

Making Waves: Shaping the Future of Water in General Plans

Association of California Water Agencies (ACWA) Conference
Local Government Committee
December 2, 2025



☆LCI Planning
Guidelines Update



CA Governor's Office of
**Land Use and
Climate Innovation**



CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF
WATER RESOURCES

Julia Ekstrom
Environmental Program Manager
California Dept of Water Resources



Rosalyn Prickett
Principal, Water Resources
Rincon Consultants, Inc.

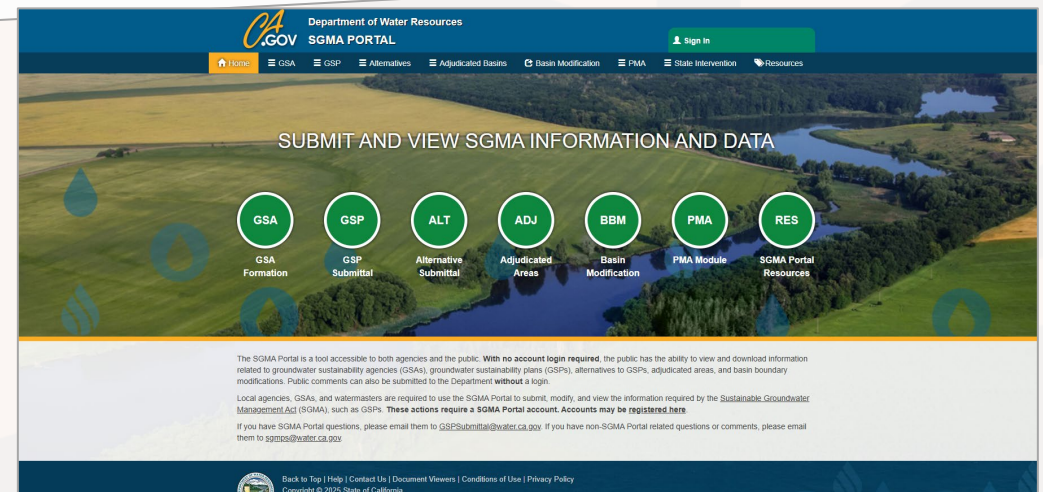
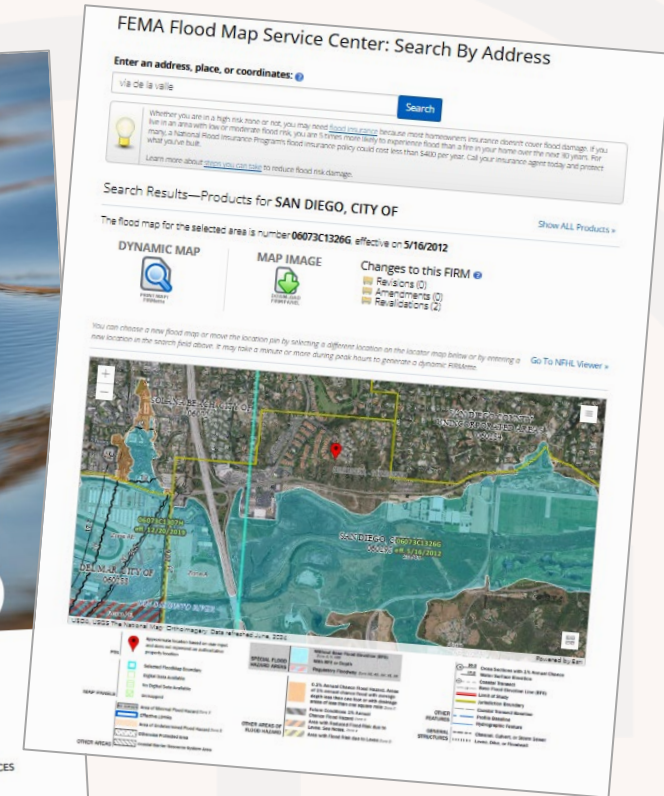
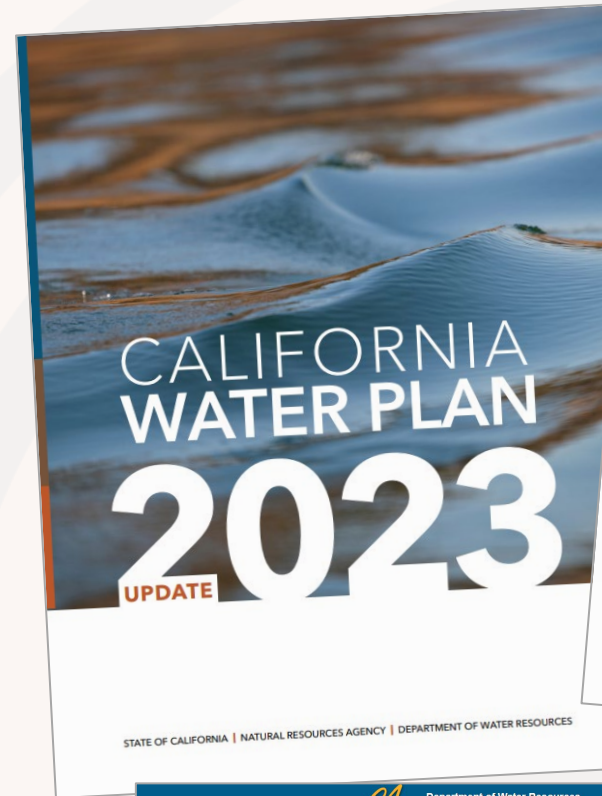


