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Left: ACWA's incoming President Ernie Avila and Vice President Carol Lee Gonzales-Brady appear on the Main Stage, where the ceremonial passing of the gavel ceremony was among many highlights of the ACWA 2025 Fall Conference & Expo. **Right:** Avila presents outgoing ACWA President Cathy Green with a plaque celebrating her term leading the association.

ACWA Delivers Successful San Diego Fall Conference

ACWA hosted its 2025 Fall Conference & Expo in San Diego during the first week of December where more than 1,600 attendees accessed the latest information on leading California water issues while enjoying opportunities for learning, networking and strengthening their statewide connections.

Discussion topics ranged from the role of artificial intelligence in water management to the Colorado River and navigating infrastructure funding and regulations in a shifting federal landscape.

Keynote speakers included Western Growers President and CEO Dave Puglia, who delivered the welcoming address on Wednesday and spoke to ongoing issues within California water and agriculture. Letitia Grenier, Director of the Water Policy Center at the Public Policy Institute of California, spoke as the Thursday keynote speaker and shared her perspectives on the need for more research into water issues.

In addition to AI as a discussion panel topic, the conference's Water Talk speaker featured AI expert and researcher Gigi Karmous-Edwards, CEO of Karmous-Edwards Consulting, who spoke about the role of generative AI in the global water sector.

By the numbers, the latest ACWA conference featured 26 educational sessions, 13 committee and task force meetings, nine ACWA regional membership meetings and more than 87 Exhibit Hall booths, along with receptions and daily opportunities for professional network building. Additionally, 36 sponsors supported the conference.

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

PFAS

Title: "The PFAStrophe: A Legal Overview on What's New in PFAS Regulation, Legislation, and Litigation"

Selected audio recordings of conference programs will be available to registrants (see email for details), or for purchase through **acwa.com**.

CONFERENCE continued on page 4 >

2 Leadership Column: Looking Back and Planning Ahead as New Year Arrives
6 Images from Fall Conference Fill Photo Collage
8 ACWA Region Boards Co-Host Southern California Water Forum

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ACWA INTERIM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
MARWAN KHALIFA

Looking Back and Planning Ahead as a New Year Arrives



Powerful currents of change driven by Mother Nature, by shifting water policy and by evolving ACWA member needs have brought us to the end of another eventful year. We have been through a lot together and have a solid foundation on which to build a successful 2026.

At the federal level, we are proactively navigating a major shift in water policy, marked by transformative changes to the Clean Water Act, National Environmental Policy Act, and Endangered Species Act. At the state level, we are positioning ourselves for success as California prepares for a new gubernatorial administration. And at the association level, we are implementing a new five-year Strategic Plan designed not just to serve ACWA's members, but to help them thrive through strong advocacy, robust engagement, education, communication, and continued fiscal strength.

ACWA is not merely riding the current of change — we are harnessing it. Thanks to your engagement and the dedication of our staff, the state of the association is strong and growing stronger.

Much of our momentum stems from steadily achieving goals within our 2025–'29 Strategic Plan, adopted by the Board in late 2024. It provides a clear, forward-looking roadmap to sharpen our focus and invest resources where they matter most. In just the first year, we have completed 70% of the measurable objectives, representing a reflection of our shared commitment and organizational discipline. A key achievement includes developing a strategy to leverage member expertise so we can get ahead of the issues that matter most.

This year also underscored ACWA's essential role in statewide water policy. From Sacramento to Washington, D.C., we ensured the voices of California's water managers were heard. ACWA engaged on more than 45 regulatory issues and nearly 120 legislative issues. ACWA-sponsored legislation advanced, including SB 394, which strengthens penalties for water theft and was signed by Governor Newsom.

Member engagement helped power these outcomes: 31 advocacy Alerts prompted 138 agencies to take more than 560 actions. I can't stress enough how important it is to have individual agency actions backing up ACWA's advocacy.

Connecting members remains the engine behind our advocacy. This year we hosted three major conferences, a Legislative Symposium and seven Region events. Education and communication continue to elevate our collective voice, with seven webinars covering topics from cybersecurity to water rights data.

ACWA also remains fiscally strong. Through disciplined financial stewardship, we strengthened cash balances and reduced unfunded pension liabilities, allowing the Board to reduce the planned 2026 dues increase from 2.5% to 1%, a tangible return on responsible governance.

Looking ahead, ACWA will focus on making water issues a top priority for candidates running for governor during the 2026 primary election. At the same time, the results of our recent member engagement survey will help guide our work in supporting members and strengthening local and regional efforts.

Thank you for your engagement, partnership and commitment to ACWA and California water. Whatever challenges, opportunities or surprises lie ahead of us, we will face them together. I wish you all a warm holiday break with your loved ones, and Happy New Year!

ACWA Board Briefed on 2025 Accomplishments

The ACWA Board of Directors held its last meeting for 2025 on Nov. 21 and received summaries on association accomplishments during the first year of the 2025-'29 Strategic Plan, including updates on state and federal advocacy successes, as well as the status of internal and external engagement surveys.

Strategic Plan

Fifty key performance indicators, or KPIs, underpin the Strategic Plan and measure progress toward meeting specific targets within four goals — advocacy, connections, education and organizational strength. ACWA Interim Executive Director Marwan Khalifa reported that 70% of KPIs have been completed since the beginning of the year.

