



Gov. Gavin Newsom addresses attendees during ACWA's 2026 Spring Conference. A page 2 article summarizes the governor's speech, in which he highlighted his administration's action on key water issues and praised ACWA member agencies for their leadership.

ACWA Delivers Action-Packed 2026 Spring Conference

The introduction of ACWA's next Executive Director and a closing address by Gov. Gavin Newsom counted among multiple highlights during ACWA's 2026 Spring Conference, which attracted more than 1,500 attendees to Sacramento May 6-7.

Keynote speakers included Assemblymember Diane Papan, Chair of the Assembly Water, Parks and Wildlife Committee, and California Natural Resources Secretary Wade Crowfoot. ACWA's Vision for Our Water Future initiative featured prominently throughout the conference, with a Wednesday panel discussion focused on how the effort is elevating water as a top priority for California's next governor, legislative leadership and state officials.

By the numbers, the conference featured 26 educational sessions, 13 committee and task force meetings, nine ACWA regional membership meetings and more than 80 Exhibit Hall booths, along with receptions and opportunities for professional network building. Additionally, 43 sponsors supported the conference.

Informative panel discussions explored a wide range of topics. Below are summaries of a few of those programs.

Sites Reservoir

Title: "Key Developments in the Sites Reservoir Project"

Panelists: (Moderator) Chelsea Haines, Director of State Regulatory Relations, ACWA; Jeff Sutton, General

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ACWA Names Nemeth as Executive Director



One of California's most prominent water leaders will lead ACWA when Department of Water Resources (DWR)

Director Karla

Nemeth assumes responsibilities as the association's next Executive Director Sept. 1.

ACWA President Ernie Avila announced the Board of Director's selection of Nemeth during the 2026 Spring Conference in Sacramento. She brings an unprecedented breadth of experience, list of accomplishments and high-profile statewide recognition to overseeing the largest association of its kind in the

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Newsom Addresses Spring Conference, Praises ACWA's Collaborative Work

California Gov. Gavin Newsom praised ACWA member agencies' collaborative leadership at the 2026 Spring Conference in Sacramento, where he delivered a forceful closing address highlighting accomplishments, goals and progress on water issues during his eight years in office.

"We'll continue on this journey together in different roles, in different capacities. But again, ACWA, you're the real deal," said Newsom, who terms out of office at the end of this year. "You're that last mile. You're the folks that deliver on what we promote and what we promise. You are the ones that not only get it, but you get things done."

Newsom's remarks capped a 25-minute speech that took attendees through a fast-paced tour of his administration's key water efforts against the background of historic climate change. The Delta Conveyance Project (DCP) featured prominently, with Newsom calling for accelerated progress on building the single tunnel design backed by his administration.

"We've got to get that done, and we've got to finish the job," Newsom said.

He made the same point with the Sites Reservoir Project, heavily supported within the ACWA member agency community but still facing determined opposition from some environmental organizations.

"We've got to do the groundbreaking at Sites. If you can't agree to an off-stream investment in this world of weather whiplash, we're as dumb as we want to be," Newsom said.

Newsom also voiced his continuing support for ACWA-supported initiatives such as expanding access to safe drinking water through the State Water Resource Control Board's Safe and Affordable Funding for Equity and Resilience program, or SAFER, as well as the Healthy Rivers and



Gov. Gavin Newsom poses with ACWA President Ernie Avila before his address.

Landscapes Program, formerly known as Voluntary Agreements.

"We made a commitment of \$1.1 billion that would back up those Voluntary Agreements to move away from the old binaries of litigation, to finally have science and monitoring strategies that would address the issue of river flow, particularly between January and June, to address the needs for fish," Newsom said.

The governor repeatedly touched on the challenges of climate extremes.

"You know, we've chosen a profession with forever problems. And water is the forever problem," Newsom said.

During his closing remarks, Newsom praised ACWA for "wisely" choosing Department of Water Resources Director Karla Nemeth as the association's incoming Executive Director, effective Sept. 1.

"Thank you for your collaborative spirit that defines this organization," Newsom said, later adding "I thank you for all of the extraordinary work yet to be done that I have all the faith and confidence that you will accomplish together." ♦

Vision for Our Water Future Efforts Continue to Expand

Momentum for Vision for Our Water Future (Vision) continues to build with a featured panel at the ACWA 2026 Spring Conference and new opportunities for member agencies and coalition partners to support the effort. The policy initiative was launched earlier this year to elevate water-related priorities with California's gubernatorial candidates, legislative leadership and administration officials in advance of a new governor taking office in 2027.

Working Groups Formed

ACWA formed specialized working groups to help with the next phase of the initiative. Centered on four priority actions, the Vision framework will ultimately include a set of recommendations to advance each priority area.

These working groups will help develop those recommendations by the end of the year. The three working groups are:

- Protect Affordability Working Group
- Deliver Critical Infrastructure Working Group
- Modernize Water Management Working Group

If you would like to join a working group, contact ACWA State Relations Advocate Stephen Pang at (916) 669-2369.

