

## Advancing Water Resilience for the Sacramento Region



2024 was a transformative year for the Regional Water Authority (RWA). Despite significant challenges, we secured funding for critical projects, protected member interests, and positioned the Sacramento region for long-term water resilience.

The passage of Proposition 4, the \$10 billion Safe Drinking Water, Wildfire Prevention, Drought Preparedness, and Clean Air Bond Act, was one of the biggest wins of the year. The RWA played a key role in helping to shape and advocate for this measure, which dedicates \$386 million to groundwater management and recharge, and \$100 million to watershed resilience.

This funding will play a critical role in ensuring a reliable water supply for the Sacramento region, including supporting the Sacramento Regional Water Bank, as we face the growing challenges of climate change. The passage of Proposition 4 marked a significant milestone, not just for the region, but for the future of California's water management strategy.

The year also brought changes in legislative leadership. Senator Christopher Cabaldon and Assemblywoman Maggy Krell joined the ranks, bringing fresh perspectives to water management. Alongside Senator Angelique Ashby, their leadership strengthens the region's ability to secure resources and advance water priorities. We have already met with our newest legislators and look forward to working with them in the year to come.

In addition, the RWA successfully safeguarded \$55 million for the Agreements to Support Healthy Rivers and Landscapes, preserving essential funding amidst a historic \$46.8 billion state budget deficit. These funds, initially awarded in 2023, are critical to advancing projects that promote ecosystem health and water sustainability.

As we look ahead to 2025, our focus remains steadfast: advancing water sustainability and advocating for our members' interests. With the support of our new legislative partners and the potential for Proposition 4 funding, we are well-positioned to advance our water priorities and further strengthen the resilience of our water systems.

James Peifer





## 2024 LEGISLATIVE RECAP

2024 saw the continuation of the 2023-24 legislative session, with the RWA actively advocating for member interests in critical areas such as water conservation, water rights, groundwater management, water quality, water affordability, and the advancement of a 2024 water and climate resilience bond. Amid a \$68 billion state budget deficit, RWA also worked diligently to protect funding for vital water resilience projects.

**In 2024, 61 new bills were introduced and tracked by RWA, alongside 7 carryover bills from 2023, which continued to progress through the legislative process well into the year.**

### A SNAPSHOT OF 2024 LEGISLATION:

Bill – Author	Bill Title & Description	RWA Position	Outcome
<b>SB 867</b> Allen D- Santa Monica	The bill passed and the voters approved Prop 4 which, among other things, provided for \$386 million for groundwater recharge and \$100 million for watershed resilience.	<b>Supported</b>	Passed
<b>SB 1255</b> Durazo D- Los Angeles	This bill would have created a mandatory water rate assistance program that for most agencies would have cost significantly more to administer than the benefit it would have provided.	<b>Opposed</b>	Died
<b>AB 2079</b> Bennett D- Ventura	This bill sought to regulate the permitting of large-diameter, high-capacity water wells in California. The bill aimed to impose additional requirements on local enforcement agencies before approving permits for such wells, including public notifications and consultations with groundwater sustainability agencies.	<b>Opposed</b>	Died
<b>SB 1110</b> Ashby D- Sacramento	This bill aimed to adjust the timelines for the State Water Resources Control Board’s authority to issue informational orders, written notices, and conservation orders to urban retail water suppliers not meeting their urban water use objectives. The bill proposed delaying these enforcement actions by two years, allowing suppliers additional time to comply with water use efficiency standards.	<b>Sponsored</b>	Died
<b>AB 1337</b> Wicks D- Oakland	This bill sought to enhance the State Water Resources Control Board’s authority to curtail water diversions during shortages, regardless of the basis of water rights.	<b>Opposed</b>	Died
<b>AB 460</b> Bauer-Kahan D- Orinda	Originally, this bill enhances the enforcement capabilities of the State Water Resources Control Board regarding water rights and usage. It increases civil penalties for unauthorized water diversions and mandates annual adjustments for inflation to these penalties, beginning January 1, 2026. The bill also strengthens the board’s authority to issue cease and desist orders and seek injunctive relief for violations related to water use. This bill was chaptered on September 22, 2024.	<b>Maintained Watch</b>	Chaptered

## 2024 REGULATORY ADVOCACY

### Shaping Conservation Regulations

In 2024, the Regional Water Authority actively advocated for its members to influence the development of the Making Water Conservation a California Way of Life regulation, which were adopted by the State Water Resources Control Board in July 2024. The RWA’s efforts included engagement with the legislature, participation in stakeholder meetings, and outreach through the news media to address critical concerns, such as the feasibility of outdoor water use standards and the protection of urban tree canopies.

