

Regional Water Authority Federal Legislative Platform

Who We Are

The Sacramento region is home to multiple watersheds which include –the American River, Consumes River, Bear River, Sacramento Rivers –from which our water resources are captured, diverted and managed. The Regional Water Authority's (RWA) mission, on behalf of its almost twenty-one water purveyors and suppliers, helps to sustainably manage the water resources for close to 2 million people, is "to serve, represent and align the interests of regional water suppliers and stakeholders for the purpose of improving water supply reliability, availability, quality, and affordability." Collectively, RWA members are guided by the co-equal goals of water supply reliability and stewardship of the region's natural and recreational assets. The following are issues related to federal action that impact the pursuit of the co-equal goals by RWA and its members.

A Warmer Future

The American River Basin Study, a joint effort with RWA and the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, recently indicated the upper American River watershed may experience a 6 F° temperature increase by 2080. This presents ongoing serious challenges to regional water management as peak runoff will eventually occur an estimated 45 days earlier than it does today, with more highly variable flows as well. This temperature increase, and other related changes, will continue to exacerbate floods, fires, and droughts, which are often already causing severe devastation.

Adapting to a Changing Climate

A key to adapting to our changing climate and optimizing 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, but our ability to store it, convey it and regulate its temperature are limited and preventing their most efficient, effective, and environmentally beneficial use. Informed by regional plans and studies there are several efforts underway to address these constraints to better achieve the co-equal goals, including investing in both natural and constructed infrastructure, as well as instituting operational changes to help improve water temperature management.

Building Groundwater Resiliency

Over the last 20 years, in accordance with the Water Forum collaborative, the Sacramento region has successfully recovered and maintained healthy local groundwater levels. Water agencies voluntarily shift to more surface water use in wet years, which results in increased aquifer storage, and those groundwater supplies being available to meet local needs in dry years. But we can, and seek, to do more to enhance that conjunctive use capability.

The Sacramento Regional Water Bank (Water Bank)

We are fortunate to have a 1.8 million acre foot capacity natural reservoir under our feet (about twice the size of Folsom Reservoir) that can sustainably and resiliently store water. To take advantage of this opportunity, RWA is spearheading an effort to increase utilization of the Water Bank in the near term with potential additional recharge of 60,000 acre feet annually in wet years for future use in dry years, with this potentially expanding to beyond 90,000 acre feet in the near future if necessary infrastructure investments can be realized. (This is almost equal to the water supply of cities the size of Sacramento.) The Water Bank could also Reflecting likely benefits to Central Valley Project operations, so Reclamation has provided financial assistance funding to support technical work and planning to supporting the Water Bank's

expansion. Future federal recognition of the Water Bank is critical to increasing its capabilities, as well as federal funding to help build new infrastructure.

- **RWA Supports:** Federal investment in the Sacramento Regional Water Bank to support technical, governance and operational framework development, as well as related infrastructure.

Habitat

Through the Water Forum collaborative, the region has and continues to improve the ecosystem of the Lower American River by increasing spawning and rearing habitat acreage for native fisheries. More habitat investments are needed, but the permitting process for these projects is in desperate need of modernization to make it more predictable, and reduce the time and resources currently required to develop and implement these environmental enhancements.

- **RWA Supports:** The Army Corps of Engineers should initiate a process to develop and adopt more predictable and timely permitting processes and appropriately fund regulatory offices.

Folsom cold water pool management

During the 5 year 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 improve cold water pool management at Folsom Reservoir, the Army Corps of Engineers has already been authorized to construct a new Temperature Control Device (TCD).

- **RWA Supports:** To have the TCD included as an Army Corps priority, as well as securing a sufficient appropriation to fund its construction at Folsom Dam.

Watershed Stewardship and Forest Management

Managing our water resources from their origin at the headwaters and in the upper watershed is critical. Unmanaged and unhealthy forests extend and intensify fire seasons. Runoff from heavy rain events after wildfires contaminate water resources with topsoil, contaminants and ash.

- **RWA Supports:** Increased and predictable funding for greater investments in ecological forest management and fire suppression practices on U.S. forest lands.

Legacy Groundwater Issues

As a critical part of our water portfolio, groundwater comes with its own challenges. One is contamination: including the family of PFAS chemicals. Without remediation, the ability to optimize conjunctive use and expansion of the Water Bank cannot be fully realized.

- **RWA Supports:** The federal government should accept responsibility and partner with communities to fund clean-up of legacy contamination from the operation of military bases and other federal facilities while also securing financial support from polluters

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COVID-19 Relief

Federal aid packages in response to the pandemic have failed to address impacts to State and local governments, including special districts. Prohibitions on water shut-offs and overdue bill collections have also impacted the financial stability of public utilities. In addition, reduced commercial water demands that have not been offset by residential increases, and the resulting revenue impacts, new, unbudgeted expenses have arisen to meet the challenges of providing safe work environments and transitioning to many employees working from home.

- **RWA Supports:** Federal COVID-19 relief aid targeted to State and local governments, including special districts, as well as expanding payroll tax relief to these jurisdictions . In addition, with respect to ongoing legal prohibitions of water shut-offs and collections of arrearages in payments to public utilities, if amnesty is proposed, then federal aid must be provided to those impacted utilities to cover the lost revenues.

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Infrastructure Investment and Financing

The pandemic has highlighted the critical value of reliable water service, so much so that water service shut-offs for lack of payment has been widely prohibited. There is a long-standing, multi-billion dollar deficit in necessary investment in new water infrastructure, as well as rehabilitation of existing facilities.

- **RWA Supports:** Significant federal funding of programs that provide [job recovery](#), financial support and grants to leverage local investments (e.g. WaterSMART, WIFIA, State Revolving Funds, etc.), as well as increased direct capital investment funding for Reclamation, EPA, and the Corps of Engineers.

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RiverArc

The RiverArc project would enable large parts of both Sacramento and Placer counties to divert water supplies from the Sacramento River instead of the American River. This would allow more cold water to be preserved at Folsom Reservoir and improve environmental management of American River flows, both to benefit fisheries. RiverArc can also increase Central Valley Project operational flexibility by adjusting local demands on Folsom Reservoir. Reclamation has shown support by helping to fund initial technical studies.

- **RWA Supports:** Continued federal financial support of the RiverArc project for technical, governance and operational framework development, as well as funding for the project's conveyance, treatment and related infrastructure.