



Top: ACWA Senior Regional Affairs Representative Jennifer Rotz, center, presents an ACWA resolution to the CCWD Board honoring the district on its 90th anniversary. Board members receiving the resolution include (l-r) Vice President Antonio Martinez, President Ernie Avila, Rotz, Patt Young and Constance Holdaway. **Center:** A Water Fiesta celebrated the first water delivered through the Contra Costa Canal in this 1940 photo. **Bottom:** People tour one of CCWD's treatment plants as part of the 90th anniversary events.

Photos courtesy of CCWD

Contra Costa Water District Celebrates 90 Years

Contra Costa Water District (CCWD) is thriving as it celebrates 90 years of securing a reliable supply of high-quality water throughout central and eastern Contra Costa County.

CCWD operates within one of California's most challenging environments for water professionals, the Sacramento-San Joaquin Bay-Delta. Changing salinity levels can heavily impact water quality, while periodic droughts can drastically affect supply. Add in a booming population, and you have what could be a difficult situation for even the most seasoned water manager. However, forward-thinking leadership stretching back to its 1936 creation has helped CCWD remain successful.

A Salty Start

Efforts to secure a reliable supply of water in Contra Costa County began in the early 1900s as farmers and community leaders worked to address declining water quality amid a prolonged drought and changing Bay-Delta conditions. By the 1920s, conditions worsened to the point where farmers were forced to halt irrigating, and factories resorted to bringing in fresh water by rail tank cars. While the drought ended in 1930, the experience underscored the vital need for a sustainable solution. That would come in the form of the Contra Costa Canal.

Richmond attorney Thomas Carlson was retained to explain the salty situation to the California Legislature and then the federal government. His advocacy contributed to a commitment by the federal government to launch the Central Valley Project.

Construction of the 48-mile Contra Costa Canal began in 1937, just one year after voters approved CCWD's formation, and by 1940 the canal started delivering water from the Delta to the City of Pittsburg. The occasion was marked with a three-day celebration called the Water Fiesta, including the largest parade ever seen in Contra Costa County and the coronation of a Fiesta Queen.

The demands from World War II caused construction delays due to shortages of labor and materials, but the entire canal was completed in 1948. However, salinity and changing Bay-Delta conditions continued posing challenges to water quality and reliability. In response, CCWD leaders worked tirelessly to stay one step ahead.

Los Vaqueros Reservoir

Early investments in conveyance and treatment facilities laid the foundation for a system designed to grow and adapt alongside the rapidly growing communities served by CCWD. Over the decades, CCWD's mission expanded beyond water delivery to include water quality protection, water treatment, watershed stewardship and collaboration with regional and state partners. By the 1980s, CCWD decided to embark on a decisive answer to further securing a reliable and higher-quality water supply — Los Vaqueros Reservoir.

In 1988, voters authorized funding for a 100,000-acre-foot off-stream reservoir that would improve water quality by storing fresh water from the Delta and provide an emergency supply. At the time, it was the first new dam built in California in more than 15 years and was built on time and under budget. It was the largest and most significant project undertaken by CCWD.

Aside from municipal water supply, Los Vaqueros provides recreation with fishing and more than 55 miles of trails. It also protects endangered species ranging from the red-legged frog to the Alameda whip snake and protected golden eagles.

In the early 2010s, CCWD expanded Los Vaqueros to increase storage by 60,000 acre-feet, strengthening drought resilience and making it one of the largest reservoirs in the Bay Area.

Continued Innovation

Today, CCWD continues to meet the needs of industry and a growing urban

population. Operating as both a water retailer and wholesaler, the district relies on a team of 330 employees to serve approximately 550,000 people in central and eastern Contra Costa County.

More recently, CCWD has advanced critical initiatives such as its Canal Replacement Program, which will modernize infrastructure while enhancing climate resilience and safeguarding water quality through a fully enclosed, buried pipeline. Construction is scheduled to start in 2032.

“We have a responsibility to not only deliver reliable water today, but to undertake the thoughtful planning needed to advance the Canal Replacement Program to ensure reliable water for decades to come,” said CCWD General Manager Rachel Murphy.

At the same time, CCWD has remained an active ACWA member, including through its contributions to the association's leadership. CCWD Board President and current ACWA President Ernie Avila, P.E., is the second CCWD Board member to lead ACWA. Bette Boatman served as ACWA President during the 2002-'03 term and actively participated in the association until her passing in 2024.

Looking Ahead

CCWD's legacy is also a roadmap for its future. Like numerous water agencies throughout California, CCWD has navigated cycles of drought, regulatory change and population growth. Meeting these challenges has required ongoing innovation – from advances in water treatment and monitoring to investments in system reliability and emergency preparedness. Avila summed up the secret to CCWD's success in a single sentence.

“As we mark this milestone, we're reminded that CCWD was built on innovation, collaboration and long-term planning,” Avila said. ♦

DISTRICT FACTS

Location

Concord (Contra Costa County)

Established

1936

Service Area and Connections

61,780 connections serving approximately 550,000 people in central and eastern Contra Costa County, including agricultural and major industrial users such as refineries

Water Source

Sacramento-San Joaquin Bay-Delta

Water Supply and Operations

- 814 miles of treated water pipelines
- 41 storage reservoirs, including 160,000-acre-foot capacity Los Vaqueros Reservoir, for a total capacity of 72 million gallons
- Bollman and Randall-Bold water treatment plants

Employees

330

Website

ccwater.com