

# The Regional Water Authority

## 2015 ADVOCACY PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

### *A Note From The Executive Director*

In 2013, the Regional Water Authority Board of Directors approved a five-year strategic plan. A key component of the plan was advocacy. The Board's goal: Ensure that regional needs and concerns are positively represented on legislative and regulatory policies and actions. To achieve this goal, RWA launched the Advocacy Program. RWA dedicated resources to a contract lobbyist and part-time staffing for the program in 2015. After just one full year in operation, the results are palpable and significant.

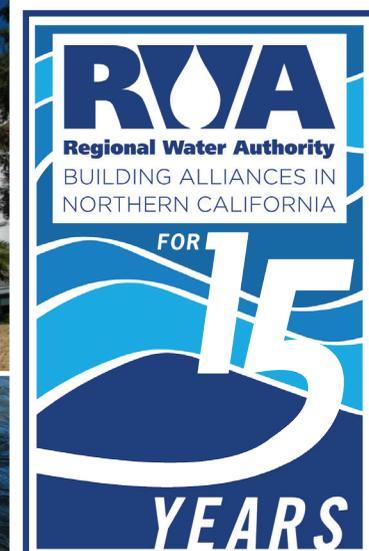
RWA and member agency staff created a legislative platform and policy principles for Board approval that address key advocacy issues and goals. These will guide RWA's advocacy efforts and future work plans for years to come. The documents also demonstrate RWA's commitment to strong, proactive advocacy and will help build upon our important partnerships with allied organizations as we continue to increase RWA's advocacy profile.

The year's key highlights include one-on-one meetings with all of the region's state representatives, tracking hundreds of bills, lobbying proactively on nearly two dozen bills, hosting tours of local water resources for legislators and staff, and passage of some key bills. Program ambassadors also reached out to local elected leaders, meeting with those newly elected in 2014 or whose districts are impacted most by drought or water conservation measures.

Most recently, as a direct result of RWA's advocacy efforts, State Water Resources Control Board staff recommended that a climate adjustment be incorporated into emergency water conservation regulations. The adjustment would reduce the conservation requirement by up to four percentage points for water providers located within the state's warmest areas, including the Sacramento region. RWA staff also continues to lead in the development of regulations to implement the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act, helping to ensure that local authority and flexibility will be paramount.

As RWA prepares to mark its 15-year anniversary and celebrate past accomplishments, it is the future that I am most excited about pursuing. I am confident that the Advocacy Program will achieve even greater results in 2016 and the years to come. Thank you to those agencies and staff members that helped pave the inaugural path forward.

*– John Woodling*



# LEGISLATION HIGHLIGHTS

## By the Numbers

- 99** Number of bills introduced in the 2015 session with identified potential impacts on RWA members
- 41** Number of bills identified as high or medium priority (“hot list”)
- 27** Number of hot list bills that became two-year bills
- 14** Number of hot list bills that were signed into law

## Bills Signed into Law

AB 149 (Chavez) Urban Water Management Plans	Support
AB 349 (Gonzalez) Common Interest Developments: Property Use	Support
AB 401 (Dodd) Low Income Water Rate Assistance Program	Watch
AB 606 (Levine) Water Conservation	Support
AB 617 (Perea) Groundwater	Support if Amended
AB 1164 (Gatto) Water Conservation: Drought Tolerant Landscaping	Support
AB 1390: (Alejo) Groundwater Comprehensive Adjudication	Watch
SB 13 (Pavley) Groundwater	Watch
SB 144 (Pan) Sacramento-San Joaquin Watersheds	Support
SB 208 (Lara) Integrated Regional Water Management Plans	Support if Amended
SB 226 (Pavley) Groundwater Adjudication	Watch
SB 385 (Hueso) Hexavalent Chromium: Compliance Plan	Support
SB 555 (Wolk) Water Loss Management	Support
SB 664 (Hertzberg) Urban Water Management Planning	Watch