Advocacy

ACWA staff briefed Board members on two association-sponsored bills before the state Legislature during 2025. SB 394 (Allen, D-Santa Monica), cosponsored with Las Virgenes Municipal Water District, was signed into law and will strengthen water agencies' ability to increase penalties for water theft from fire hydrants.

A second bill, SB 454 (McNerney, D-Stockton), cosponsored with the League of California Cities, would have created a statewide PFAS Mitigation Fund. Despite lack of opposition within the Legislature, Gov. Gavin Newsom ultimately vetoed the bill citing fiscal concerns.

ACWA reviewed and took positions on nearly 60 bills during the past year.

On the federal advocacy side, ACWA staff reviewed activity in Washington, D.C. during the past year, when the association took positions on nearly 60 pieces of legislation in Congress. This was in addition to signing advocacy letters focused on the importance of water infrastructure funding.

Highlights included support for the continued advancement of the Fix Our Forests Act in the Senate, as well as ACWA D.C. staff supporting funding on water-related issues in the wake of federal government budget cuts and tracking impacts from the recently ended government shutdown.

Surveys

ACWA staff also updated Board members on an ACWA member engagement survey distributed by an independent firm in October, the first since 2022. Board members will receive a full briefing in January on the results, which will inform them on the membership's priority issues and how to best enhance member services and opportunities.

Board members were also briefed on the results from a survey of ACWA staff. Overall, the results showed that the fundamentals for productivity remain strong, with employees reporting having clarity in expectations, access to the right materials and resources, and a strong commitment to quality.

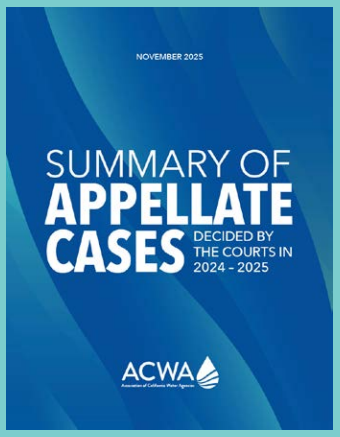
Requests for Assistance

Board members approved requests from member agencies asking ACWA to file Amicus Curiae letters in support of legal cases either directly or indirectly affecting them. The cases included *City of Pico Rivera v. Pico Water District, Bring Back the Kern v. City of Bakersfield, Town of Apple Valley v. Apple Valley Ranchos Water and United Water Conservation District v. United States.*

Summaries on 2025 Legislation and Appellate Cases Available for Members

Download at acwa.com/resources









Left: An expert panel features perspectives on the Colorado River and next steps in negotiations. **Right:** Roundtable participants share thoughts on what's ahead for California water managers.

CONFERENCE continued from page 1

Panelists: (Moderator) Claire Collins, Partner, Hanson Bridgett LLP; Stephen Cole, Assistant General Manager, SCV Water; Andrew Gagen, Partner, Kidman Gagen Law LLP; Kenneth Sansone, Partner; SL Environmental Law Group, P.C.

Key issue(s): Panelists discussed the impacts of PFAS on water agencies and shared anecdotes about how ACWA member agencies are responding. Panelists also highlighted regulatory and legal challenges, as well as funding sources for treatment efforts, as PFAS issues continue to develop.

Collins quote: "That's why this topic keeps coming back. It's evolving so quickly. If you think you know a lot about PFAS, that's great. But two years from now, we're going to do this program again and you're going to know more."

Colorado River

Title: "Puzzle Pieces of the Colorado River"

Panelists: (Moderator) Meena Westford, Director of Imported Water, San Diego County Water Authority (SDCWA); Brenda Burman, General Manager, Central Arizona Project; Dan Denham, General Manager, SDCWA; Jessica Neuwerth, Executive Director, Colorado River Board of California

Key issue(s): Panelists discussed development and negotiations of guidelines on Colorado River water management, their importance to California water and current actions taken by parties within the Colorado River basin.

Westford quote: "We're entering into a moment in history where the math no longer hides the politics. Climate change has collapsed the margin of error. Evaporation is real, infrastructure is aging and demand doesn't go away just because it becomes inconvenient. But this basin has proved something over and over again. We do hard things, and today we're going to talk about that."

Neuwerth quote: "California is on track to have the lowest water use that we've had since 1950 on the Colorado River, despite maintaining agricultural production and strong urban economies. I think we are a demonstration across the basin — it is possible to do more with less, that using less water does not have to be an existential threat to your communities."

Invasive Species

Title: "California's Battle Against Invasive Species and Their Threat to Native Fisheries"

CONFERENCE continued on page 5 >

COMMENTS ON CONFERENCE



CRAIG MILLER
General Manager
Western Municipal Water District
40th Conference

"ACWA conferences provide a fabulous forum to bring water leaders together to talk abut water policy issues that we can't do on a daily basis."



JORGE MARQUEZ
Board Member
Three Valleys Municipal Water District
1st Conference

"It's making connections with people in water and hearing what other parts of the state are dealing with – Central Valley, San Diego and Bay Area for example."

