

# Celebrating a Year of Success

**What a year!!** In 2023, the Regional Water Authority (RWA) achieved unprecedented success. From a record amount of new funding for priority projects to spearheading a groundbreaking new law, our achievements in 2023 reflect not only this moment in time but decades of collaboration and sustained effort to become a recognized leader in California water management.



## **A few highlights:**

The RWA secured \$55 million in funding for members to advance 21 projects to enhance local water supplies and environmental flows for the Lower American River during dry years. This landmark partnership with the California Natural Resources Agency (CNRA) and Department of Water Resources (DWR) will enhance the region's resilience to drought and climate change, reduce reliance on surface water, and distribute supplies where needed most to support communities and the environment. This comes in addition to two additional grants from DWR totaling \$7 million aimed at supporting groundwater sustainability and water efficiency programs benefiting disadvantaged communities.

We also won in the legislature, spearheading Senate Bill 659, the California Water Supply Solutions Act of 2023, from conception to enactment. Partnering with California Sen. Angelique Ashby, the new law is a game-changer in how California manages water. It builds on the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act and was the only groundwater law of 2023. In addition, we protected state budget funds that were ultimately part of the \$55 million received from CNRA and DWR. This could not have been accomplished without the support of our member agencies and Sen. Ashby's leadership.

We made substantial progress on the Sacramento Regional Water Bank (Water Bank) with the release of foundational documents outlining its strategy, organizational framework, and essential functions for successful implementation. We also launched the environmental process for the Water Bank, initiating public scoping and putting us in an excellent position to release a draft environmental document in 2024.

On the regulatory front, the RWA worked to preserve water supplies at Folsom Reservoir and defended member access to these supplies. We actively shaped emerging regulations, working to safeguard member interests in the Bay Delta Water Quality Control Plan and influence conservation regulations to be fair, realistic, and affordable.

These achievements demonstrate our collective strength through the RWA. We look forward to building upon this momentum as your partner in delivering enduring benefits for the communities you serve for generations to come.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "James Peifer". The signature is fluid and cursive, written over a light blue background.

James Peifer



## FUNDING SUCCESS

The RWA was awarded \$55 million in funding for members to advance 21 projects designed to boost local water supplies and environmental flows for the Lower American River during dry years. Part of a landmark partnership agreement with the CNRA and DWR, the improvements will allow the region to better withstand intense drought and impacts from climate change, reduce reliance on surface water, and distribute supplies where they are needed most to support communities and the environment.

RWA/SGA staff submitted a sustainable groundwater management grant request on behalf of the North American Subbasin and received \$3.5 million in funding from DWR. These funds are dedicated to a range of projects and activities that focus on recharging the groundwater basin, monitoring groundwater conditions, studying water quality contamination, and enhancing groundwater modeling. These initiatives play a pivotal role in maintaining basin sustainability and providing essential support to the communities in the North American Subbasin of the Sacramento region.

The RWA was awarded \$3.5 million in drought grant funding from DWR to implement a regional indoor fixture installation program for disadvantaged communities and a climate-resilient yard transformation program. The yard transformation program will reduce outdoor water use by providing rebates to residential, commercial, and institutional properties, while the indoor fixture installation program will purchase and install over 22,000 new high-efficiency fixtures in older inefficient multi-family and commercial/institutional properties.

## 2023 Advocacy Priorities

- Obtain Funding for RWA Member Projects
- Advance the Sacramento Regional Water Bank
- Advocate for Legislation that Increases Groundwater Recharge and on Priority Bills
- Help Shape a Water Bond or Other Funding
- Seek Positive Regulatory Outcomes and Protect Member Interests in processes such as the Biological Opinions, Voluntary Agreements, and Delta Conveyance Project

## LEGISLATIVE WINS

Gov. Gavin Newsom signed into law RWA-sponsored Senate Bill 659, also known as the California Water Supply Solutions Act of 2023. Authored by California Sen. Angelique Ashby and co-sponsored by the California Association of Winegrape Growers, the bill received widespread support for its innovative approach to enhancing groundwater recharge as a sustainable water supply solution in California. SB 659's primary goal is to identify and address barriers to recharge and water banking projects.