Conference Panel Highlights Need for Partnerships

During a Main Stage program at ACWA Spring Conference, leaders from across sectors discussed their priorities and the policy agendas shaping California's future. Moderated by ACWA State Regulatory Relations Director Chelsea Haines, the panel included Jennifer Barrera, President and CEO of the California Chamber of Commerce; Chuck Bonham, Executive Director of the Nature Conservancy's California Chapter; and Shivaji Deshmukh, General Manager of Metropolitan Water District of Southern California.



he call for bold actions and unusual partnerships was repeated throughout the discussion by all panel members.

Discussing aging infrastructure, Barrera emphasized the cost of project delays: "The impact again, on the affordability issue, the notion time is money is real, the more these projects are delayed, the more costly they get. And we see that show up in rates and prices to consumers. We want to do better with regards to how we are building in California."

Wrapping up the program, all the panelists agreed that alignment and continued partnerships will be the way we see progress under the next administration.

"The importance of partnerships are probably the most shocking observation I have, because even today at my second ACWA conference, I'm meeting people we have MOUs, agreements, partnerships with and it's really refreshing to see," said Deshmukh.

"If we all go buzzing, separately in an acrimonious way to the next set of leaders, they are going to not be able to absorb what we really need collectively; vision, values and voice – to tackle some of these hard things," concluded Bonham. "And if we can go together, we are better off."

New Video Debuts

ACWA debuted a new Vision for Our Water Future video that highlights the

framework's four priority actions and underscores the need for bold leadership from California's next gubernatorial administration.



Members are encouraged to share the four-minute video through their agency's communications channels.

Toolkit Expanded

In response to member feedback, several new resources have been added to the Vision toolkit. A sample letter of support is now available for agencies interested in becoming Vision Partners.

New Canva social media templates sized for Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn and X (formerly Twitter) are also available. The customizable templates allow agencies to incorporate photos from their own service areas or regions. The full member toolkit is available on the website at acwa.com/resources.

For questions regarding Vision for Our Water Future, please visit online at acwa.com/vision.

VISION 
FOR OUR WATER FUTURE



May Revise Includes Added Funding for HRL Program

The ACWA-supported Healthy Rivers and Landscapes (HRL) Program would receive an additional \$25 million in funding in Gov. Gavin Newsom's revised proposed budget, released May 14.

The additional, one-time General Fund monies will bolster efforts to deliver environmental flows, habitat restoration, science and monitoring to support the requirements of the soon to be updated Bay-Delta Water Quality Control Plan. The State Water Resources Control Board is expected to adopt an updated Bay-Delta Plan by the end of 2026, with the HRL as a compliance pathway for participating water agencies.

The revised proposed budget is the second of two stages in the state budget process leading up to its final approval by the Legislature by June 15.

ACWA advocacy staff as of mid-May were tracking and advocating in support or opposition on 66 bills in the Legislature. The bills address a wide range of topics of interest to member agencies, including infrastructure funding, wildfire policy, invasive species and Proposition 218 reform affecting rate settings.

A few key water-related bills and their status are summarized below.

Wildfire Liability

Author: Sen. Anna Caballero (D-Merced)

ACWA Position: Sponsoring

What it would do: SB 1153 would clarify and declare the limited role of public water systems during wildfires. While water systems support firefighting, they are not designed or intended for wildfire defense or suppression, and it would be impractical and costly to require them to function as such. The bill would establish that water supply or pressure limitations during a wildfire are not a substantial cause of wildfire damages and that wildfire

spread is not an inherent risk of water system design. It also would require certain urban water suppliers in high fire-risk areas to include wildfire specific response procedures in their emergency response plans.

Status: In Senate

Wildfire Impacts

Author: Sen. Shannon Grove (R-Bakersfield)

ACWA Position: Co-sponsoring with California Forest Watershed Alliance

What it would do: SB 899 would require the California Wildfire and Forest Resilience Task Force, created by Newsom, to assess the health costs and impacts of high-severity wildfire smoke to better value the importance of investing in achieving the task force's action plan goals.

Status: In Senate

Rate Setting

Author: Assemblymember Chris Ward (D-San Diego)

ACWA Position: Sponsoring

What it would do: AB 2180 would clarify how water agencies comply with Proposition 218 when setting water rates. This clarification would provide predictability for agencies, support California's water-use conservation goals and help minimize unnecessary legal disputes over water rates. ACWA is leading a coalition supporting the bill.

Status: In Senate

Golden Mussels

ACWA advocates are monitoring bills that could strengthen California's response to invasive species, specifically golden mussels. The bills, supported by ACWA, would build on the success of a coalition led by the East Bay Municipal Utility

Take Action

These are among dozens of priority bills that could affect ACWA member agencies. Support and strengthen ACWA's advocacy by joining a coalition at acwa.com/coalitions.