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What information, guidance, and tools/data should be included in the General Plan Guidelines to make planning and collaboration easier for water?



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What is a General Plan and what are its contents?



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General Plans are the blueprint for how California communities grow—guiding land use, housing, transportation, open space, and utilities.



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Image by Urban Advantage, Community Design + Architecture

General Plan Elements

- | | |
|-----------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Land Use | 6. Safety |
| 2. Circulation | 7. Noise |
| 3. Housing | 8. Environmental Justice |
| 4. Open Space | 9. Air Quality |
| 5. Conservation | |



Climate Change, Natural and Working Landscapes, Water, Economic Development

Jurisdictions may add "optional" elements. Elements can be combined in any way.

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Sample Water Element

WR-1

To effectively manage water supply by adequately planning for the development, conservation, and protection of water resources for present and future generations.

WR-1.1

EJ HC

Sustainable Water Supply

The County should encourage water suppliers, groundwater management agencies, and groundwater sustainability agencies to inventory and monitor the quantity and quality of the county's water resources, and to identify and implement measures to ensure a sustainable water supply to serve all existing and future residents, businesses, agriculture, government, and the environment. (IGC, SO)

WR-1.2

Watershed Planning

The County shall consider the location of a discretionary project within a watershed to determine whether or not it could negatively impact a water source. As part of discretionary project review, the County shall also consider local watershed management plans when considering land use development. (MPSP, RDR)

WR-1.3

Portfolio of Water Sources

The County shall support the use of, conveyance of, and seek to secure water from varied sources that contribute to a diverse water supply portfolio. The water supply portfolio may include, but is not limited to, imported water, surface water, groundwater, treated brackish groundwater, desalinated seawater, recycled water, and stormwater where economically feasible and protective of the environmental and public health. (IGC)

WR-4

To maintain and restore the chemical, physical, and biological integrity and quantity of groundwater resources.

WR-4.1

EJ HC CAP

Groundwater Management

The County shall work with water suppliers, water users, groundwater management agencies, and groundwater sustainability agencies to implement the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) and manage groundwater resources within the sustainable yield of each basin to ensure that county residents, businesses, agriculture, government, and the environment have reliable, high-quality groundwater to serve existing and planned land uses during prolonged drought years. (IGC, RDR, SO)

WR-4.2

Important Groundwater Recharge Area Protection

In areas identified as important recharge areas by the County or the applicable Groundwater Sustainability Agency, the County shall condition discretionary development to limit impervious surfaces where feasible and shall require mitigation in cases where there is the potential for discharge of harmful pollutants within important groundwater recharge areas. (IGC, RDR)

Ventura County GPU 2040

Opportunities

- No guidance currently exists for Optional Water Element – opportunity to address spectrum of water management strategies, integrate across elements
- Align with statewide efforts – clarify water-related plans and regulations that affect land use (e.g., California Water Plan, Sustainable Groundwater Management Act, Federal Emergency Management Act, etc.)
- Promote multi-benefit solutions – emphasize how to leverage watershed and water management strategies to achieve community benefits (e.g., flood mitigation and managed aquifer recharge opportunities)
- Identify data sources – provide data and resources to help local agencies understand, assess, and prioritize water management strategies

What is the Planning Guidelines Update?