RWA actively participated in the state budget process, closely monitoring details as they fell into place leading up to the July 1 constitutional deadline for a signed budget. This included working with Sen. Ashby to protect funds that were ultimately part of the \$55 million the region received.



Several significant bills, namely AB 460 and AB 1337, which would impact water rights, did not progress in 2023. Although potential resources bond measures faced obstacles in the legislative process, discussions between the Legislature and Administration continued throughout the year and are anticipated to progress in 2024. In addition, many bills that RWA initially opposed either underwent satisfactory amendments or did not advance. These bills spanned areas such as water rights, adjudication, efficiency, water quality, and shutoffs, among other subjects.

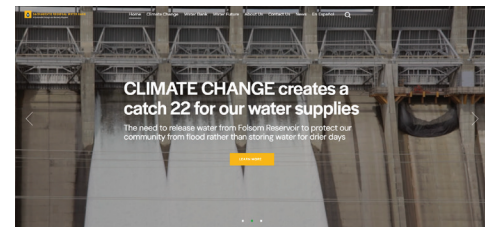
# ADVANCING THE SACRAMENTO REGIONAL WATER BANK

**Work Products:** The RWA released two foundational documents in 2023 outlining the Water Bank’s overall strategy and organizational framework. The Goal, Objectives, Principles, and Constraints (GOPC) document sets the direction for operations, governance, and compliance. The second document, titled “Governance: Organizational Framework, Functions, and Associated Roles and Responsibilities,” outlines essential functions vital for successful implementation.

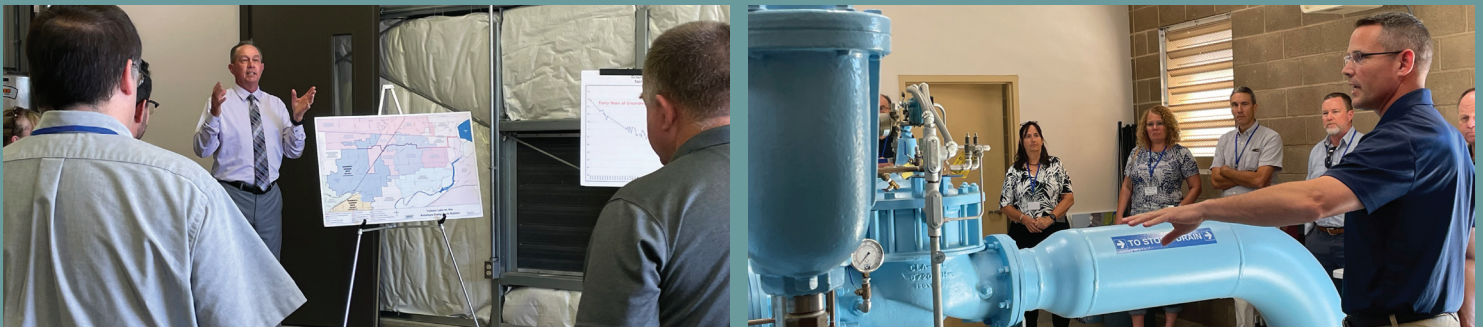
**Environmental Process:** The RWA launched the environmental process, issuing the Notice of Preparation (NOP) for an Environmental Impact Report. Public scoping meetings, held in October 2023, provided information and opportunities for input from the community about the scope of the environmental document.

**Stakeholder Engagement:** Two Stakeholder Forums took place in 2023 to provide updates on Water Bank work products and progress, address questions, and collect feedback. In addition, the RWA facilitated small group and one-on-one meetings with stakeholders, members of the media, and organizations such as the League of California Cities.