## RWA Position

## Bills with Significant RWA Input and Influence

LEGISLATION	TOPIC	OUTCOME
SB 555 (Wolk)	Required local water agencies to conduct annual water loss audits	Senator Wolk’s staff and key legislative committee staff worked closely with RWA to make amendments that warranted RWA removing opposition and, in fact, going on record as a supporting organization. Amendments allow water providers to certify audits in house rather than through costly third-party validations.
SB 385 (Hueso)	Hexavalent Chromium: Compliance Plan	RWA supported this important bill that will allow several members with hexavalent chromium problems in groundwater to comply in a reasonable manner.
AB 617 (Perea)	Sustainable Groundwater Management Act modifications and cleanup	RWA worked to get a definitional change to the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) that would have assured this region’s groundwater management methods and data remain valid and in compliance with SGMA. While this language was ultimately removed from the bill, it prompted productive conversations with the Department of Water Resources to address concerns administratively in the regulatory process.
AB 647 (Eggman)	Defining groundwater recharge as a beneficial use	As a result of RWA’s input and concern, Assemblywoman Eggman agreed to move AB 647 to a two-year bill, allowing RWA and other water organizations additional time to work amendments on the bill that would be favorable, or at least neutral, to RWA interests.

# INFLUENCER OUTREACH

## State Legislative Leaders

RWA staff and member agency representatives held one-on-one meetings with legislative members and staff to introduce the Regional Water Authority and advocate for 2015 key issues. Meetings included legislators representing the five-county Sacramento region as well as members of key policy and budget committees.

## Local Leaders

Throughout the year, Advocacy Program members met with local elected officials to update them on priority policy principles and seek their future support with state legislative leaders. A key objective of this outreach effort was to develop a strong team of local elected officials RWA and its members can call upon to provide political support for water-related issues important to this region.

The relationships built with our local delegation led to a powerful, bipartisan letter of support from the local delegation to the State Water Resources Control Board supporting RWA's call for a more equitable allocation of water conservation requirements.

## Tours for Influencers

RWA's Advocacy Program hosted tours of regional water resources for two distinct groups of influential stakeholders:

- **Legislators and Staff** – In November, RWA hosted a tour for 36 legislators and legislative staff. The tour's purpose was to foster with these key decision makers a further understanding of the Sacramento region's stewardship, investment in water supply reliability and locally preferred solutions.



State Senator Dr. Richard Pan and Assemblymembers Kevin McCarty and Ken Cooley participated in RWA's tour of regional water resources in November.

## **New Briefing Book Tells the Region's Story**

RWA developed a new briefing book and fact sheets for use in outreach to influencers. Materials tell the region's story on water supply, including collaboration through RWA and the Water Forum, integrated regional planning, conservation, water meters, policy priorities and other topics.

Wrote members of the Senate Republican Caucus after the tour: "The tour was very informative, not just regarding the physical and practical aspects of water treatment, storage and delivery, but also especially for your perspective on the balance in the relationship between local and regional water agencies and state government. ...our caucus would be interested in utilizing the Authority as a resource for staying abreast of the concerns of your member water agencies."

- **Metropolitan Water District of Southern California** – In September, RWA hosted a tour for executives and legislative staff from the Metropolitan Water District. The tour's goal was to impart a greater understanding of the region's water supply system, regional investments in water reliability and how regional solutions have statewide benefits.

Wrote Metropolitan's Assistant General Manager for Strategic Water Initiatives after the tour: "Thank you for a highly informative and collegial day of getting a glimpse of some of the water achievements and challenges of the Sacramento region. ... The progress on the water metering program is evident and impressive. ... We very much look forward to reviewing your proposal on how to re-operate Folsom Dam in a manner that provides the region with greater water supply reliability without redirecting impacts. ... Building relationships can be the foundation of creating lasting partnerships."

## COALITION BUILDING

Understanding that there is strength in numbers, the Advocacy Program looked for potential partnering organizations with like-minded objectives. These groups included the Association of California Water Agencies (ACWA), the California Municipal Utilities Association, the Northern California Water Association and individual water agencies throughout the state. Through our partnership with ACWA, RWA was asked to lead a subcommittee of the Groundwater Committee to develop policy objectives. RWA staff and those of member agencies served on ACWA's State Legislative Committee, providing policy perspectives representing northern California.

Additionally, RWA staff served as the Chair of the Practitioner Advisory Panel convened by DWR to provide leadership and policy input on SGMA implementation, and on the State Water Resources Control Board's Water Conservation Workgroup.

Representatives from the Advocacy Program attended meetings of the Senate Natural Resources and Water Committee and the Assembly Water, Parks and Wildlife Committee to track progress of legislation and provide testimony. As a result of RWA's proactive and persistent presence, RWA Executive Director John Woodling was asked by Senator Jim Nielsen to testify on behalf of SB 173 before the Senate Natural Resources and Water Committee.