District and Metropolitan Water District of Southern California. That effort resulted in a \$20 million allocation being added to a budget trailer bill from an invasive species account for use in responding to golden mussel issues such as severe damage to water infrastructure. ACWA advocacy on the issue is also focused on educating legislators about impacts to water agencies and the vital importance of funding to countering the threat of invasive species to water infrastructure.

Water Affordability

Author: Assemblymember Esmerelda Soria (D-Merced)

ACWA Position: Support

What it would do: AB 2739 proposes a lasting funding solution to water affordability at the household, system and community levels. The bill advances a sustainable funding solution to support a statewide Low-Income Rate Assistance program for water, as proposed by SB 1125 (Menjivar), while also supporting strategic investments that stabilize water systems and help reduce cost pressures before they are passed on to ratepayers.

Status: In Assembly

The April edition of ACWA News incorrectly identified Republican Sen. Shannon Grove's party affiliation. ACWA News apologizes for the error.

New Online Resource for HRL Program Available

A new website has been launched to help tell the story of the Healthy Rivers and Landscapes (HRL) Program. Developed by several California public water agencies and partners, the site brings together videos, infographics and clear, accessible information to help explain how this approach works for Californians and why it matters.

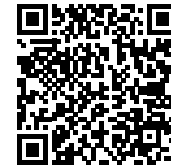
The HRL Program is a science-based, collaborative framework for restoring river health, floodplains and natural landscapes, and continues to gain momentum as an

important path forward for the Bay-Delta Water Quality Control Plan update. ACWA is a long-standing supporter of the HRL Program as the best approach to protecting, restoring and enhancing the Bay-Delta watershed.

The HRL Program is built on a simple idea: pairing strategically timed flows with habitat improvements can create real, measurable benefits for fish and wildlife, while maintaining water supply reliability for cities, rural communities, agriculture and recreation. This advances

the State Water Resources Control Board's important responsibility to protect all beneficial uses of water.

Explore the site by visiting healthyiverslandscapes.org or scanning the accompanying QR code. ♦



LIKE, SHARE
& FOLLOW

EXPLORING THE WATER WORLD ACROSS SOCIAL MEDIA

This year's ACWA Spring Conference in Sacramento was packed with announcements, amazing programs and surprise speakers. Many 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.



Scan to
Watch a
YouTube
Short



Manager, Glenn-Colusa Irrigation District; Jerry Brown, Executive Director, Sites Reservoir Project; Lance Eckhart, General Manager and Chief Hydrogeologist, San Geronio Pass Water Agency

Key issue(s): In a landmark decision this past January, the U.S. Department of the Interior approved the Sites Reservoir Project — clearing a major hurdle and propelling one of the state’s most significant water infrastructure projects forward. A panel of leading experts broke down what this approval means and shared the latest updates on progress toward breaking ground on the off-stream reservoir project in Northern California.

Sutton quote: “If we don’t see this to fruition, we’re on the wrong side of history. ... It’s really a bellwether to see if we can still build big things in California water anymore.”

Groundwater

Title: “Groundwater Banking 101”

Panelists: (Moderator) Morgan Campbell, Director of Regulatory Affairs, Westside Water Authority; Terry Erlewine, Principal Engineer; Provost & Pritchard Consulting Group; Paul Gosselin, Deputy



Sites Project Reservoir Executive Director Jerry Brown makes a point during a conference panel updating progress toward making the off-stream reservoir a reality.

Director for Sustainable Groundwater Management, Department of Water Resources; Trevor Joseph, Manager of Technical Resources, Regional Water Authority

Key issue(s): Panelists shared perspectives during an overview of key considerations, basic facts and what’s ahead for groundwater banking. The discussion covered progress since the implementation of SGMA, as well as how groundwater banking and management is affected by climate change and how it works as an effective strategy within the context of water resiliency.

Joseph quote: “If we didn’t do groundwater banking, if we didn’t advance conjunctive use, we’re essentially left with demand reduction in many areas. ... Putting water in the basin first before you

extract it, as opposed to other methods, seems like a pretty prudent way to do things in light of SGMA.”

Finance

Title: “Managing Workforce Costs & Long-Term Financial Liabilities”

Panelists: (Moderator) Dan Gumpert, Controller, ACWA; Sophia Crocker, Human Resources Manager, Las Virgenes Municipal Water District; Daniel Kaufman, Customer Outreach and Support Analyst, CalPERS; Nick Pavletich, Administrative Operations Manager, Kern County Water Agency

Key issue(s): With workforce costs, pension obligations and OPEB liabilities representing some of the largest long-term financial exposures for water agencies,

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nation. She is the first woman to lead the association as Executive Director in its 116-year history.

Her appointment followed overwhelming support by the association’s Board of Directors after a nationwide recruitment process. Current Interim Executive Director Marwan Khalifa will remain at ACWA through a transition period.

“Bringing in Karla to lead the ACWA team is a phenomenal win for our members,” said ACWA President Ernie Avila. “She brings deep expertise and a proven track record navigating California’s most complex water challenges. Her leadership

will strengthen ACWA’s role as a leading voice and advocate for water agencies across the state.”

