

## Protecting our River and Water Supply



The Water Forum was formed 20 years ago to provide a way for diverse stakeholders to design balanced water-use and river management solutions. Today, members continue to work together under the Water Forum Agreement to meet two co-equal goals: provide a reliable and safe water supply for the Sacramento region's long-term growth and economic health and to preserve the fishery, wildlife, recreational and aesthetic values of the lower American River.

Over the years, the Water Forum has developed a track record for collaboration among water providers, environmental groups, business leaders, local governments and other stakeholders and successes in meeting the co-equal goals even during extreme conditions such as California's recent historic drought.

As the Sacramento region adapts to climate change, the Water Forum Agreement will continue to provide a solid foundation, North Star and path forward.

## Cutting-Edge Science

The Water Forum's approach to meeting the co-equal goals is grounded in cutting-edge science. No other entity knows the lower American River—the Sacramento region's crown jewel—like the Water Forum does. The Water Forum uses pioneering tools to study how changes in the river's temperature and flow impact the potential to nurture fish.



The lower American River is not only a crucial part of the Sacramento region's daily experience and identity, it is a major water supply source for nearly 2 million people. The river is also home to 43 fish species, including federally threatened Central Valley steelhead and struggling fall-run Chinook salmon, responsible for producing about 20 percent of the state's fall-run Chinook salmon population.

# Progressive Solutions to Manage Temperature and Flow

To address temperature and flow conditions for the lower American River, the Water Forum developed its Flow Management Standard, first implemented 14 years ago and modified based upon real-world experience during the drought. The Water Forum's science-based flow standard optimizes how water is managed to best meet the co-equal goals of water supply reliability and environmental stewardship.

Water Forum stakeholders are now working with federal and state agencies to encourage their adoption of the Water Forum flow standard, which stakeholders believe is the best path forward for protecting and restoring steelhead and fall-run Chinook salmon while also improving the reliability of local water supplies and without re-directing negative impacts to other regions of the state.



The Water Forum's Modified Flow Management Standard would help preserve water storage in Folsom Reservoir to guard against severe circumstances like drought and improve water temperature in the lower American River for salmon and steelhead.

## Habitat Restoration

The drought and past restoration efforts provided invaluable opportunities to study the lower American River under intense settings, as expected with climate change. The Water Forum puts this science to work by partnering with federal, state and local agencies to restore habitat. Over the last decade, partners have invested more than \$7 million to create over 30 acres of spawning beds and 1.2 miles of side channels, which are prime rearing zones.

Over the years, Water Forum scientists have learned when, where and how to restore spawning habitat to maximize the health of fisheries through targeted and cost-effective projects. Most recently, the Water Forum completed a major habitat restoration project on the lower American River designed to create ideal conditions for salmon and steelhead to spawn and rear their young. Partnering with federal, state and local agencies, Water Forum teams restored river habitat with stunning results: After counting zero salmon nests (redds) in 2018, the restoration site teemed with more than 345 redds after the project.

**Expanding these partnerships could accelerate and expand the Water Forum's work to include longer-term studies with the potential to provide insight into system-wide issues with climate change, including those beyond the Sacramento region.**

## Looking Ahead

This year, as the Water Forum celebrates its 20th anniversary, stakeholders are embarking on a new strategic planning process to consider lessons learned over the past two decades and where the Water Forum should go from here, particularly in a future with climate change. The Water Forum Agreement is a living document—envisioned to adapt with changing conditions—yet ever focused on meeting the co-equal goals through collaboration.