CONFERENCE continued from page 4

Panelists: (Moderator) David Weisenberger, General Manager, Banta-Carbona Irrigation District; Andrea Fuller, Vice President and Senior Biologist, FISHBIO; Dana Lee, Senior Fisheries Biologist, FISHBIO; Kai Palenscar, Habitat Conservation Plan Compliance Program Manager, San Bernardino Valley Municipal Water District; Kelly Stockton-Fiti, Principle Research Scientist, KASF Consulting, LLC

Key issue(s): Scientists discussed how invasive species are reshaping California's water by threatening salmon, steelhead and water infrastructure, ranging from new arrivals such as the Golden Mussel to long-established predators such as striped bass.

Fuller quote: "We're not saying that flow isn't important. We're not saying that habitat restoration is not important. But we have a larger suite of actions that could be taken, including looking at predators and competitors, non-native fish that have been introduced into the system."

Water Management Roundtable

Title: "Vision for the Future"

Panelists: (Moderator) Andy Fecko, General Manager, Placer County Water Agency; Karla Nemeth, Director, Department of Water Resources; Austin Ewell, Owner, The Ewell Group of Companies



A panel on innovation gives attendees a look into the thinking behind groundbreaking advances in California water.

Key issue(s): This forward-looking roundtable brought together California's leading water professionals, policy experts and thought leaders to explore priorities for a sustainable water future. Small breakout discussions between speakers also allowed dialogue on critical issues including climate resilience, infrastructure, environmental stewardship and water supply reliability.

Fecko quote: "We're here to sort of define the future of how ACWA approaches advocating for all of us members. …to get your feedback to guide the future for ACWA."

Innovation

Title: "Shaping the Future of California Water Through Innovation"

Panelists: (Moderator) Maurice Chaney, Public Information Officer, City of Roseville; Kassy Chauhan, Special Project Manager, Fresno Irrigation District; Sarah Hussong Johnson, Director of Engineering, Tahoe City Public Utility District; Brad Koehn, General Manager, Turlock Irrigation District; Andy Ramirez, Board Director, Beaumont-Cherry Valley Water District

Key issue(s): California's water agencies continue breaking new ground with bold ideas and breakthrough solutions. From cutting-edge technology to game-changing infrastructure updates, innovators continue to redefine what's possible. Panelists discussed solar panels over canals, AMI/AMR upgrades, recharge basins and a regional water treatment plant.

CONFERENCE continued on page 9 >



LAURYN DULTZ

Business Development Manager
Hanson Bridgett LLP
4th Conference

"We have a lot of really great clients who come through and it's a great opportunity to humanize us especially as attorneys. We're a really friendly bunch and it's great to build those relationships."



RICK ERKENEFF

Board Member
South Coast Water District
5th Conference

"I think ACWA conferences are great. You get to see a lot of old friends and always make some new friends."



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ACWA 2025 Fall Conference & Expo

1. Past ACWA President Steven LaMar visits UC San Diego's Scripps Institution of Oceanography CW3E booth in the Exhibit Hall
2. ACWA Interim Executive Director Marwan Khalifa and ACWA President Ernie Avila recognize outgoing Region 1 Chair and Vice Chair, (l-r center) Elizabeth Salomone and Jennifer Burke, for their leadership during the 2024-'25 term.
3. State Water Resources Control Board Chair E. Joaquin Esquivel (right) participates in a panel discussion about Bay-Delta policy.
4. ACWA JPIA staffers have fun during the Exhibit Hall's H2O All Stars Tailgate Reception.
5. Conference attendees catch up over coffee.
6. Spell it out! The ACWA letters return to another conference.
7. A Main Stage event packs the house.
8. Attendees take a break and charge up their devices at the ACWA Power Bar.
9. Conference goers connect with exhibitors at the "Hydrohub" sponsored by GEI Consultants.
10. Department of Water Resources Director Karla Nemeth speaks during the Water Management Roundtable.



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Opening Keynote Speaker Calls for Overhaul of Regulatory Policies to Support More Water Storage

Dave Puglia



Opening the ACWA 2025 Fall Conference & Expo, Western Growers President and CEO Dave Puglia delivered an incisive keynote address calling out legislative and state policies that hobble the state's agricultural community.

He came with plenty of examples, calling for a redefinition of public benefit to support more water storage.

"(Sites Reservoir) has not seen a shovel of dirt turned. It's been 11 years since the voters said 'Let's go!' and still, we muddle along in a regulatory scheme while construction costs climb and the tab to be paid by water users goes higher," Puglia said.

Puglia emphasized California's national agricultural dominance; but even though it generates $61 billion in value, the state's agriculture industry is struggling.

Soaring production costs, driven by state-level policy decisions, are outpacing inflation and squeezing farm profitability. Over the past decade, California farmers saw expenses rise by nearly 30% while revenue increased only 9%, according to Puglia. And much of that dynamic originates within the legislative and policy community that ignores realities inherent to the agriculture industry.

Examples range from legislation upending established overtime pay for farm workers to California's banning the use of autonomous farm vehicles.

"We've been fighting this for about four years now. Even though we have Waymos running around San Francisco, Los Angeles, yet somehow, we can't have a tractor," Puglia said.

Letitia Grenier



Thursday's keynote address was delivered by Letitia Grenier, Director of the Public Policy Institute of California's (PPIC) Water Policy Center. She closed the conference with an overview of some of the PPIC's recent research data and emphasized the need for more water-related research.