Nemeth is among the most instantly recognizable and accomplished decision makers within the California water space, having served as DWR Director since 2018. She was originally appointed by Gov. Jerry Brown and re-appointed by Gov. Gavin Newsom. Throughout that time, Nemeth has participated in numerous ACWA conferences as a panelist and keynote speaker, sharing her perspectives on a wide range of issues affecting association members.

Addressing conference attendees, Nemeth emphasized the critical need for partnership within California’s water community.

“We’ve got a lot of work to do together to prepare California, our economy, our people and our environment, for the hydrology that is now upon us,” Nemeth said. “The work that we need to do together as a water user community is essential, absolutely essential to advancing all of our collective interests. There is nobody in this room that is not interdependent on one another.” ♦



(l-r) Left: Assemblymember Diane Papan, Chair of the Assembly Water, Parks and Wildlife Committee, delivers the opening keynote address during conference. Right: California Natural Resources Secretary Wade Crowfoot speaks to attendees as the closing keynote speaker.

Keynote Speakers Recognize ACWA's Leadership

Wednesday Keynote

Assemblymember Diane Papan, Chair of the Assembly Water, Parks and Wildlife Committee, delivered the opening keynote address at ACWA 2026 Spring Conference by acknowledging the wide range of challenges facing water suppliers.

Throughout her address, Papan stressed the importance of water infrastructure for climate adaptation and called for increased federal funding. Papan's local government experience included serving as Mayor and a councilmember for the City of San Mateo.

"Local agencies are operating an environment defined by climate volatility, increasing regulatory requirements, rising operation costs and growing affordability pressures, all while state and federal investment hasn't kept pace with the scale of the need," Papan said. "My focus has always been on what it takes to maintain and finance infrastructure that communities depend on every day."

She underscored the need for infrastructure that gives water agencies greater flexibility to move and capture water during wetter periods while maintaining long term reliability. Touching on the Delta Conveyance Project, Papan

remarked that "reasonable people can disagree on different aspects of the project, but I do think we need to be honest that maintaining the status quo in the Delta is not a long-term strategy."

She closed by praising ACWA members' ability "to do a lot with a little."

"California's water agencies have demonstrated an extraordinary ability to adapt to changing conditions over many decades, but the challenges ahead will require sustained partnership and sustained investment, including from the federal government," Papan said.

Thursday Keynote

California Natural Resources Secretary Wade Crowfoot delivered Thursday's keynote address by highlighting climate change while calling for collaboration, continuity and cohesion within the water community.

Crowfoot threaded this theme through diverse issues ranging from Colorado River negotiations to implementation of SGMA, progress on the Sites Reservoir Project, advancing access to safe drinking water and addressing the alarming pace of climate change.

"It's going to get more complicated, more complex, more challenging. We are on borrowed time, and I know, you know this across your water agencies," Crowfoot said. "But we need to continue to lean forward with the urgency. We can't let a couple of normal hydrologic years divert us from the urgency and focus that we need."

Crowfoot also called on ACWA members to continue collaboration with groups such as conservation and environmental organizations to secure water supplies, expand access to safe drinking water and maintain the health of California's rivers. He specifically called out the state's partnership with Floodplains Forward as an example of water agencies collaborating to restore habitat in the Sacramento Valley.

Crowfoot closed by thanking ACWA members for their partnership and highlighted the opportunity to engage with the next governor.

"I have experienced ACWA as a powerful, influential difference maker in California water policy over 15 years," Crowfoot said. "When ACWA thinks boldly and advances the vision and maintains cohesion across the vast diversity of your water agencies, you can and you have shaped California water policy." ♦



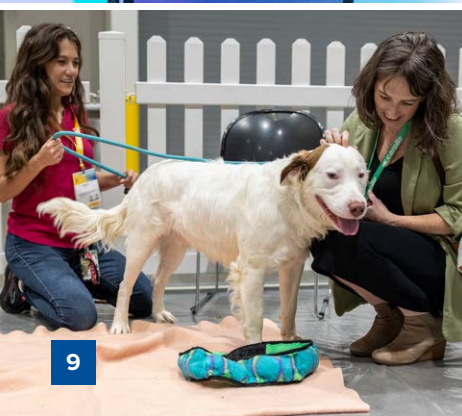
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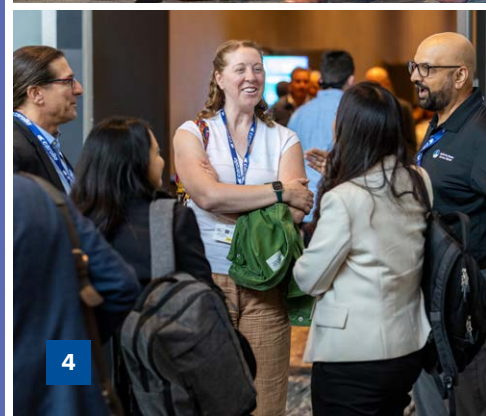
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ACWA 2026 Spring Conference