- **Legislative Advocacy:** The Regional Water Authority (RWA) sponsored Senate Bill 1110, authored by Senator Angelique Ashby, to introduce flexibility in enforcing water use standards. The bill sought to allow lower-cost supply alternatives to meet regulatory requirements. Although SB 1110 was held in committee and did not advance, RWA continues to explore strategies to address technical challenges in the adopted regulations. Senator Ashby reaffirmed her commitment to advocating for the region’s water interests.
- **Engagement with State Entities:** RWA engaged proactively with the Legislative Analyst’s Office (LAO) prior to its January report to the Legislature. The report incorporated critiques of the proposed regulations, reflecting several key concerns raised by RWA. Additionally, RWA’s legal counsel and staff worked directly with the State Water Resources Control Board, advocating for revisions to the regulations. These efforts emphasized the need for realistic outdoor water standards and support for healthy landscapes, including maintaining urban tree canopies.
- **Media Outreach:** RWA leveraged media platforms to amplify its concerns. Executive Director Jim Peifer co-authored an op-ed in the Sacramento Bee, warning about the potential impacts of outdoor water use standards on urban tree canopies. Furthermore, Amy Talbot, RWA’s Water Efficiency Program Manager, participated in public discussions and contributed to a POLITICO article, highlighting the implications of the regulations for tree health.

### Advocacy in Regulatory Processes

The RWA actively represented member interests in three critical water management initiatives in 2024: the Agreements to Support Healthy Rivers and Landscapes (Agreements), the Bay-Delta Plan Update, and the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for Long-Term Operations (LTO) and Biological Opinions (BiOps) for the Central Valley Project and State Water Project.

- **Agreements to Support Healthy Rivers and Landscapes:** RWA staff and member agencies developed key draft agreements and procedures, including the Enforcement Agreement, Implementation Agreement, and Flow Accounting Procedures for the American River tributary. RWA collaborated with other Sacramento-San Joaquin Bay-Delta tributaries to host a workshop in April, focusing on flow measures, enforcement, and program progress. RWA also engaged with the State Water Board to influence the draft implementation plan for the Agreements.
- **Bay-Delta Plan Update:** Collaborating with the Water Forum, the RWA reviewed and submitted comments on the extensive 6,000+ page draft staff report for the Bay-Delta Plan update. RWA’s feedback focused on concerns about the cold-water pool in Folsom Reservoir and its effects on fish in the Lower American River.
- **EIS for Long-Term Operations and BiOps:** RWA provided input to the Bureau of Reclamation on the Environmental Impact Statement for the Long-Term Operation of the Central Valley Project and State Water Project. Recommendations for improving conditions in the Lower American River were included in the final document. Additionally, RWA tracked the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s biological opinion, which analyzed the operational impact of these projects on listed species and critical habitats.

## 2024 STAKEHOLDER OUTREACH, TOURS AND ADVOCACY

The RWA hosted a tour of the American River in January for new NOAA West Coast Regional Administrator Jennifer Quan and other NOAA staff members. The tour, which made stops at PCWA's American River Pump Station, Roseville's new Solaire ASR wells and the Water Forum's 2023 Habitat Project, aimed to showcase the region's "supershed" approach and open a dialogue about issues such as the Agreements to Support Healthy Rivers and Landscapes.



Photo courtesy of PCWA.



RWA and member agencies on April 5 hosted a discussion with state and local water leaders to explore strategies for increasing climate change resiliency on a watershed level. Representatives from the Department of Conservation, Department of Water Resources, and Wildlife Conservation Board heard from local water managers and environmentalists about their holistic approach to water management on a "supershed" level.

## RECLAMATION

- The RWA team met with Reclamation's new Regional Director for the California-Great Basin Region Karl Stock to discuss the American River region's priorities and foster ongoing collaboration. Stock succeeded Ernest Conant, who assumed the role of senior advisor to the Deputy Commissioner for Operations.
- RWA staff and members attended the Mid-Pacific Region Water Users Conference in Reno, Nevada, from January 24-26. Multiple meetings occurred, including a discussion on operations under the proposed "Agreements to Support Healthy Rivers and Landscapes," formerly called Voluntary Agreements.

## NATIONAL PANEL

RWA Manager of Strategic Affairs Michelle Banonis served on a February 28 panel at the request of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine to discuss the Long-Term Operations of the Central Valley Project and State Water Project. She presented information about how to inject the best science into the operations of the American River Division of the Central Valley Project.

## SGMA 10-YEAR ANNIVERSARY

The RWA was a key participant in the SGMA 10-Year Anniversary Event on November 18 hosted by the California Department of Water Resources. RWA Executive Director Jim Peifer appears in a commemorative video reflecting on SGMA's role in sustainable water management in the Sacramento region. Additionally, RWA's Manager of Technical Services, Trevor Joseph, joined a panel discussion at the event.