"The need for good research is greater than ever," she stated. In particular, she noted California's water challenges are not going away and that research can help us do more with less.

She also talked about the ways in which research can provide data to support investment decisions and find new ways to fund projects and safeguard water affordability.

"I love being around water people," she said. "You have integrity and I love how smart water people are and how great you are. You like to tackle water problems and solve them. I'm really honored to be part of your world, and I know you are going to come to solutions."

The PPIC Water Policy Center connects nonpartisan, objective research to real-world water management debates, with the goal of putting California water policy on a sustainable and constructive path. Learn more about the center and review its research and data at **ppic.org/water.**

Water Talk



Few topics generate more buzz than artificial intelligence (AI) these days, and when it comes to water management ACWA member agencies large and small have far more to gain than lose.

That was the message attendees of ACWA's Fall 2025 Conference & Expo heard during a Water Talk presentation, when they received a fast-paced breakdown of how AI can benefit their operations from a leading expert in the field.

Gigi Karmous-Edwards, of Karmous Edwards Consulting, has invested the majority of her more than 25-year career into state-of-the-art digital technologies. An expert in Generative AI in the water sector, she provided a few examples of how water agencies are employing the technology.

Generative AI creates new content and insights — producing text, images or audio — using patterns learned from existing data. In Georgia, a city water utility used it to capture the extensive knowledge of a highly experienced treatment operator, Jerry, who was about to retire. It created a "What Would Jerry Do?" chatbot modeled on technical answers he had provided about subjects such as chlorine.

Karmous-Edwards' presentation summarized the benefits of generative AI for utilities in five areas: 50% less time searching for information, faster troubleshooting with confidence, institutional knowledge preservation, better decisions with the same workforce and ability to run lean without burning out staff. Her last presentation slide summed up what's ahead for the technology in the water industry.

"Generative AI won't replace us, but leaders who know how to use it will shape the future of water."

Recordings will be available to registrants (see email for details), or for purchase through **acwa.com**.





Left: (l to r) Dan Denham, Jessica Neuwerth, Shanti Rosset and Assemblymember Jeff Gonzalez pause for a photo following the panel "Shared Sources, Shared Stakes: Colorado River in Southern California." **Right:** General Manager Mark Toy interviews U.S. Rep. Ken Calvert.

ACWA Region Boards Co-Host Southern California Water Forum

By Region 8 Chair Anthony Fellow, Region 9 Chair G. Patrick O'Dowd and Region 10 Chair Dana Friehauf

In an unprecedented collaboration, ACWA Regions 8, 9, and 10 organized the largest regional event in the association's history — a Southern California Water Forum highlighting shared challenges and innovative approaches.

The Nov. 13-14 event also provided an excellent opportunity for networking and collaboration among participating agencies on challenges they face and potential solutions.

Among the highlights of the daylong event held in Irvine was Keynote speaker Jeffrey Kightlinger, retired General Manager of Metropolitan Water District of Southern California. Kightlinger shared an overview of Southern California's water supply history and his perspective on current and future challenges and solutions.

"In 2020, I started thinking 'What is the challenge going to be for this generation?'" he said, noting that for the first time the region's population growth is slowing down and water sales have dropped significantly.

His advice for today's water managers – be creative, be flexible and be strategic in how you maximize existing water resources; and focus more investment on maintenance.

The event also featured two informational panel discussions and an interview with U.S. Rep Ken Calvert (R-CA-41), who addressed federal support for local projects, the Colorado River negotiations and the need for more surface storage, among other topics.

"It's our job, all of us, for the future of California, to develop a reliable water resource," he said. He also praised ACWA and its members for their federal advocacy and encouraged continued outreach to federal elected officials and to educate them on water issues.

Thank you to ACWA staff and the event's many sponsors for their support in making the event successful. Sponsors were ACWA JPIA, Best Best & Krieger, East Orange County Water District, Laguna Beach County Water District, Mesa Water District, Rancho Water, SCV Water, Santa Fe Irrigation District, Stantec, Townsend Public Affairs and Western Water.

Keynote Presentation: "Navigating Southern California's Water Future: Policy Challenges and Collaborative Opportunities," by Jeffery Kightlinger, retired General Manager, Metropolitan Water District of Southern California; owner, Acequia Consulting, LLC

Panel: "Shared Source, Shared Stakes: Colorado River in Southern California"

Speakers: (Moderator) Dan Denham, General Manager, San Diego County Water Authority; Shanti Rosset, Policy Manager, Colorado River Resources, Metropolitan Water District of Southern California; Jessica Neuwerth, Executive Director, Colorado River Board of California; and Jeff Gonzalez, Assemblymember (R-Indio)

Interview: "Inside Washington: Federal Priorities Shaping Water Policy" with U.S. Rep Ken Calvert (R-CA-41); (Moderator) Mark Toy, General Manager, Yorba Linda Water District

Panel: "Investing in Tomorrow: Projects Driving California's Water Security"

Speakers: (Moderator) Dave Pedersen, General Manager, Las Virgenes Municipal Water District; Mai Hattar, Chief Engineer, Metropolitan Water District of Southern California; Jennifer Pierre, General Manager, State Water Contractors; and Jerry Brown, Executive Director, Sites Project Authority

CONFERENCE continued from page 5

Johnson quote: "Innovation requires flexibility, so if you're being innovative and trying something new there's likely going to be setbacks; but they're just temporary, they're not permanent roadblocks — so, be nimble, be flexible, be creative."