1. The giant ACWA letters return as a popular venue for selfies.
2. ACWA President Ernie Avila appears with ACWA Vice President Carol Lee Gonzales-Brady on the Main Stage.
3. A few of among more than 1,500 conference attendees take in a presentation.
- 4-5. Attendees enjoy one of many networking opportunities during conference.
6. A conference attendee engages with the team from BKF, one of many vendors in the ACWA Spring Conference Exhibit Hall.
7. ACWA Business Development Specialist Joe Ramos presents Tuolumne Utilities District Board member Carol Reel with a waterproof Bluetooth speaker she won during an Exhibit Hall drawing.
8. Interim Executive Director Marwan Khalifa takes a selfie with ACWA leadership and staff behind the Main Stage.
9. A dog smiles while enjoying attention at the 'Barking Lot' in the Exhibit Hall.
10. Incoming ACWA Executive Director Karla Nemeth delivers remarks during conference.



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Left: Panelists share perspectives during the “Groundwater Banking 101” discussion. **Right:** Orange County Water District Legislative Affairs Liaison Alicia Harasty comments during the Education and Outreach panel discussion.

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many are looking for innovative strategies to balance workforce investments with fiscal sustainability. Panelists discussed automation trade-offs, succession planning costs and other considerations.

Crocker quote: “A key component of our strategic plan is to provide competitive pay and benefits to develop and maintain a highly productive workforce. We do this by keeping a finger on the pulse of the market, making adjustments to remain competitive and having flexible salary placement practices in place.”

Education and Outreach

Title: “Educating Decision-Makers and Communities Without Crossing the Line”

Panelists: (Moderator) Cristel Tufenkjian, Deputy General Manager, McMullin Area Groundwater Sustainability Agency; Alicia Harasty, Legislative Affairs Liaison, Orange County Water District; Kim Boyd, Director of Strategic Affairs, Tahoe City Public Utility District; Melissa Williams, Public Affairs Manager, Modesto Irrigation District

Key issue(s): Water agencies benefit from educating lawmakers and regulators about critical issues affecting their communities, as well as educating the public about complicated legislative and regulatory issues. Panelists shared their experiences using tours, video and other successful strategies while adhering to legal guidelines.

Williams quote: “Develop and foster your relationships. You may have the best video, or the most articulate talking points, or the best handouts, but if you don’t have the relationship with your colleagues, your own management, your leadership, your decision makers, your legislators, your customers, those tactics won’t resonate.”

Harasty quote: “Education and advocacy works when you’re credible and consistent. And also, at the end of the day, decision makers don’t understand water unless you educate them, and they learn to trust you and see you as a resource.”

Water Management

Title: “From Policy to Production: Delivering 9 Million Acre-Feet by 2040”

Panelists: (Moderator) Karla Nemeth, Director, Department of Water Resources; Ed Manning, Partner, KP Public Affairs; Craig Miller, General Manager, Western Municipal Water District; Jason Phillips, Vice President-Water Business Group, HDR Engineering; Jennifer Pierre, General Manager, State Water Contractors

Key issue(s): California made history with SB 72, establishing the state’s first-ever long-term water supply target of 9 million acre-feet by 2040. Now that the law is in effect, the focus shifts from policy to production. This panel brought together state leaders, implementing agencies and coalition partners to examine what it will

take to sustain momentum and deliver real supply outcomes.

Manning quote: “I do think SB 72 was a bit of a turning point in terms of the ability and maturity politically, of the water community, but it’s only a value if we take it and raise our game to the next level.”

Nemeth quote: “The answer cannot be ‘conserve more, just keep conserving more,’ without a broader suite of actions that we’re leaning into.”

Emergency Preparedness

Title: “Lifeline Infrastructure Integration – A New Path for Resiliency”

Panelists: (Moderator) Matt Collings, Assistant General Manager, Moulton Niguel Water District; Ron Eguchi, CEO and Co-Founder, ImageCat, Inc.; Brian Kamoie, Managing Director, Deloitte

Key issue(s): True resiliency goes beyond infrastructure, policy and funding. None of these would be possible without people and leadership. This panel discussed some of the most historic emergencies in the country and why integrating lifeline infrastructure must be the new path forward to ensure the safety of our communities.

Eguchi quote: “We are in the midst of a perfect storm. There are three things driving it: severity and frequency of



Left: Yuba Water Communications Manager DeDe Cordell moderates a panel on innovation. **Right:** State Water Resources Control Board Chair E. Joaquin Esquivel, center right, participates on a panel discussing ways to modernize water management.

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events, aging systems and codes and standards that are outdated or don't exist."

Kamoie quote: "You are a lifeline. No lifeline can be resilient in isolation. We can talk all about policies, statutes and regulations but none of that matters without your engagement and leadership."