**Outreach Tools:** The RWA launched a new “Water Bank Q&A Connect” feature to engage stakeholders and answer questions between Forums. In addition, the RWA launched several new tools to educate the community about climate change impacts on the Sacramento region’s water system and adaptation through the Water Bank. These included a new website—SacWaterBank.com—and a video series.



The RWA hosted a tour of Water Bank facilities for several federal agencies. Washington, DC-based representatives from Reclamation and local representatives from the U.S. Geological Services learned why the Water Bank is critical to a reliable water future with climate change.



## REGULATORY ADVOCACY

The RWA continued its work to shape the State Water Board’s draft regulations for “Making Water Conservation a Way of Life” both behind the scenes and in public comment. In addition to providing leadership on state working groups, the RWA and member agencies made the region’s voice heard at the October State Water Board hearing. In detailed written comments, they highlighted severe concerns about cost, the unrealistic target for outdoor efficiency, and potential damage to California’s urban tree canopy, among other concerns. In the fall, RWA staff met with the Legislative Analyst Office (LAO) in advance of their required report to the Legislature on the regulations. Much of what was discussed in that meeting was touched on in the final LAO report.

In addition, the RWA actively worked to safeguard member interests in the Bay-Delta Plan environmental process. The RWA team provided member perspectives on the American River Agreements for Healthy Rivers and Landscapes, commonly called the Voluntary Agreement, and organized comment panels on habitat and hydrology, as well as an opening and closing panel. The RWA team hosted technical collaboration meetings with statewide tributary representatives to coordinate comments on the 6,000-page draft environmental document under review by the State Water Board.

## MILESTONE

The Sacramento Groundwater Authority celebrated its 25th Anniversary with a lively breakfast, marking the organization's dedication and innovation in groundwater management. The program featured three distinct panels of water and policy leaders, as well as the next generation of California water leaders.



## SHAPING THE CONVERSATION

The RWA hosted two Coffee & Conversation events in 2023. The first featured Felicia Marcus, Stanford University Water in the West Fellow and former State Water Board Chair, who shared her thoughts on a wide range of topics, including strategies for utilizing excess runoff and precipitation to help prepare for dry times. Another included Jay Ziegler, Delta Watermaster and former Policy Director for the California Office of the Nature Conservancy, sharing his insights on the significance of data analytics in advancing water management in the Delta and other topics.

## In the News

The RWA continued to advocate on priority topics via the news media. Published pieces included:

- An RWA-sponsored commentary in the *Sacramento Bee* by Roseville's Sean Bigley and Sacramento Suburban Water District's Dan York, highlighting how the region successfully recharged groundwater with the 2023 storms and advocating for increased state and federal support in this endeavor.
- An opinion article in *AWWA's SOURCE Magazine* by RWA's Jim Peifer, urging California water providers to collaborate and take a leading role in groundwater recharge efforts.
- An op-ed on *Maven's Notebook* co-authored by Eastern Municipal Water District's Joe Mouawad and RWA's Jim Peifer, emphasizing the need for additional groundwater recharge during wet winters and the potential to make significant progress in rebuilding depleted groundwater by capturing excess runoff in wet years.
- An opinion article in the *Nevada Independent* by RWA's Jim Peifer, exploring how Northern California could help Colorado River-dependent communities like Las Vegas via the Water Bank.

