

Regional Water Authority

Federal Legislative Platform

Approved by the Board on March 19, 2020

Who We Are

The Sacramento region is home to the American River, Consumes River, Bear River, Feather River and Sacramento River watersheds where our water resources are captured from Sierra Nevada and Cascade Range snowmelt. The Regional Water Authority (RWA) represents the interests of twenty-one water purveyors and suppliers within the greater Sacramento Region, serving close to 2 million people. RWA supports these agencies in the management of natural resources in a sustainable manner. RWA's mission is "to serve and represent regional water supply interests and assist [RWA] members with protecting and enhancing the reliability, availability, affordability and quality of water resources. "

Collectively, RWA members are guided by the co-equal goals of water supply reliability and the preservation and enhancement of our natural and recreational assets. We consider ourselves stewards of our watersheds and their ecosystems that originate in the headwaters and flow through our rivers. That stewardship is challenged by a changing climate that impacts water supply reliability and the general health of our watersheds.

A Warmer Future

To better prepare for challenges, we have partnered with the Bureau of Reclamation to conduct the American River Basin Study to improve information water managers have about current and future conditions of the basin and how to adapt to the changing climate conditions. Our collaborative work reveals that in the future:

- Temperatures within the upper American River watershed will increase by up to 6 degrees.
- The basin's mountain snowpack (our natural reservoir) will significantly decrease.
- The timing of water runoff will be up to 45 days earlier.

These changes will increase the threats of flood, fire, and drought. Unaddressed there will be increased conflict between water supply, environmental health, and potential for flood. We have a plan to address these threats and decrease conflicts under this changing climate.

Adapting to a Changing Climate

A key to adapting to changing climate and optimizing our water resources for both water supply and the environment is enhanced management and storage through development of a more diversified and resilient water supply portfolio.

Our region is fortunate to have access to both surface water and groundwater resources, but our ability to store it, convey it and regulate its temperature are limited.

We are working to ensure that our region's natural resources remain healthy and that we develop solutions that provide for a sustainable and reliable water supply. Informed by regional plans and studies, there are several efforts underway to accomplish this including both natural and constructed infrastructure, operational changes to help improve water temperature management, and conveyance alternatives to take pressure off our more fragile ecosystems.

Building Resiliency

Through a collaboration known as the Water Forum Agreement, the Sacramento region has worked hard to maintain healthy groundwater levels over the last 20 years. Water agencies voluntarily alternate between surface water and groundwater to allow our groundwater basins to recharge in wet years, so that more groundwater supplies are available to meet local needs in dry years. But we can do more.

The Sacramento Regional Water Bank

We are fortunate to have a 1.8 million acre foot capacity natural reservoir under our feet that can sustainably and resiliently store water. To take advantage of this opportunity, RWA is spearheading a project known as the Sacramento Regional Water Bank expansion, which increases the Region's ability to use more groundwater in dry years and free up surface water for other purposes. This project is currently operating on a limited basis. However, it has the capacity to allow water providers to store 60,000 acre feet annually of additional water in the basin in wet years for future use in dry years and could potentially expand beyond 90,000 acre feet in the near future. It can provide water resource reliability and resiliency to local agencies as well as the Central Valley Project. Reclamation has provided financial assistance to support our technical work related to the Water Bank's development, demonstrating Reclamation's support for our efforts to develop the Water Bank. Federal recognition of this project is critical as well as federal funding to help build out its infrastructure.

We support: Federal financial support of the Sacramento Regional Water Bank for technical, governance and operational framework development, as well as funding for related infrastructure. The federal nexus for this project is that it can alleviate pressure on Central Valley Project and ecosystem demands, particularly during dry periods.

RiverArc

The Lower American River is designated as both a state and federal wild and scenic river, which helps to protect the listed and struggling fish species that call it home, including Steelhead and Fall Run Chinook Salmon. In order to plan for a future of warmer temperatures, including shorter wet seasons, less opportunities to bank groundwater and more severe droughts, the RiverArc project would enable large parts of both Sacramento and Placer counties to take their water supplies off the Sacramento River instead of the American River. This capability is critical for environmental management when flows need to be maintained on the American and more cold water needs to be preserved at Folsom Reservoir. RiverArc can also provide flexibility to Reclamation's Central Valley Project operations by adjusting the demands on Folsom Reservoir. Reclamation has shown support by helping to fund initial technical studies. Reclamation's active involvement in this project is key to our success.

We support: Federal financial support of the RiverArc project for technical, governance and operational framework development, as well as funding for the conveyance, treatment and related infrastructure. The federal nexus for this project is that it can alleviate pressure on the Central Valley Project and ecosystem demands.

Habitat

Our region is committed to a healthy river ecosystem by increasing fish spawning and rearing habitat and improving the overall ecosystem health. Our watershed has coordinated habitat projects through the Water Forum Agreement, which has successfully developed habitat over the last 20 years. More habitat projects are needed, but the permitting process to accomplish these projects is in desperate need of modernization to allow for a predictable permitting process that reduces the time and resources RWA members must dedicate to develop and implement these environmentally protective projects.

We support: More predictable and timely federal permitting from the Army Corps of Engineers. The federal nexus for this project is that it will help recover fish species that are listed and help maintain a healthy ecosystem.

Operating with a Resilient Priority

Folsom cold water pool management

During the drought period that ended in 2016, elevated water temperatures on the American River were devastating to fisheries. We anticipate with a warmer climate and earlier runoff, cold water will become more critically important. To manage this better in the future, we are working closely with Reclamation on how best to plan for a minimum level of storage behind Folsom Reservoir at the end of every December. This planning minimum will provide a cold water buffer going into the next water year.

To also help manage the cold water pool at Folsom Reservoir, the Army Corps of Engineers has authorized a Temperature Control Device (TCD) to help regulate how water is used for releases.

We support: Reclamation continue to support our efforts to establish a planning minimum at Folsom Reservoir and that the TCD be funded in the next appropriations cycle. The federal nexus is that it will help recover fish species that are listed and help maintain a healthy ecosystem.

Legislative proposals continue to support water supply reliability for the water users and the environment within the RWA members watersheds.

Watershed Stewardship and Forest Management

Managing our water resources from their origin at the headwaters is critical. Our region has paid a price due to unhealthy forests with extended fire seasons and more intense wildfires in the upper watershed over the last few years. Heavy rain events after these wildfires contaminate our water resources with runoff containing topsoil, contaminants and ash. We must dedicate more resources to manage forests and to allow for greater investments in ecological forest management practices. Increased and predictable funding for such management practices on U.S. forest lands is critical.

Legacy groundwater issues

Groundwater is a critical part of our water portfolio, but it doesn't come without its own challenges. One of these challenges is contamination, with the family of PFAS chemicals being one of the latest issues to arise. Contaminants have percolated into our groundwater basin from both federal facilities and private industry activities. We are now paying the price of these legacy actions. The federal government must continue to take ownership of the adverse impacts to water quality that occur from past and current federal activities and federal facility operations and fund clean-up needs.

We support: The federal government accepting responsibility and partnering with communities to clean up legacy contamination from the operation of military bases. . Legislative proposals should support clean water infrastructure assistance with a role for the originators of the pollution to financially support these efforts.