Freiberg, Rates Manager, San Francisco Public Utilities Commission; Jonathan Wunderlich, Finance Manager, Alameda County Water District

Key Issue(s): Building complex long-range financial models can provide a clearer view of long-term financial sustainability, debt strategies and rate impacts. Panelists shared best practices and strategies for integrating long-term financial planning into utility decision making.

Freiberg quote: "(When building a model) make sure it's fit for purpose. It's key to know what you're trying to achieve with your model before you start building it, so think about all the different touchpoints in your agency you think would benefit from having a model."



REBECCA GUO
General Manager
El Dorado Water Agency
Region 3, 8th Conference

"I enjoy the networking opportunities and the dedicated time to actually connect to colleagues that I don't see very often."



RICK BORGES
Chair
Friant Water Authority
Region 7, 1st Conference

"The content is very useful for me to learn more about the water industry throughout the state. I feel like I have a handle on what's going on in my region, the Central Valley, as well as a better understanding of how issues are different in urban areas compared to my area."

Humanitarian Delivers Inspiring Water Talk

What meaningful impact would you make if you only knew you could? Justin Wren began his talk asking attendees just this. His story from being bullied to becoming an MMA champion and then an impactful humanitarian is inspiring. Wren began his journey to provide clean and safe access to water after a trip to the Congo Basin Rainforest to visit the Mbuti Pygmy people.

"Instead of coming back in with a cookie cutter solution from our culture context — our way of life — what if you just listen to them and learn from them and immerse yourself in it and listen to their ideas, their hopes, their dreams," Wren said.

Wren founded Fight for the Forgotten and traveled back to Africa to begin helping communities build water wells. Since then, they've built 97 wells providing water for around 80,000 people, purchased and provided more than 3,000 acres of land to people, provided 35 family homes in Uganda, expanded impact to two nations and saw 18,000 people transition out of a life of slavery and into a life of freedom.

As Wren continued to mention throughout his talk, the solutions and success came from getting to know the people and working with the people: "If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together."



Trump Administration Budget Proposes Water Funding Cuts

The Trump Administration's fiscal year 2026 budget proposal recommends a decrease in discretionary and non-defense spending of an estimated $163 billion. Notably for ACWA members, the budget includes estimated cuts of $4.9 billion for the Environmental Protection Agency, $5.1 billion for the Department of Interior, $5 billion for the Department of Agriculture (USDA), and $1.7 billion for the Department of Commerce.

Examples of specific water-related budget proposals include the following:

EPA

Decrease of $2.4 billion for the Clean and Drinking Water State Revolving Fund, which offers low-cost financing for water quality projects. SRFs are the largest source of federal funds for drinking water utilities, sewage treatment plants, and other infrastructure like water pipes.

Interior

Consolidation of USDA and Interior wildfire fighting strategies including wildfire suppression response, risk mitigation efforts, and coordination with non-Federal partners to combat the wildfire crisis. Specifically, this seeks to consolidate the Federal wildland fire responsibilities into a single new Federal Wildland Fire Service at Interior, including transferring USDA's current wildland fire management responsibilities.

USDA

Decrease of $754 million for the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Private Lands Conservation Operations, which provides conservation technical assistance to comply with state environmental regulations; this includes California's Irrigated Lands Regulatory Program, which regulates agricultural runoff. Additionally, this proposal calls for a decrease of $16 million for the NRCS Watershed Operations, which provides assistance to implement conservation practices that address watershed resource concerns such as renovating locally owned dams and installing flood control measures.

Commerce

Decrease of $1.5 billion for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, including $209 million for projects pertaining to weather satellites and infrastructure that relate to climate-measurement instruments.

Army Corps of Engineers

Decrease of $7 million to eliminate the Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act program, which provides low-cost, long-term loans for non-Federal water infrastructure projects such as dam safety.