Koehn quote: "I have to give it to staff because we found some key project champions and they really dug in, understood the why, and then drove that down into staff so we could develop a supportive team and a team that understands the finish line, and that sometimes to get to a finish line, you have to do things slightly differently than you've done in the past."

Chauhan quote: "I think the pilot is a good way to get to a yes and really demonstrates with an actual project that this can work. … it's not just words, there's action behind the words."

AI vs Cybersecurity

Title: "Balancing AI Innovation and Cybersecurity for California's Water Systems"

Panelists: (Moderator) Ranjiv Khush, Board of Directors, Marin Municipal Water District; Ty Justice, Information Technology Manager, Sonoma Water; Mehul Patel, Executive Director of Operations, Orange County Water District; Hunter Sargent, Cybersecurity Risk Specialist, ACWA JPIA

Key issue(s): Artificial Intelligence promises a wave of innovation for California's water systems and panelists discussed how agencies can assess the potential challenges, risks and benefits of implementing new technologies before determining whether it makes sense to move forward. They also provided practical strategies for strengthening cybersecurity.

Justice quote: "Start small and have an AI policy in place," on what advice he would give to general managers.

Khush quote: "AI is poised to transform how we serve customers, manage finances and run our organizations. … But each application, each new addition, brings its own cybersecurity considerations."

Financial Resilience

Title: "Building Financial Resilience: How Water Utilities Should Size and Invest Reserves"

Panelists: (Moderator) Dan Gumpert, Controller, ACWA; Robby Hannay,

CONFERENCE continued on page 12 >

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Left: California Farm Water Coalition Executive Director Mike Wade accepts ACWA's Lifetime Achievement Award from President Cathy Green. **Center:** Green presents ACWA's John P. Fraser Emissary Award to Cristel Tufenkjian, honoring her decades of volunteer work helping ACWA achieve its goals. Tufenkjian is currently the McMullin Area Groundwater Sustainability Agency Deputy Executive Director. **Right:** Avila presents the Excellence in Innovation Award to Turlock Irrigation District General Manager Brad Koehn and Board Director Becky Hackler Arellano for the district's Project Nexus.

ACWA Celebrates Above-And-Beyond Work, Awards Scholarship

Finalists for the Innovation and Communication awards discussed their projects and programs during separate programs at ACWA's 2025 Fall Conference & Expo. Registered attendees who missed the programs can listen to a recording by visiting **acwa.com**.

ACWA Honors Members for Outstanding Achievements, Communication, Innovation and Outreach

ACWA presented several awards at the 2025 Fall Conference & Expo Dec. 2-4 in San Diego. Awards were given out in five different categories: Emissary, Excellence in Innovation, Lifetime Achievement, Outreach and Huell Howser Excellence in Communication.

Emissary Award

The John P. Fraser Emissary Award recognizes individuals who have made remarkable contributions to California water through voluntary service to ACWA. The 2025 recipient of the ACWA Emissary Award is McMullin Area Groundwater Sustainability Agency Deputy Executive Director Cristel Tufenkjian. She has been a long-time supporter of ACWA, including serving on the Communications Committee since 2004 and as Chair of ACWA's Outreach Task Force since 2018. She has also led a number of award-winning outreach and education programs and earned her current and previous agency ACWA's top outreach award for Region 6 multiple times.

Excellence in Innovation Award

ACWA's Excellence in Innovation Award recognizes successful innovations by member agencies that continue to support and drive California toward long-term water resilience. The 2025 award recipient is Turlock Irrigation District for its Project Nexus. Project Nexus is the first pilot project in the United States to install solar panels over canals, generating renewable energy and reducing water evaporation without impacting customers. The project, in partnership with UC Merced, Solar AquaGrid, and the Department of Water Resources, produces 1.7 MW of clean energy while advancing sustainable water and energy management.

Lifetime Achievement Award

ACWA's Lifetime Achievement Award recognizes individuals who, throughout the course of their career, have made remarkable and lasting contributions to the California water community. The 2025 award recipient is California Farm Water Coalition Executive Director Mike Wade. He has served as Executive Director since 1998, educating the public about the critical connection between farm water and the state's food supply. He has also led the Agricultural Water Management Council and serves on ACWA's Communications Committee.

Outreach Awards

Throughout 2025, ACWA asked its member agencies to take action on many key issues, such as water theft, the Healthy Rivers and Landscapes Program, low-income rate assistance programs and PFAS. This outreach helps advance the association's legislative and regulatory agenda. These ACWA awards recognize the most active member agency in each region, as well as an overall winner and most active small agency.

The 2025 winners are:

- Region 1: Mendocino County Russian River Flood Control and Water Conservation Improvement District
- Region 2: Bella Vista Water District
- Region 3: Tuolumne Utilities District
- Region 4: San Juan Water District
- Region 5: Monterey Peninsula Water Management District
- Region 6: McMullin Area Groundwater Sustainability Agency
- Region 7: Friant Water Authority
- Region 8: Three Valleys Municipal Water District
- Region 9: West Valley Water District
- Region 10: Mesa Water District
- Top Regional Winner: West Valley Water District
- Most Active Small Agency Winner: Monte Vista Water District

continued on page 11 >

ACWA Outreach Program: 25 Years of Advocacy and Impact

For a quarter of a century, the ACWA Outreach Program has been the cornerstone of the association's collective voice by using a grass-roots approach to encourage and support member agencies' direct outreach to legislators, regulators and administration officials.