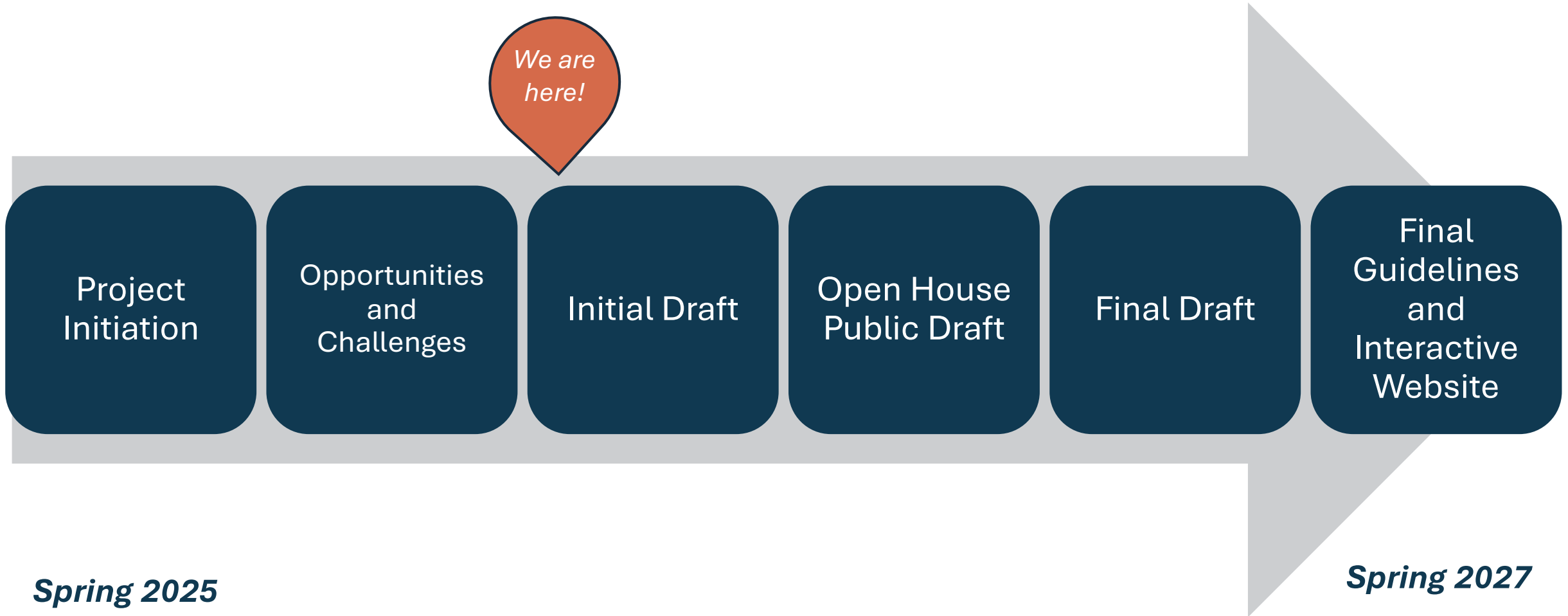
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What We're Doing

- Comprehensive updates to:
 - General Plan Guidelines (excluding Housing)
 - Planner's Guide to Specific Plans
 - Tribal Consultation Guidelines
- An interactive project website
- Complete by March 2027



Planning Guidelines Timeline



Planning Guidelines Update Topics

- 9 Required Elements
- Optional Topics/Elements
 - **Water**
 - Historic Preservation
 - Economic Development
 - Urban Design and Placemaking
 - Agriculture and Working Lands
- Cross Cutting Topics
 - Climate Adaptation and Resilience
 - Tribal Knowledge
 - Equity and Health
 - Community Engagement



