

VISION

FOR OUR WATER FUTURE



Setting the Vision

The Association of California Water Agencies (ACWA) represents approximately 470 public water agencies that collectively deliver approximately 90 percent of the water used by Californians — in their homes, on their farms, and for their businesses.

Water agencies are being proactive and are on the front lines of the state’s most pressing challenges — from droughts, floods, and wildfires to aging infrastructure and the need for more housing. Meaningful progress requires state partnership with local water suppliers to achieve common goals. Bold leadership from the governor is critical to setting a unified direction, accelerating action, and delivering results to prepare California for the future. Action is needed now.

Why Water Matters

Water is the foundation upon which California is built. This State is the world’s fourth-largest economy, the nation’s breadbasket, a global technology leader, and home to extraordinary ecosystems. None of it functions without water.

Water is not a single-sector issue. It is the backbone every other sector depends on. It determines where homes can be built, whether farms can produce, how businesses operate and grow, and whether species can survive a changing climate. A safe, reliable, and affordable water supply is one of the most important investments California can make.

ACTION IS NEEDED NOW



**Lead
on Water**



**Protect
Affordability**



**Deliver Critical
Infrastructure**



**Modernize Water
Management**

California Thrives With Water

- › **Housing:** California must plan for 2.5 million new homes in the next decade. Every unit requires a reliable water supply.
- › **Agriculture:** California agriculture is 12% of the state's economy, contributing \$60 billion; employing over 400,000 people; and producing more than half of the nation's fruits, nuts, and vegetables. Both surface and groundwater are fundamental to California's agriculture sector.
- › **Economy:** California's \$4 trillion economy spans technology, innovation, manufacturing, trade, and tourism. Every dollar of it depends on a reliable water supply.
- › **Environment:** California's extraordinary ecosystems — its rivers, wetlands, and floodplains — depend on the same water system managed by local water suppliers. A thriving California requires managing water to sustain both communities and ecosystems.
- › **Public Health:** Water suppliers are California's first line of public health defense, delivering safe, clean drinking water to every community in the state.
- › **Climate Resilience:** Climate whiplash — the swing between extreme droughts and extreme floods — is increasing, snowpack is diminishing, and wildfires are growing more severe. Water suppliers are modernizing, but they cannot do it alone.

Building A Modern System

Securing California's water future requires more than incremental fixes. It demands a fundamental shift in how the State leads, invests, and operates. The Vision for Our Water Future provides an essential framework for ensuring a resilient and reliable water system.

Funded, built, and managed for extreme conditions, our modern water system is resilient, coordinated, and flexible — meeting the needs of California's communities, economy, and environment.

- › **Anchored by Backbone Infrastructure:** The State Water Project and Central Valley Project form the foundation of the statewide water system. These assets capture and manage California's highly variable hydrology and move water where and when it is needed.
- › **Strengthened by Regional Resiliency:** Regional and watershed-based partnerships strengthen local water reliability under changing hydrologic conditions and during emergencies through coordinated planning, interconnected infrastructure, diversified supplies, and shared responsibility.
- › **Delivered Locally:** Water is delivered by local suppliers, even when conveyed through or interconnected with statewide or regional systems. Local agencies set rates and policies — ratepayers fund approximately 85% of California's water system costs — while navigating structural constraints from Proposition 218, regulatory mandates, and permitting complexity.

Key Elements of A Modern Water System

- › Designed and upgraded for the future
- › Flexible and responsive to changing climate conditions
- › Supported by aligned state permitting, regulatory, and investment frameworks
- › Informed by technology, data, and science
- › Grounded in long-term affordability

A modern water system must be resilient, coordinated, and flexible to meet California's evolving needs.





LEAD ON WATER

Recognize water as an essential resource and the infrastructure that underpins California's economy, housing growth, food production, environmental health, and community resilience. Sustained executive leadership is needed to improve water supply reliability, accelerate climate resilience, and ensure coordinated action across state government.

- › **Set a Bold Water Agenda (First 100 Days):** Establish a focused statewide water agenda aligned with this Vision for Our Water Future.