# WORKING TOGETHER TO LEAD THE CHARGE ON GROUNDWATER RECHARGE

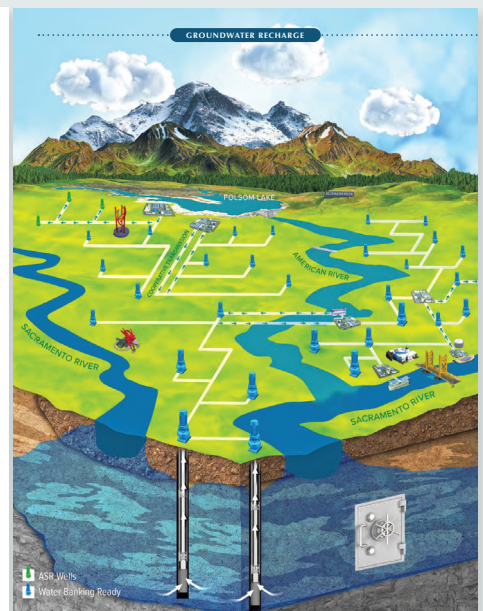
By JIM PEIFER

**IS THE DROUGHT OVER IN CALIFORNIA?** That was the question on a million minds after nature delivered nine soaking-wet atmospheric river storms to the Golden State for three weeks after Christmas. ▼

The short answer is no. Those storms didn't end the drought, and a real end could be decades away. The reason is groundwater depletion. When we get that kind of deluge, it does help recharge groundwater, but only incrementally. In fact, decades of over-pumping groundwater exacerbated by the dry climate hydrology has left many of the state's groundwater basins in a condition of overdraft that will take years to overcome.

To end the drought, we need to start treating our groundwater aquifers as the water infrastructure of the climate change era. To do this, we must transform how we manage storm runoff to recharge groundwater on a much bigger scale. Cities and agricultural irrigation districts are starting to figure it out, and the state is taking steps to help. So, while stormwater capture is happening, we have

water needs too long. Surface reservoirs remain essential but adding to the natural recharge of our groundwater basins and thereby increasing the amount of underground water storage will be needed to meet the demands of today's fickle winter storms. It has been estimated that the State Water Project and federal Central Valley Project will lose 25 percent of their capacity by 2050 due to shrinking Sierra Nevada snowpack



# Legislation By the Numbers



**1,974** in the Assembly

**1056** in the Senate



- **1,171** Number of bills signed into law
- **156** Number of bills vetoed by the Governor
- **737** Number of bills that became 2-year bills
- **38** Number of bills with RWA positions
  - **3** bills were signed into law
  - **1** bills were vetoed
  - **1** bills were signed into law
  - **6** bills were vetoed
  - **21** bills were vetoed
    - **6** Support
    - **8** Oppose
    - **20** Neutral

Bill – Author	Bill Title & Description	RWA Position	Outcome
<b>SB 659</b> – (Ashby)	Requires DWR to identify the statewide potential and ways to reduce barriers to groundwater recharge.	<b>Support</b>	Chaptered
<b>AB 249</b> – (Holden)	Would require a community water system that serves a school site with a building constructed before January 1, 2010, to test for lead in the potable water system of the school site before January 1, 2027.	<b>Oppose</b>	Vetoed
<b>AB 754</b> – (Papan)	Would require an urban water management plan, if a reservoir is identified as an existing or planned source of 50% of an agency’s water, to include specified information related to water storage and conservation, including, among other things, a target water supply storage curve.	<b>Oppose</b>	Died
<b>AB 460</b> – (Bauer-Kahan)	Establishes expansive authority for the State Water Resources Control Board to issue interim relief orders.	<b>Oppose</b> – Unless Amended	Two Year Bill
<b>AB 1337</b> – (Wicks)	Would authorize the State Water Resources Control Board to issue a curtailment order for any diversion, regardless of the basis of right, when water is not available under the diverter’s priority of right. The bill would authorize the board to adopt regulations to implement this provision.	<b>Oppose</b> – Unless Amended	Two Year Bill

An aerial photograph of a wide river valley, likely the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta, during the golden hour of sunset. The sky is filled with soft, wispy clouds, and the sun is low on the horizon, casting a warm glow over the landscape. The river winds through the valley, surrounded by lush greenery and agricultural fields.

## STAFF

For any questions or more information, please contact RWA Advocacy Program Manager Ryan Ojakian at (916) 967-7692.

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