Innovation

Title: "Water Agencies Powering Tomorrow with Bold Solutions"

Panelists: (Moderator) DeDe Cordell, Communications Manager, Yuba Water Agency; Vince Dambrose, Senior Public Affairs Representative, Helix Water District; James Lee, General Manager, Crescenta Valley Water District; Joe Mouawad, P.E., General Manager, Eastern

Municipal Water District; Nicholas Schneider, General Manager, Georgetown Divide Public Utility District

Key issue(s): Showcasing exemplary programs that reflect innovation, strong management and operational excellence, the finalists of the Clair A. Hill Agency Award for Excellence shared their best-in-class initiatives that are advancing the water industry and delivering results.

Dambrose quote: "(Our funding success is because) We built our case well. We could reduce emissions from our fleet, and through collaboration, we could reduce emissions beyond that, throughout our service area."

Mouawad quote: "It was important we had standing meetings with the

community. We don't want to just go to the community when we need something. You want to have the standing relationship and earned trust with your community before you announce a large construction project."

Water Management

Title: "Modernizing Water Management to Deliver Results"

Panelists: Samantha Arthur, Deputy Secretary for Water, California Natural Resources Agency; Eric Beightel, Federal Strategy Director, Environmental Science Associates; E. Joaquin Esquivel, Chair, State Water Resources Control Board

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COMMENTS ON CONFERENCE



HALEY ELIGIO

Principal Grant and Legislative Analyst
Marin Water

"I liked the Water Management Program on water resilience because it highlighted a lot of different perspectives. It was a very well-rounded discussion."



SIERRA LAYOUS, P.E.

Director, Irrigation Training & Research
Center at Cal Poly (Exhibitor)

"The ACWA Spring Conference] helped us connect with districts that know we exist, but we haven't seen in a while. It's like reconnecting with different districts and talking to them about their issues like how we help them."



Left: A panel discusses the need for integrating lifeline infrastructure to enhance resiliency. **Right:** Panelists lay out the details behind what drives the water affordability issue.

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Key issue(s): California needs to modernize its regulatory and operational systems to ensure water projects can move forward with increased reliability and efficiency. This panel explored strategies to expedite decision making, while maintaining environmental protections and public transparency.

Arthur quote: “We’ve also made some progress on groundwater recharge. It’s been perhaps, the low hanging fruit, but we are looking at how we get flood flows into the ground. . . . when we have flood flows that are risking life and property, being able to scale up and expedite groundwater recharge permitting.”

Esquivel quote: “The reality is that it takes money and it takes time. I think we have to be honest with that. Whatever we do needs to be lasting.”

Water Affordability

Title: “The Water Affordability Squeeze in the Era of Increasing Costs”

Panelists: (Moderator) Greg Thomas, General Manager, Elsinore Valley Municipal Water District; Andrea Abergel, Director of Water, California Municipal Utilities Association; Michael Claiborne, Directing Attorney, Leadership Council for Justice and Accountability; Sean Maguire, Member, State Water Resources Control Board; Mehdi Nemati, Professor of Environmental Economics and Policy, University of California Riverside.

Key issue(s): California water agencies face steep cost increases to build and operate water and wastewater systems, all while complying with strict unanticipated regulatory requirements. This panel



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

examined the causes of this challenge and potential solutions to water affordability in California.

Maguire quote: “I think we need to be creative as we go forward. Things are on the basis that we can continue to support consolidations, we can continue to look at innovative treatment strategies for smaller communities, regional management structures. There’s a whole bunch of, really interesting ideas out there and ways that we can help realize the human right to water in a productive sense.” ♦



BRENDA DENNSTEDT

Board Member
Western Municipal Water District

“The scan and play in the Exhibit Hall! I came in 3rd and we had so much fun. I had more conversations with exhibitors than I normally do. I’ve never done it before and it gave conference a different buzz.”



JAKE SAHL

Water Resources Principal
El Dorado Water Agency

“It’s really great to hear that we’re all confronting the same issues, and it’s an awesome forum for exchanging ideas for solutions and for finding opportunities for collaboration.”



Left: Brian Poulsen accepts the ACWA Excellence in Water Leadership Award. **Center:** Helix Water District Board members Dan McMillan and Andrea Beth Damsky receive the Clair A. Hill Water Agency Award for Excellence. **Right:** Jamie Marquez speaks after being named this year's recipient of ACWA's John P. Fraser Water Leaders Fellowship.

ACWA Awards and Scholarships Recognize Excellence and Leadership in Water Community

ACWA presented several awards and announced \$20,000 in scholarships to three undergraduate college students during the 2026 Spring Conference in Sacramento.

Excellence in Water Leadership

ACWA presented its 2026 Excellence in Water Leadership Award to Brian Poulsen, General Counsel for El Dorado Irrigation District, for his commitment in advancing California water policy.

Poulsen has played a key role in negotiations for the Sacramento Water Forum 2050 Agreement, an extension of the landmark 2000 agreement that brought together water users, environmental organizations and business interests to promote sustainable water management and environmental stewardship in the Lower American River region.

Clair Hill Award

The Clair A. Hill Water Agency Award for Excellence was presented to Helix Water

District for their innovative Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure Project.