- › **Appoint Leaders to Deliver Results:** Appoint and empower leaders to deliver measurable outcomes.
- › **Unify State Agencies:** Direct state agencies to align under unified statewide water priorities and jointly advance implementation in partnership with local, regional, and federal water managers. Designate a cabinet-level water policy executive, reporting directly to the Governor, to align agencies and organize state resources to implement California's water priorities.



PROTECT AFFORDABILITY

Ensure safe and reliable water remains affordable by strengthening sustained state investment and funding partnerships with local, regional, and federal agencies to address rising infrastructure, climate, and regulatory costs. California's ratepayers fund more than 85% of the system. Without predictable investment, these costs will increasingly fall on households, businesses, and farmers.

- › **Secure Sustainable Water Funding:** Create a reliable sustainable state funding source for water infrastructure that provides predictable, long-term investment. This funding should support critical water infrastructure projects, environmental needs, and California's Human Right to Water while leveraging federal, regional, and local investment.

- › **Accelerate Funding:** Improve funding programs and coordination so investments reach projects faster — reducing administrative delays, lowering project costs, and accelerating infrastructure delivery.
- › **Integrate Investments Across Sectors:** Align state investments and integrate water infrastructure funding across energy, housing, and climate and hazard mitigation to advance multi-benefit projects and maximize federal, state, and regional investment.



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DELIVER CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Future-proof California's critical water infrastructure to ensure reliable supplies in the face of climate change, growing economic and community demands, and escalating emergency risks. This requires strengthening the statewide water system, including both built and natural infrastructure, while advancing regional resilience to maximize systemwide reliability.

- › **Strengthen the State's Water Backbone:** Upgrade, repair, and optimize California's essential backbone infrastructure — the California State Water Project and Central Valley Project.
 - ◆ **Modernize and Protect Infrastructure:** Advance a durable Delta conveyance solution, strengthen Delta levees, safeguard critical infrastructure from subsidence and seismic risk, and upgrade system technologies — including Forecast Informed Reservoir Operations, snowpack measurement, and remote monitoring control.

- ◆ **Improve Coordinated Operations:** Integrate operations of the California State Water Project and Central Valley Project to increase system flexibility, expand the storage and movement of water, and enhance water supply reliability.
- › **Safeguard Colorado River Water Supplies:** Protect California's Colorado River allocation, consistent with the State's legal entitlements and the efforts of the Colorado River Board of California.
- › **Empower Regional Water Solutions:** Champion regional and watershed-based solutions. State policy should empower regions with the tools, flexibility, and investment needed to advance regional planning, partnerships, and projects that diversify water supplies, strengthen system connectivity and operational efficiency, and restore ecosystem functions to ensure reliable water supplies.

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MODERNIZE WATER MANAGEMENT

Improve California's regulatory and operational systems so water projects can move forward reliably and efficiently, infrastructure can be operated more flexibly, and agencies can respond more rapidly to changing conditions. California's regulatory framework should deliver clear, coordinated decisions grounded in the best available science, while maintaining environmental protections, public transparency, and California's existing water rights priority system.

- › **Improve Permitting Performance:** Enhance the clarity, coordination, and efficiency of state permitting processes to accelerate infrastructure and operational improvements; eliminate avoidable costs; and ensure state and local agencies deliver timely, accountable results.
 - ◆ **Integrate Permit Requirements:** Integrate requirements and processes across regulatory agencies to eliminate redundancy and inconsistency.
 - ◆ **Enhance Regulatory Certainty:** Establish transparent procedures, clear criteria for permit approval, and accountable timelines for agency decisions — developed in direct partnership with water suppliers.

- ◆ **Streamline Pathways:** Create efficient pathways to advance multi-benefit, climate-resilient water supply projects.
- › **Modernize Water Operations:** Advance operational approaches that reflect changing climate realities to improve water supply reliability across environmental, agricultural, and urban sectors. This may include coordinated reservoir management, flexible diversion rules tied to real-time hydrology, accelerated groundwater recharge and conjunctive use, expanded water transfers, and other adaptive strategies.
- › **Strengthen Water Data and Science:** Invest in integrated, science-based statewide data systems and technology that improve transparency, inform real-time decisions, and strengthen regulatory and operational performance to increase efficiency and better manage water resources.

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Vision for Our Water Future is an initiative of the Association of California Water Agencies, representing approximately 470 public water agencies in California.