From "Good Idea" to "Necessity"

In July 2000, a framework for the Outreach Program was presented to the ACWA Board of Directors. By December of that year, the program was approved, and the Outreach Task Force was established to bring the vision to life. At the first Task Force meeting, then-Executive Director Steve Hall captured its essence: "This isn't just a good idea, this is a necessity."

First co-chaired by members Gary Arant and Keith Coolidge, the Task Force was charged with ensuring the program's successful implementation, providing ongoing oversight and creating a system to recognize the outstanding outreach efforts of members.

A Legacy of Achievement

Over the past 25 years, the Outreach Task Force has built a robust infrastructure that empowers every member to be an effective advocate. Key foundational accomplishments include:

- **Outreach Awards** — An annual tradition to celebrate and honor members for exceptional outreach.
- **The Outreach Handbook** — A living document serving as both a training tool for members to effectively engage with legislators, regulators and administration officials, and an overview of the program.
- **A Growing Grassroots Network** — Launched with 120 participants this network has since expanded to 1,204 outreach ambassadors.
- **Leadership Development** — The Task Force includes Outreach Captain training that enables regional leaders to bolster enthusiasm and awareness for the program.

The Program Today

Steadily built over 25 years, the Outreach Program is more vital and effective than ever as demonstrated by recent achievements:

- **Participation** by 138 member agencies resulting in 562 agency interactions with policymakers.
- **Mobilized** member agencies in response to a combined 31 key ACWA Alerts and Advisories, ensuring a swift and unified voice on critical issues.

"Thank you to every volunteer, ambassador, captain, and Task Force member who has contributed to this 25-year legacy," said ACWA Interim Executive Director Marwan Khalifa. "Your dedication ensures that ACWA's message is not just heard, but heeded."

continued from page 10

Huell Howser Excellence in Communication

ACWA's Huell Howser Excellence in Communication Award honors outstanding efforts in communicating important information to customers, legislators, media and the public. The award focuses on innovation and transparency and takes budget into consideration. The 2025 recipient is East Bay Municipal Utility District for its creative and impactful H2Flow Campaign. This campaign highlighted the importance of water in the community through partnerships with schools, community groups and Grammy- and Emmy-winning artists Alphabet Rockers.

Stephen K. Hall Water Law & Policy Scholarship

Oliver Slosser, Engineering Program Manager at Las Virgenes Municipal Water District and a law student at UCLA, was selected from a group of exemplary applicants to receive $10,000 to put toward his school tuition costs. The scholarship was established in 2007 in honor of former ACWA Executive Director Steve Hall, who passed away in 2010 after a lengthy battle with ALS.

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



East Bay Municipal Utility District Education Manager Kathryn Horn accepts the Huell Howser Excellence in Communication Award on behalf of the district for its H2Flow Campaign.





Left: Scientist Kelly Stockton-Fiti speaks during a panel discussion about challenges posed by invasive species to California water operations. **Center:** East Bay Municipal Utility District Treasury Manager Robert Hannay speaks during the Finance Program. **Right:** April Coady with Eastern Municipal Water District shares insights on how to effectively weather a social media crisis.

CONFERENCE continued from page 9

Treasury Manager, East Bay Municipal Utility District; Jason Klinghoffer, Chief Financial Officer, MaxQ Asset Management

Key issue(s): Financial reserves are the foundation of resilience for public water agencies and this panel explored how to determine the right amount of reserves for your agency, tips for creating an investment policy and best practices for investing reserve funds and evaluating the performance of the investment.

Hannay presentation: He analyzed reserve amounts of 15 large California water agencies and found the amount ranged widely from 32 days on hand to 988 days.

Social Media

Title: "Spotlight Session #4: Navigating the Fallout of a Controversial Social Media Moment"

Speaker: April Coady, Assistant General Manager, Eastern Municipal Water District

Key issue(s): A single social media post can ignite a public relations and human resources crisis overnight. Coady shared a real-life case study where a social media post concerning a water agency employee sparked public backlash around the country and internationally.

Coady quote: "Regardless of your agency's participation on social media, this can still happen to you," she said. "It felt like we were trapped on a roller coaster with an angry mob."



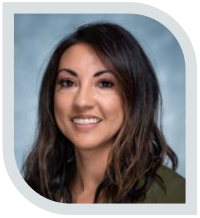
Three ACWA Employees Recognized for Service Milestones

20 Years



Senior Event Resource Specialist Avon Alfaro began her ACWA career as a Graphic Designer. She plays a key role in supporting association events and webinars with her technical skills, having earned certificates as a digital event strategist as well as in technical meeting and production. In 2025 her talent and hard work were celebrated as she was promoted to her current position.

Five Years



Senior Regional Affairs Representative Jennifer Rotz supports ACWA Regions 1, 3 and 5. Her knowledge of California's key water issues and trusted relationships among ACWA members have made her a valuable asset to the association. She also manages ACWA's Outreach Program, the Outreach Awards and serves as the liaison to the Outreach Task Force, all while spending countless hours on the road fostering relationships with members.