Helix Water District built California's first large-scale public agency charging facility at its operations center in El Cajon to meet regulatory mandates, enhance emergency response and promote regional collaboration. The project includes 87 high-capacity chargers designed for current fleet needs and future expansion, while serving neighboring agencies through shared access.

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

Clair Hill Scholarship

The \$5,000 Clair A. Hill Scholarship, sponsored by Jacobs, was awarded to Alice Taylor, a marine biology and biomolecular engineering student at University of California, Santa Cruz.

Arthur Littleworth Scholarship

The Arthur L. Littleworth Best Best & Krieger Scholarship, sponsored by BB&K,

was awarded to Catari Portillo, a business administration student at Merritt College, transferring to Howard University in Fall 2026.

Jerry Gladbach Scholarship

The \$5,000 Edward G. "Jerry" Gladbach Scholarship, sponsored by SCV Water, was awarded to Victor Ilias Fraga, a plant science and agricultural business student at California State University, Fresno.

ACWA Fellowship

ACWA presented its seventh annual John P. Fraser Water Leaders Fellowship to Westside Water Authority's Water Resources Manager Jamie Marquez. The fellowship covers tuition for an individual working at an ACWA member agency who has been selected to participate in the Water Education Foundation's Water Leader's Class.

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

DWR Boosts SWP Allocation Heading into Summer

The Department of Water Resources (DWR) on May 15 announced an increase to the State Water Project (SWP) allocation for 2026. The allocation is now 45% of requested supplies, up from the previous allocation of 30% announced on January 29. The allocation establishes how much water the State plans to deliver to the 29 public water agencies served by the SWP, which provides water to 27 million Californians and 750,000 acres of farmland.

In the spring, SWP allocations are based on current hydrological conditions, existing reservoir storage, and remaining snowpack. While California saw record heat in March and early snowmelt, consistent rainstorms in April provided critical runoff through the system that allowed DWR to capture more water and meet environmental regulations without using stored water. Currently, the SWP's largest reservoir, Lake Oroville, is at 99% of capacity. Statewide, reservoirs are 117% of average for this time of year.

The challenge remains that California's snowpack, the state's frozen reservoir, is essentially gone. As of today, the statewide snowpack is just 12% of average. The snowpack peaked in mid-February and has since melted off.

"California's reservoirs are full, but most snowpack melted off weeks ago. We must



use this stored water carefully because there's no backfill until next season," said DWR Director Karla Nemeth.

The SWP utilized real-time operational flexibility to benefit water users and the environment despite the fact that so much of this year's precipitation came as rain instead of snow. Water managers at Lake Oroville coordinated closely with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to capture as much water as possible while still providing flood protection to downstream communities. These flexible operations,

coupled with the improved runoff in the system resulted in an additional 400,000 acre-feet of storage in Lake Oroville. This puts the SWP in a better position to provide water supply to contractors this year while maintaining robust carryover storage to meet water supply and environmental needs should next year be dry.

This season, the initial allocation was 10% on December 1, updated to 30% on January 29, and increased to 45% on May 15. ♦

ACWA IN ACTION

(l-r) Calkin Public Affairs Chief Client Officer Richard Stapler and ACWA Director of State Legislative Relations Julia Hall meet with candidate for California governor Xavier Becerra. ACWA is reaching out to gubernatorial candidates to share the association's Vision for Our Water Future initiative, aimed at elevating water-related priorities in advance of a new governor talking office in 2027.



SFPUC Shares Successes in Rebounding Fish Populations

Chinook salmon returned to two Bay Area creeks this winter for the first time in decades. Steelhead trout populations are booming on those same two waterways. And the lower Tuolumne River is once again a thriving fish hangout.

It has been a good year for fish and other native species in waters the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission (SFPUC) helps manage.

The rebounding fish populations come as the SFPUC has worked diligently with other river partners – often for years – to remove man-made barriers to fish migration, restore natural spawning habitat, and strategically increase water releases from reservoirs to mimic natural river flows.

“This represents a lot of hard work by a lot of people. It’s paying off,” SFPUC General Manager Dennis Herrera stated in a news release. “Together, we’re doing the work to protect and support native fish populations on the waterways we have a hand in managing.”

Progress on four Bay Area waterways tell a story of success.

- **Alameda Creek:** During the SFPUC’s annual fish trapping surveys between 2015 and 2023, biologists captured and released an average of about 40 steelhead a year. In 2024, they captured



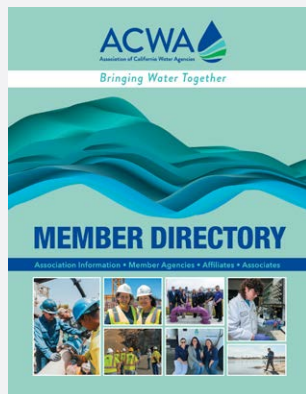
Photo courtesy of SFPUC

and released 2,600 steelhead. In 2025 that number was over 1,400. This year it’s already over 200 and on pace to meet last year’s figure.