While the president's budget serves as a funding blueprint, it is ultimately up to Congress to set funding levels and appropriate funds for federal programs. ACWA staff is working closely with partner organizations and allies on Capitol Hill to secure robust funding for water infrastructure.

THIS MONTH IN ACWA HISTORY

10 years ago

Gov. Jerry Brown addressed attendees at the Spring 2015 ACWA Conference & Exhibition in Sacramento, where he told water managers that they are "on the front lines" of the drought and that his administration was "here to back you up."

20 years ago

ACWA Vice President Randy Fiorini and ACWA President Jerry Gladbach formally presented ACWA's "No Time to Waste: A Blueprint for California Water" to Department of Water Resources Director Lester Snow during ACWA's 2005 Spring Conference in San Jose. The Blueprint packaged a diverse mix of actions and investments to help California meet its water supply needs in the coming decades.



Then-Metropolitan Water District of Southern California Board Chair John V. Foley detonates groundbreaking blasts that ceremonially began construction of Diamond Valley Lake in this May 17, 1995 photo.

30 years ago

A mile-long string of explosions accented by red, white and blue smoke marked the official groundbreaking of what would become Metropolitan Water District of Southern California's Diamond Valley Lake. Building the 810,000 acre-foot off-stream reservoir became the largest public works project under construction in the Western United States at the time.

40 years ago

The ACWA Board of Directors adopted a resolution urging implementation of a coordinated operating agreement, or COA, between the Central Valley Project and State Water Project during the 1985 ACWA Spring Conference in Anaheim. The COA proposed a requirement that water supply and quality needs within the Sacramento-San Joaquin Bay-Delta be satisfied before pumping any water south.

50 years ago

More than 700 delegates gathered in Sacramento for ACWA's Spring Legislative Conference, where leading topics included political reform, basin quality control plans, public employer-employee relations and attitudes toward water development within the new administration of Gov. Jerry Brown.

continued from page 4

former waters of the United States (WOTUS). The new provisions would also be enforceable by citizen lawsuits, which were previously not permitted.

Status: SB 601 passed out of the Senate Appropriations Committee May 23 and is now headed to the Senate floor for a vote.

SB 599/Forecasting

Author: Sen. Anna Caballero (D-Merced)

ACWA Position: Favor

What it would do: Encourage improvements in atmospheric river forecasting and by extension allow more details on their impact on water supply, flooding, post-wildfire debris flows and environmental conditions. The bill would achieve this aim by requiring the Department of Water Resources to include the use of experimental tools that produce seasonal and sub-seasonal atmospheric river forecasts, encouraging research, development and implementation of novel forecasting methods.

Status: SB 599 passed out of the Senate Appropriations Committee May 23 and is now headed to the Senate floor for a vote.

Take Action

These are among dozens of priority bills that could affect ACWA member agencies. Support and strengthen ACWA's advocacy by accessing these member-only resources in three easy steps:

1. Join a coalition
2. Track ACWA's bill positions
3. Get tips on engaging with elected officials

LIKE, SHARE & FOLLOW

EXPLORING THE WATER WORLD ACROSS SOCIAL MEDIA







In mid-April, ACWA released a new toolkit for Water Awareness Month, which kicked off May 1. The toolkit provided water suppliers an opportunity to highlight agency efforts, programs and investments made to continue delivering safe and affordable water to the communities they serve. It also served as a great opportunity to continue asking customers to use water wisely and share information on available rebates.

The toolkit included the Water Awareness Month logo and new social media graphics along with sample posts. Some water agencies used the provided graphics, while others added the Water Awareness Month logo to their own graphics and posts. Here are some examples of how water agencies added the logo to their own content.

Upper San Gabriel Valley MWD (@upper_water) shared a Water Awareness Month "Director's Corner" that highlighted ways Board members save water at home.

West Valley Water District (@mywvwd) did a #TBT (Throwback Thursday) post "Water Awareness Month Edition" and showcased a water conservation sign from 1990.