## ADVANCING THE SACRAMENTO REGIONAL WATER BANK

In 2024, the Sacramento Regional Water Bank achieved significant milestones toward advancing sustainable water management in the region, reaching the halfway point of its four-year development timeline. Efforts focused on finalizing key frameworks, including the Water Accounting System (WAS), the Programmatic Environmental Impact Report (PEIR), and scientific groundwater modeling.

**Water Accounting System (WAS):** Substantial progress was made and a WAS concept paper is nearing public release. The WAS consisting of a concept paper and ultimately an accounting tool is a critical component of the project for managing water deposits, withdrawals, and storage losses within underground aquifers. The WAS is designed to ensure basin sustainability and will be implemented across the North and South American Subbasins. It incorporates detailed principles and tools for effective water banking.

**Environmental Review Process:** The RWA advanced the PEIR under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), incorporating updates to the Project Description and reissuing a Notice of Preparation (NOP) to include out-of-basin transfers of up to 35,000 acre-feet per year.

**Groundwater Modeling:** State-of-the-art modeling, combining the CalSim 3 surface water model with the locally developed CoSANA groundwater model, provided a framework for analyzing surface and groundwater interactions. A Water Management Operations Pilot explored various water banking scenarios, aligning regional data for accurate simulations of Water Bank activities.

**Community Outreach:** The Water Bank enhanced outreach efforts with new educational materials, including a video on in-lieu recharge, a process vital to groundwater replenishment. These resources were showcased at conferences and published in key industry platforms. The Q&A Connect series addressed stakeholder questions, while Spanish-language materials expanded accessibility for diverse community members.



## IN THE NEWS

RWA leveraged media to spotlight regional water initiatives:

- KCRA 3 and ABC 10 highlighted how 12.3 billion gallons of water were stored in the Water Bank during 2023's historic storms.
- Fox 40 News and CBS 13 featured groundwater recharge efforts and stormwater capture for underground storage.
- Maven's Notebook published an RWA-sponsored blog post on wildfire risk reduction by Placer County Water Agency and Yuba Water Agency.

## SHAPING THE FUTURE OF STATE FUNDING

In 2024, RWA was awarded a \$2 million grant from the California Department of Water Resources to lead a Watershed Resilience Pilot Project, aimed at shaping water management planning and funding in California. This initiative addresses local climate risks and adaptation strategies across regional watersheds, including the American, Bear, Cosumnes, and Sacramento Rivers.

Key achievements included forming a Watershed Resilience Ad Hoc Committee and a Watershed Network of agencies, tribal representatives, and non-governmental organizations. Collaborative efforts with stakeholders and DWR focused on watershed budgets, tools, and a comprehensive climate vulnerability assessment. This assessment will guide detailed implementation plans to strengthen regional water management.

# SHAPING THE CONVERSATION IN 2024

RWA engaged stakeholders and highlighted the Sacramento Regional Water Bank through key events and discussions:

## COFFEE & CONVERSATION SERIES

RWA hosted discussions on pivotal water issues:

- **Jennifer Quan** (NOAA Fisheries) shared insights on salmon restoration and the regulatory challenges posed by climate change.
- **Pablo Garza** (Assembly Committee on Water, Parks, and Wildlife) offered post-election perspectives and advocacy strategies for water providers navigating the California Legislature.

## WATER BANK PRESENTATIONS

RWA showcased the Water Bank's critical role in sustainable water management:

- **Jim Peifer** delivered the keynote at the Ken Kerri Endowment Fund Luncheon (Sacramento State), emphasizing the Water Bank's role in regional water sustainability.
- **Trevor Joseph** highlighted the Water Bank at an ACWA Regions 3 and 4 event in Roseville, including a tour of an aquifer storage and recovery (ASR) well.
- **Jim Peifer** presented at the Water Forum plenary, focusing on the Water Bank's infrastructure and its importance in achieving coequal goals of water supply reliability and environmental stewardship. The event also featured the River Arc Project as a regional solution.
- **RWA** promoted the Water Bank at the California Building Industry Association Legislative Advocacy Conference, emphasizing its importance to homebuilding and development industry leaders.



## WELCOMING A NEW AFFILIATE

RWA welcomed CDM Smith as a new Affiliate Member. The global environmental engineering firm specializes in water quality, supply, flood control, and resource management, with over 40 professionals in its Sacramento office.

*Thank you* to our members and partners for their continued support in advancing regional water resilience!

## CONTACT INFORMATION

REGIONAL WATER AUTHORITY

2295 Gateway Oaks Drive, #100 | Sacramento, CA 95833 | [www.rwah2o.org](http://www.rwah2o.org) | 916.967.7692