Engagement Activities

- ✓ Project Workshops
- ✓ Informal Listening Sessions
- ✓ Topic-specific Advisory Groups
- ✓ Online surveys and feedback forms
- ✓ State Interagency Advisory Group
- ✓ DWR Workshop for Water Agencies
- ✓ APA Fall Conference
- ✓ ACWA Fall Conference ★

DWR Survey of Water Industry



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SURVEY RESULTS

Type of Organization

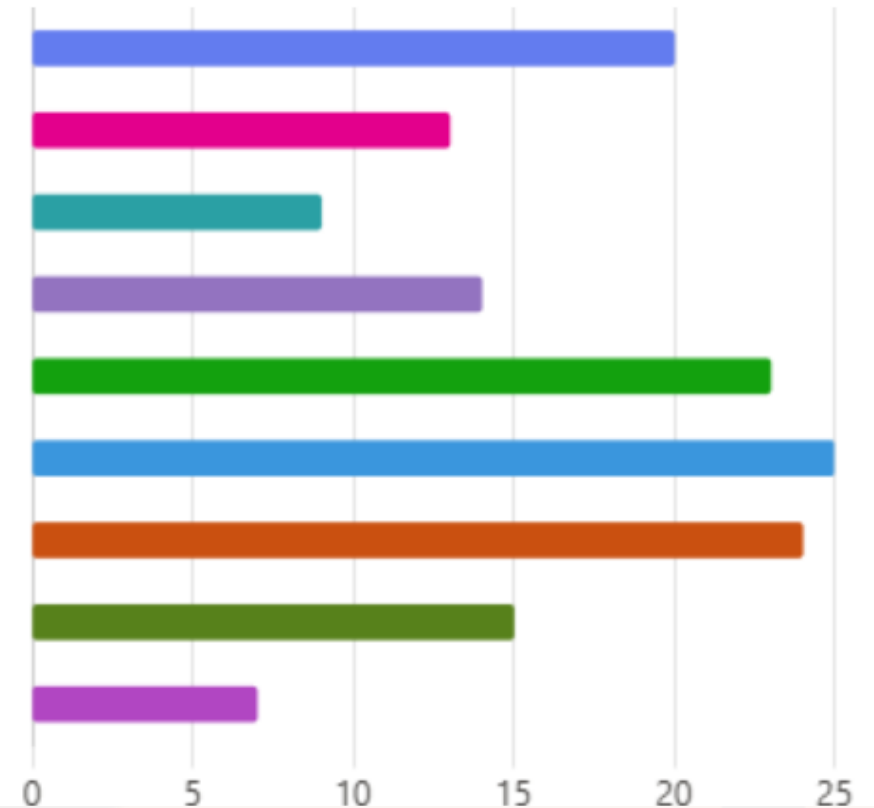


SURVEY RESULTS

Planning Challenges

10. **Planning Challenges:** What water-related planning challenges does your community or agency face? (check all that apply)

● Groundwater overdraft	20
● Flooding	13
● Drinking water access	9
● Water quality contamination	14
● Infrastructure failure - aging or underperforming water infrastructure	23
● Lack of coordination between land use and water entities	25
● Climate-driven extremes (droughts/floods)	24
● Regulatory conflicts	15
● Other	7



Gaps or Conflicts in Addressing Water Issues in Local Land Use Decisions and/or General Plan (examples)

1. Coordination Misalignments

- GPs often “have very minimal discussion of water resources.”
- “The land use entity is not in sync with the water supplier.”
- No clear framework for who says “*no*” when water isn’t available.

2. Water Supply Reliability

- “Projected reliability of SWP deliveries... could result in future shortages.”
- ADU growth creates “potential for increased demand without an evaluation” of supply.
- Annual planning “masks shortages in certain months.”

3. Groundwater & SGMA

- “GP is not aligned with SGMA... no quantitative water targets.”
- County well permitting and “Right to Farm” ordinances conflict with GSA sustainability.
- “Unresolved issue re... overdraft and lack of upfront deal making.”

4. Flood & Infrastructure Integration

- “Creeks are hemmed in by private property... floodwalls inhibit maintenance and block wildlife corridors.”
- Project-by-project mitigation loses opportunities for “regional solutions.”
- Building in floodplains pressured by housing needs.