The post from **Contra Costa Water District** (@contracostawaterdistrict) used the same styling as the graphics provided in the toolkit, but used district branding with information and images that would get the attention of customers.

Be sure to follow ACWA (@ACWAWater) on

Videos Highlight Protecting Forests, Reducing Wildfires Risk



ACWA has developed a suite of six videos to help member agencies educate the public and lawmakers about the critical need to protect California's headwaters and take steps to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire.

The videos use striking visuals and expert interviews to highlight the challenges, impacts and solutions in a fast-paced and engaging way. They were developed and funded in coordination with ACWA's Headwaters Workgroup.

Member agencies can use the videos to educate customers, community leaders and lawmakers in Sacramento and Washington DC. The main video is 4 minutes and 28 seconds long and includes the most detailed look at the issue. A shorter 1-minute version is also available, as well as four short vignette-style videos highlighting four separate aspects of the issue.

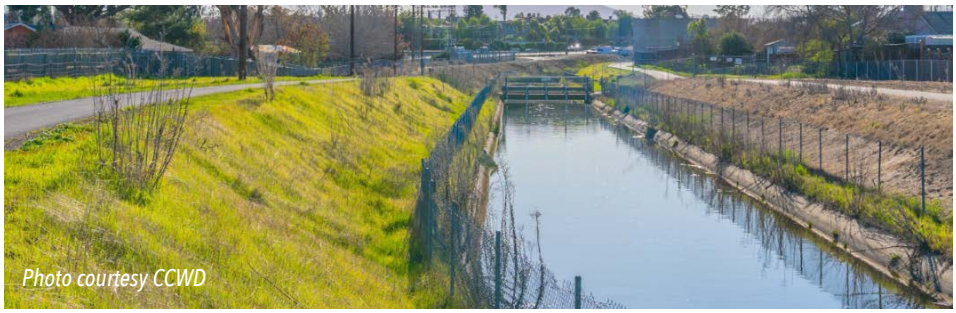
For suggestions on how to utilize the videos, as well as sample social media posts, hashtags and a link to download them, members can access the toolkit Advisory by using the accompanying QR code.

CCWD Campaign Raises Awareness About Contra Costa Canal

Contra Costa Water District (CCWD) has launched a new public awareness campaign to highlight the importance of the Contra Costa Canal and the need to plan for the replacement of its most critical and aging segments. The campaign, titled "Serving Today, Planning for Tomorrow," is designed to educate the community on how this 80-year-old system supports water reliability for more than 520,000 people — and why proactive planning is essential.

The highlight of the campaign is a narrated two-minute video. Supporting materials include a mix of digital outreach, printed literature, paid advertising, and updated online resources to help residents and stakeholders understand the canal's role and the challenges ahead.

Built in the 1930s and '40s, the Contra Costa Canal delivers untreated water from the Bay-Delta to local water treatment plants, industrial users, and irrigation customers. It supplies 99% of CCWD's total water deliveries. While the canal has served the region well for generations, its open, concrete-lined design now poses increasing challenges — from storm-related damage and debris to safety risks and water quality concerns.


Photo courtesy CCWD

"Reliable water is what has allowed our communities to grow, thrive, and succeed for generations," stated CCWD Board President and ACWA Vice President Ernesto Avila in a news release. "Our children and their children deserve the same: clean, dependable water that is safe and available whenever they turn on the tap."

The Canal Replacement Program proposes replacing the Main Canal — from Rock Slough near Oakley to Clyde, just north of Concord — with a buried pipeline. This new configuration would be more resilient to extreme weather, easier to maintain, and better protected from contamination.

"We're still in the early stages of project planning," stated CCWD General Manager Rachel Murphy in the news release. "Right now, we're evaluating design options, environmental considerations, and funding strategies. The goal is to deliver long-term water reliability while minimizing impacts during construction."