Building relationships is a critical component of the Advocacy Program. These relationships will forge long-term coalitions and build trust with key office holders to ensure that RWA has a seat at the table for future discussions.

## MEDIA OUTREACH

The Regional Water Authority continued both proactive and reactive media outreach focused on achieving RWA's goals of building the organization's reputation as a leader in California water solutions and demonstrating how our water managers are responsible stewards of local water resources. Nearly 20 press releases, media statements and opinion-editorials were issued in 2015, including an opinion-editorial in the Sacramento Bee and an appearance of Capitol Public Radio's Insight by Executive Director John Woodling advocating for a climate adjustment to emergency conservation standards.



**We need fairer water conservation goals for inland California**

BY JOHN WOODLING  
Special to The Bee

The State Water Resources Control Board meets Monday on potential changes to mandatory water conservation targets should the drought persist into 2016. It needs to correct a significant problem with current targets that unfairly impact California's inland communities.

When emergency regulations were adopted last spring, time was of the essence. California's snowpack was at a record low, and with the hot summer months approaching, Gov. Jerry Brown issued an executive order mandating a 20 percent statewide reduction in urban water use.

The water board set eight tiers of conservation targets, ranging from 8 to 36 percent, and assigned some of the highest targets to inland communities. More than a dozen Sacramento-area water providers are required to conserve 32 percent or more.

The region responded by reducing water use by 23 percent during June through October this year compared with 2013. This follows a nearly 20 percent reduction under voluntary conservation in 2014, and a longer-term reduction of 20 percent in the region's per capita water use in the decade leading up to 2013.

But these reductions have come at a cost. Most notably, our trees and landscapes suffered as most water agencies limited irrigation to two days per week or less, even in hot, dry summer months. Our trees are an important environmental resource, a source of tremendous community pride and a gift from one generation to the next. Many of them are showing signs of severe stress, making them susceptible to pests and disease. Some have died or eventually will — a sad legacy that will extend far beyond this current drought.

The higher conservation targets for inland communities also mean higher financial losses for customers to replace landscaping allowed to go "golden," increased costs for more robust conservation programs and larger revenue losses for water agencies. Sacramento-area water providers have lost more than \$25 million in revenue due to drought this year alone.

Current conservation targets are based on per capita daily residential use during the summer. This broad-brush approach fails to consider critical factors that influence a community's overall water use and its needs.

In the Sacramento region and other inland communities, that common critical factor is climate. It simply takes more water to keep a tree or plant alive inland. A landscape that is the same in every way will require more water to survive the hot summers of Sacramento or the Inland Empire than in cooler coastal cities such as Santa Monica or Santa Cruz.

To ignore this basic fact places a greater burden on inland communities to meet the governor's 25 percent statewide goal. It sends the message that our trees, landscapes and community green spaces are more expendable than those in coastal communities.

The Regional Water Authority is joining several other water providers from across the state to propose an objective, science-based approach to adjust water conservation targets for climate. Data on the water needs of plants, published by the California Department of Water Resources, provides an impartial and readily available framework for such an adjustment. The proposal makes sense, is equitable and has support from local water providers from across the state. You can learn more about this proposal at the Regional Water Authority's website.

We are ready to work with the State Water Board to incorporate climate into revised water conservation targets to help preserve our urban forest, remove the undue burden on inland communities and continue conserving during this historic drought and beyond.

John Woodling is executive director of the Regional Water Authority, which represents two dozen water providers and affiliates in the Sacramento area. He can be contacted at [jwoodling@rwa2o.org](mailto:jwoodling@rwa2o.org).

## ADVOCACY PROGRAM MEMBERS

The success of the program in 2015 is highly dependent on the RWA members who fund the contract lobbyist, Fernandez Government Solutions. The supporters of the lobbyist include:

- City of Folsom
- City of Lincoln
- City of Roseville
- City of Sacramento
- Carmichael Water District
- Del Paso Manor Water District
- Placer County Water Agency
- Sacramento County Water Agency
- Sacramento Suburban Water District
- San Juan Water District

## STAFF

For any questions or more information, please contact RWA Executive Director John Woodling or Water Policy Advisor Dave Brent.