Senior State Relations Advocate Nick Blair has become an invaluable member of the ACWA team, known for taking on complex issues such as Clean Fleets and PFAS while consistently stepping in to support colleagues and the organization whenever needed. Nick's work is equally valued by ACWA's members, who recognize and appreciate his thoughtful engagement and dependable support on their most pressing challenges.

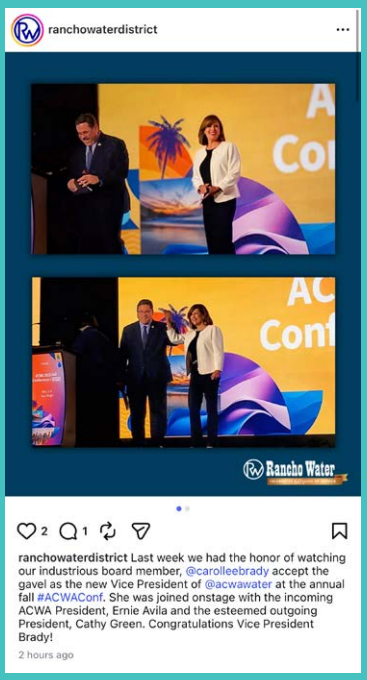
LIKE, SHARE & FOLLOW

EXPLORING THE WATER WORLD ACROSS SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media makes it easy to stay connected, even if you can't be at an event in person. At this year's ACWA 2025 Fall Conference & Expo in San Diego, attendees shared their favorite moments and takeaways using our branded hashtag, #ACWAConf.

If you missed the social media buzz from the conference, just search #ACWAConf on X, Facebook, Instagram or LinkedIn to catch up. Below is just a peek at some of the posts we saw throughout the week. You can also check out our YouTube short by using the QR code below.

VIEW YOUTUBE SHORT











Jason Phillips

Phillips Leaving Friant

The Friant Water Authority (FWA) in November announced that Chief Executive Officer **Jason Phillips** will step down from his position effective Jan. 19.

Phillips will transition into a leadership role in the private sector, where he plans to remain involved in Western water matters. Phillips had served as FWA's CEO since 2016.

"During his time with FWA, Jason has been a dedicated and results-driven leader whose influence was instrumental in advancing major infrastructure improvements, strengthening relationships with state and federal partners, and ensuring that Friant's priorities were at the forefront of critical water policy discussions. His leadership has left a lasting impact, and I'm certain Jason will be successful in his new role," FWA Board Chair **Richard Borges** stated in a news release.



Matt Stone

SCV Water GM Announces Retirement

SCV Water General Manager **Matt Stone** has announced his retirement, effective next July, after 10 years of service. The SCV Water Board of Directors named Assistant General Manager **Steve Cole** to succeed him.

Stone previously served as General Manager at the former Castaic Lake Water Agency beginning in 2015. In that capacity, he worked with Cole who was General Manager of Newhall County Water District (NCWD). They worked together on a merger that in 2018 resulted in today's SCV Water.

Stone retires after a 40-year career in water, including leadership roles at Rancho California Water District and the Municipal Water District of Orange County, along with private sector work. Cole is a past ACWA Region 8 Chair and brings more than 25 years of water industry experience, including 13 years at NCWD.



James Tickemyer

SGPWA Names Tickemyer to Board

The San Gorgonio Pass Water Agency (SGPWA) Board of Directors in November appointed **James Tickemyer** as its newest member. He fills a seat left vacant by the resignation of Board Secretary **Kevin Walton**.

Walton helped strengthen regional water reliability through SGPWA's support of Sites Reservoir, expand partnerships with small water systems and champion the installation of seven Heli-Hydrants to support faster wildfire response across the Pass area.

Tickemyer previously served as Director of Parks for the City of San Bernardino Recreation and Community Services, where he worked alongside the San Bernardino Municipal Water Department and the San Bernardino Valley Municipal Water District. His experience also includes more than 20 years as a licensed general contractor.



Marty Miller

Vista ID Elects 2026 Officers

The Vista Irrigation District Board of Directors has elected **Marty Miller** as President and **Jo MacKenzie** as Vice President for 2026.

This will be Miller's fourth term as President, having served on the Board since 2008. His experience includes owning a general construction company for 40 years. He also represents the district on the San Diego County Water Authority and Metropolitan Water District of Southern California boards of directors.

MacKenzie has served on the Board since 1992 and has been active on governing boards and committees of statewide and local organizations for many years, in addition to being actively involved with ACWA.

THIS MONTH IN ACWA HISTORY

10 years ago

ACWA members elected Kathleen Tiegs, of the Cucamonga Valley Water District Board of Directors, as ACWA President and Brent Hastey, of the Yuba Water Agency Board of Directors, as Vice President during a general session at ACWA's Fall Conference & Exhibition in Indian Wells.

20 years ago

The year closed with a massive series of storms that brought flooding to several Northern California counties which would result in Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's declaring states of emergency in multiple counties.