- **San Mateo Creek:** Over the last three years, the SFPUC’s capture and release of juvenile steelhead leaving San Mateo Creek has averaged almost 350 steelhead a year.
- **Upper Tuolumne River:** Through its collaborative Upper Tuolumne River Ecosystem Program, SFPUC is shaping springtime snowmelt water releases to better mimic natural river flows, supporting rich and unique habitats and species downstream.

- **Lower Tuolumne River:** In May of 2025, the lower Tuolumne River saw around 1,000 spring-run Chinook salmon arrive for the summer and later successfully spawn, with thousands of juveniles beginning their migration to the ocean over this past winter. The arrival of such a large number of spring-run was a first for the Tuolumne.

All of this work is vital as the Turlock Irrigation District, Modesto Irrigation District and SFPUC work to balance the needs of the river ecosystem and water supply reliability for the millions of people and thousands of businesses in the Bay Area and Central Valley who rely on the river for water. ♦



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Peter Nelson

Nelson Retires from CVWD

Longtime Coachella Valley Water District (CVWD) Board Director **Peter Nelson** has retired after 26 years of public service.

The CVWD Board of Directors honored Nelson at an April meeting with a resolution to thank him for his longstanding dedication.

“It’s been an honor to serve CVWD and represent the interests of the entire Coachella Valley to protect and preserve our water

resources for the long-term, and I have had the privilege to work alongside outstanding general managers and board directors,” stated Nelson in a news release. “And thank you to all the staff who are truly exceptional and remain CVWD’s greatest strength.”

Nelson has also served with the Salton Sea Authority, California Farm Water Coalition and Colorado River Board of California for an 11-year term, including chairing the Board from 2018 to 2023. ♦



Kevin Alexander

IEUA Names Alexander GM

The Inland Empire Utilities Agency’s Board of Directors in April appointed **Kevin Alexander** as General Manager.

Alexander advanced from serving as Acting General Manager and previously served as Deputy General Manager. He brings more than three decades of experience focused on water,

wastewater, recycled water planning, engineering and operations, growing through his career to lead in private sector business and public agency management.

Alexander holds a Bachelor of Science in civil engineering from the Missouri University of Science and Technology. ♦



Ken Payne

Carmichael WD Names Payne Interim GM

The Carmichael Water District has appointed **Ken Payne** as Interim General Manager.

Previously Payne served as General Manager of the El Dorado County Water Agency and as Environmental Utilities Director for the City of Folsom. His private-sector experience

includes roles as a founding member of Payne Environmental Consulting, partner at Municipal Consulting Group, Senior Associate with Malcolm Pirnie, Principal with Camp Dresser & McKee, and Senior Associate with the Spink Corporation.

Recruitment for a permanent General Manager will begin in June. ♦

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ACWA Names Nemeth as Executive Director – May 6

Roseville and PCWA Strengthen Regional Water Reliability with New System Connection – Apr. 24

RWD Receives More Than \$30,000 Refund from Statewide Insurance Program – Apr. 28

Ventura County Agency Recognized Among California's Top Special Districts – Apr. 22

UPCOMING EVENTS

Visit acwa.com/events
for complete listing and registration

MAY 2026

27 – 28

Peer to Peer 2026

Groundwater Resources Association | Clovis

Peer to Peer 2026 is an intimate two-day gathering of California water efficiency professionals focused on collaboration, peer learning, and innovative conservation strategies, celebrating a decade of advancing sustainable water management practices.

JUNE 2026

2 – 3

The Faces of SGMA Implementation Summit

Groundwater Resources Association | Clovis

This summit focuses on the boots-on-the-ground realities of SGMA implementation and the people experiencing its impacts firsthand. Panels explore implementation successes, challenges, and ripple effects across operations, communities, and local economies.

JUNE 2026

15

Water Policy Forum & Dinner

MWDOC | Costa Mesa

The forum will focus on the future of California water management and feature a panel on the Sites Reservoir Project. Experts will discuss water rights, regional benefits, costs and next steps for this key infrastructure effort.

JUNE 2026

26

ACWA Region 8 Event

ACWA | Los Angeles

Discover how artificial intelligence is transforming the water industry. Experts will explore real-world impacts and emerging innovations. Join us to gain insights, ask questions, and stay ahead of the rapidly evolving role of A.I. in water management.

ACWA EVENT

JULY 2026

17

ACWA Region 9 Event

ACWA | Temecula

Join ACWA Region 9 for a timely discussion on water policy, advocacy, and effective communication strategies to help public water agencies strengthen their influence in California's evolving legislative and regulatory landscape.

ACWA EVENT

AUGUST 2026

20

ACWA Fall Quarterly Policy Committee Meetings

ACWA | Oxnard

The Quarterly Policy Committee Meetings will include the Agriculture, Energy, Groundwater, Water Management and Water Quality Committees. A detailed agenda and meeting materials will be available at a later date. These meetings will be held virtually.

ACWA EVENT