5. Public Awareness & Political Will

- Policies use words to avoid commitments.
- Ecosystem needs are “an afterthought... most concern being placed on economic growth.”

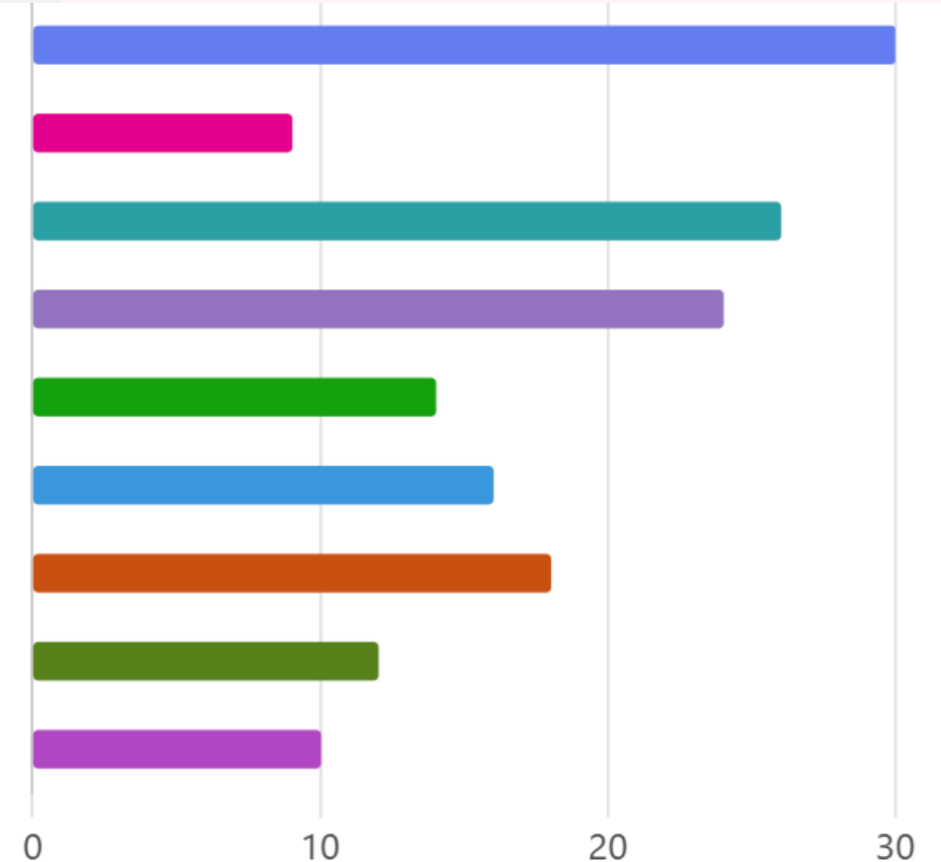
6. Resources & Capacity

- “Limited funding to adapt to changing climate.”
- “Data gaps related to water supply for rural areas.”
- Difficulty “keeping up with different agency criteria.”

SURVEY RESULTS

Desired Role of Water Element

- Improve coordination between land use and water planning 30
- Elevate water equity and affordability 9
- Alignment between local water planning efforts (E.g., SGMA, IRWM, UWMP, etc.) 26
- Alignment between local water planning and state planning efforts 24
- Promote specific goals (E.g.: nature-based solutions, GHG reduction, etc.) 14
- Encourage flood safe and water security growth 16
- Foster climate resilience 18
- Facilitate the use of floodwaters for aquifer recharge (<https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/waterrights/water...>) 12
- Other 10



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Desired Role of Water Element

"A Water Element **could set high-level goals for coordination** with implementing policies that require specific actions of both parties to work cooperatively in a timely manner. The Water Element could be **a tool to balance competing interests** of development/densification with finite water supplies."

- Survey Respondent



What are the potential contents for a Water Element?