Nation's First Public Hydrogen Utility Welcomes Inaugural Member

First Public Hydrogen (FPH2) has welcomed Rowland Water District (RWD) as its first member, marking a key milestone in the development of the United States' first public hydrogen utility.

Based in southeast Los Angeles County, Rowland Water District serves more than 55,000 residents across five cities and unincorporated communities. As a member of FPH2, RWD will gain access to shared procurement tools, technical expertise, and a transparent platform that connects public agencies with green hydrogen producers. The district will also help pilot early-stage hydrogen applications suited for public sector systems, from vehicle fleets to energy backup systems.

"Joining First Public Hydrogen reflects our commitment to innovation and resource stewardship," stated RWD General Manager Tom Coleman in a news release. "As a public agency, we have a responsibility to explore solutions that protect our environment while maintaining reliable service for our customers. This partnership allows us to play a meaningful role in shaping California's clean energy future — while continuing to put the needs of our community first."

With no cost, liability, or purchase obligation, the FPH2 model is designed to lower barriers for participation while offering access to infrastructure support, statewide collaborations, and future funding opportunities.

"Rowland Water District's decision to join as our first member validates the vision behind First Public Hydrogen — a joint public utility built on accessibility, transparency and regional collaboration," stated R. Rex Parris, First Public Hydrogen Chairman, in the news release. "Their leadership demonstrates how public agencies can take bold, practical steps to accelerate hydrogen adoption and build a more sustainable energy future for California."

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Designate Your Voter by June 20!

Each member agency must select one voting representative to participate in ACWA's elections for President, Vice President and Region Boards for the 2026-'27 term.

Learn more about the election process at **acwa.com/elections**.

MOST CLICKED

Subscribe to ACWA's eNews at **acwa.com/newsletters/ACWA-eNews** for weekly email updates on the latest association news. Check out some of the top stories from the past month on ACWA's website.

- ACWA Presents Leadership Award to Wes Monier – May 14
- Rowland Water District Launches New and Improved Website – May 14
- Five California College Students Awarded ACWA Scholarships – May 15
- State Water Board to Hold Webinars on Urban Water Use Objective – May 7
- Toolkit Available to Celebrate Water Awareness Month in May – April 21

UPCOMING EVENTS

Visit **acwa.com/events** for complete listing and registration

JUN 2025
18

Well 2025 Webinar - Recycled Water: A Key to Resilient Water Future
Water Education for Latino Leaders | Virtual

This webinar on recycled water's role in California's water resilience offers elected officials a concise, policy-focused overview of its safe use, benefits, and implementation across communities.

JUN 2025
20

Emerging Strategies to Build and Retain Your Water Workforce
ACWA Foundation | Virtual

This training focuses on California's water workforce challenges, offering data, tools, and strategies to help agencies address key trends, enhance hiring practices, and improve recruitment, training, and retention of future water professionals.

JUN 2025
30

5 Years of Central Valley Water Quality Progress
CV-Salts | Virtual

This online summit highlighting five years of CV-SALTS implementation, featuring regional updates on safe drinking water, salt management, and collaborative efforts to protect water quality and support the Central Valley's communities and economy.

JUL 2025
15

Combating Misinformation in Public Communications
ACWA & CAPIO | Virtual

Join ACWA and CAPIO for a webinar on combating misinformation. Gain practical tools to boost transparency, counter false narratives, and strengthen community trust in crisis and everyday communications.

AUG 2025
13

ACWA Quarterly Policy Committee Meetings
ACWA | Virtual

ACWA's Agriculture, Energy, Groundwater, Water Management and Water Quality committees will meet to discuss key water policy issues. Open to non-committee members. Registration required.

AUG 2025
19-21

CA Water Data Summit: A Decade of Data-Driven Discoveries
CA Data Collaborative | Davis

Celebrate 10 years of the California Data Collaborative with panels, roundtables, and networking focused on data-driven water management, climate resilience and innovation.