30 years ago

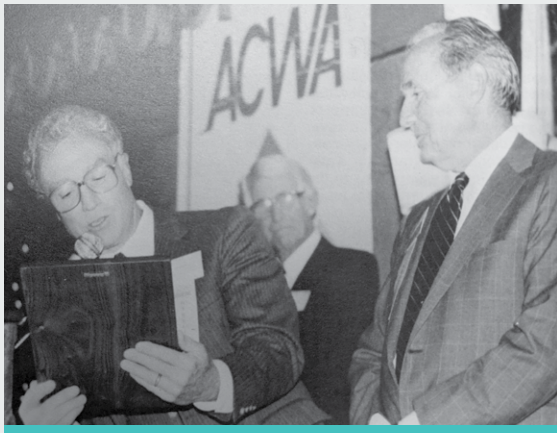
ACWA led a Sacramento event marking the first anniversary of the Bay-Delta Accord. Water agency leaders joined state and federal officials as well as representatives of environmental organizations to celebrate the agreement, described as "a historic peace treaty in California's water disputes."

40 years ago

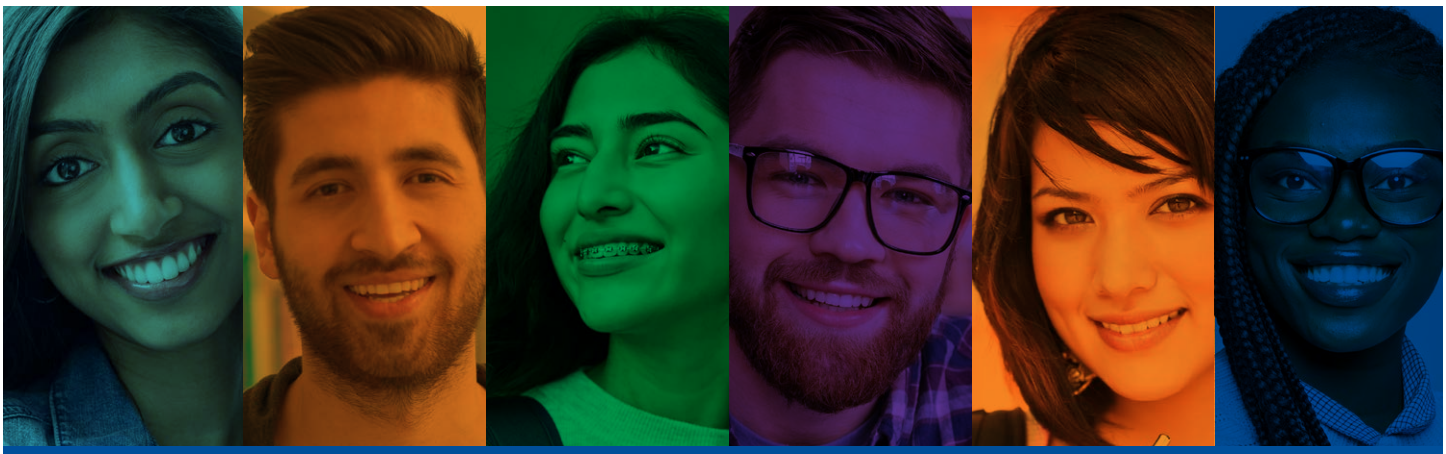
ACWA celebrated its 75th anniversary during the 1985 Fall Conference and Diamond Jubilee at the Hotel del Coranado in San Diego. The event set an all-time record with nearly 1,800 ACWA members, guests and exhibitors in attendance.

50 years ago

Members of the ACWA Board of Directors approved a resolution supporting nuclear power development and opposing an upcoming state ballot measure that would prohibit the building of new nuclear power plants.



Then-ACWA Executive Director John P. Fraser and outgoing ACWA President Raymond R. Rummonds present awards to association founding districts during the 1985 Fall Conference.



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- PWD'S Landmark Wind Turbine Decommissioned, Dismantling Underway – Nov. 19
- New Member Resources Available for Members – Nov. 25
- ACWA Presents Lifetime Achievement Award to Mike Wade – Dec. 3
- Leading with Gratitude: Reflections on My Tenure as ACWA President – Nov. 21

UPCOMING EVENTS

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

JAN 2026
29

ACWA Virtual CLE Workshop 2

ACWA | Virtual

Learn key differences between form and manuscript contracts, explore procurement and non-procurement agreements, and gain practical skills in redlining, version control, and two- vs. multi-party negotiations.

FEB 2026
11

ACWA 2026 Legislative Symposium

ACWA | Sacramento

ACWA's annual Legislative Symposium featuring critical updates on California water policy for directors, managers, attorneys and staff. Register by Feb. 6.

FEB 2026
24 –26

ACWA DC2026

ACWA | Washington D.C.

Join water professionals in Washington, D.C. to elevate California's key water issues, strengthen federal advocacy efforts, and connect with national policymakers and agency leaders.

MARCH 2026
11

Lower Colorado River Tour 2026

Water Education Foundation | Las Vegas

Join the Water Education Foundation to explore the lower Colorado River firsthand where virtually every drop of the river is allocated, yet demand is growing from myriad sources – increasing population, declining habitat, drought and climate change.

APR 2026
16

ACWA Virtual CLE Workshop 3

ACWA | Virtual

This workshop covers core risk-management tools, including allocating duties and rights, insurance and indemnity, and key term, termination, default, and remedies provisions.

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