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Key Topics

Water Supply

- Provide reliable water supplies
- Sustainably manage groundwater resources
- Expand recycled water and recharge projects
- Aging infrastructure and addressing deficiencies
- Safe and clean drinking water for all community members

Storm/Flood Management

- Manage flood flows for public safety and property
- Use flood flows for groundwater recharge
- Expand surface runoff capture and beneficial reuse

Key Topics (continued)

Water Quality

- Consolidation into municipal water/wastewater systems
- Protect surface and groundwater quality
- Effective collection and disposal of wastewater
- Develop water and wastewater treatment solutions

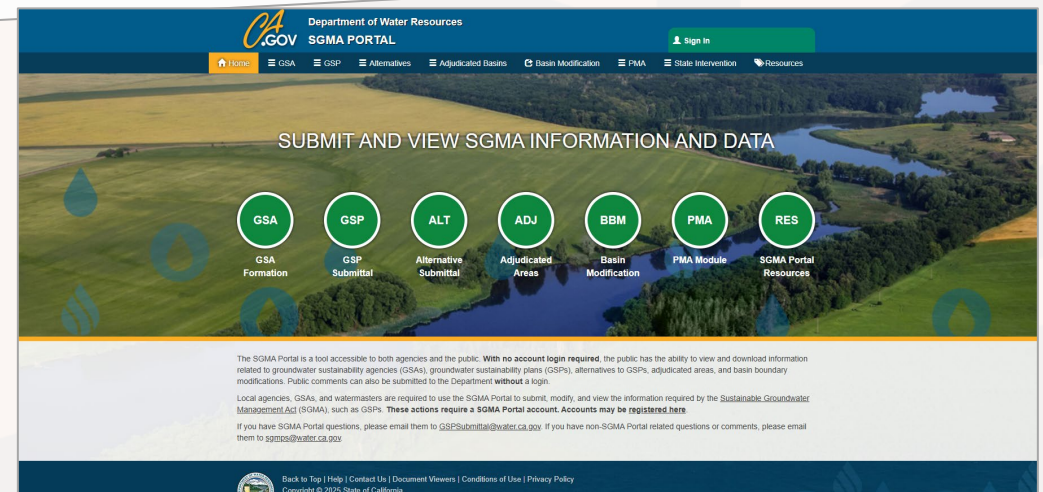
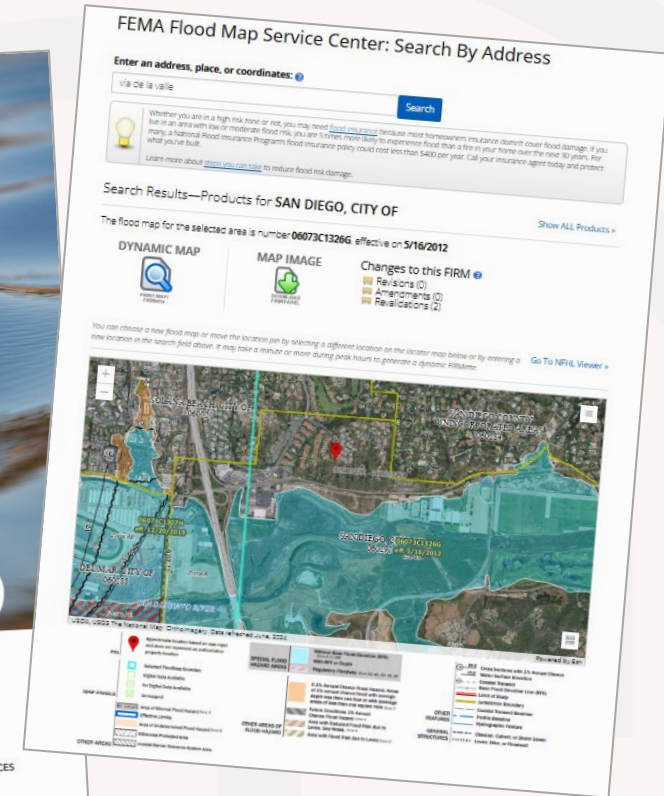
Watersheds/Habitats

- Ecosystem benefits from surface waters, wetlands, and aquatic habitats
- Public access and recreation multi-benefits along waterways
- Resilient watershed management, including healthy headwaters

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Your voice matters! Stay involved!



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Stay Involved!

- Visit the project website for more information:
planningupdate.lci.ca.gov/
- Reach out to the LCI Planning Guidelines Update team (planningupdate@lci.ca.gov) with any questions about the project!



Fill out the interest form to stay up to date on the project!

Thank you!



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