

**BAY AREA WATER SUPPLY AND CONSERVATION AGENCY
BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING**

August 10, 2022

Correspondence and media coverage of interest between July 26, 2022 and August 9, 2022

Correspondence

From: Dennis Evans
To: BAWSCA Board of Directors
Date: August 3, 2022
Subject: Rain Barrel Workshop

From: Los Vaqueros Reservoir Expansion Project
To: Stakeholders
Date: July 27, 2022
Subject: Monthly Report

Press Release

From: San Francisco Public Utilities Commission
Date: August 8, 2022
Press Release: SFPUC General Manager Dennis Herrera Taps Nancy Hom as CFO & Assistant General Manager of Business Services

From: San Francisco Public Utilities Commission
Date: July 26, 2022
Press Release: The City & County of San Francisco and the Giants Team Up to Reduce Water Use this Summer

Media Coverage

FERC:

Date: August 4, 2022
Source: YubaNet.com
Article: Court Victory for Clean Water and State Regulators in California

Drought:

Date: August 9, 2022
Source: The Hill
Article: Californians see drought as top priority, demand more action: survey

Date: August 8, 2022
Source: Capitol Weekly
Article: California's water chief steps up to fight historic drought

Date: August 4, 2022
Source: KTVU 2
Article: Critically low water levels at Lake Shasta, California's largest reservoir

Date: July 29, 2022
Source: Mercury News
Article: Water woes are biggest worry for Californians as drought drags on

Conservation:

Date: August 3, 2022
Source: ACWA News
Article: State Releases June Water Conservation Numbers

Date: August 3, 2022
Source: Daily Journal
Article: Bay Area leading in water conservation

Date: August 2, 2022
Source: Bay City News
Article: Bay Area Leads in Latest Water Conservation Numbers

Date: August 2, 2022
Source: LA Times
Article: Northern California tops Southland in water conservation as savings improve statewide

Date: August 2, 2022
Source: Courthouse News Service
Article: Water use in California dips, but still short of Newsom's goal

Date: August 2, 2022
Source: Mercury News
Article: California drought: Water conservation increasing statewide, Bay Area saving more than Southern California

Water Infrastructure:

Date: August 2, 2022
Source: Nossaman LLP
Article: Draft EIR Released for Delta Conveyance Project

Date: July 28, 2022
Source: Sacramento Bee
Article: After decades of failure, California dusts off controversial Delta tunnel water project

Date: July 28, 2022
Source: ENR California
Article: Draft Impact Report Details Massive California Water Diversion Project

Date: July 27, 2022
Source: San Francisco Chronicle
Article: As drought intensifies, Newsom plans California's biggest water project in half a century

Water Quality

Date: July 28, 2022
Source: CapRadio
Article: Unsafe drinking water is a reality for nearly a million Californians, especially in Central Valley, new audit finds

Date: July 26, 2022
Source: Associated Press
Article: Audit: California too slow to fix contaminated water systems

Lourdes Enriquez

From: Dennis Evans <dennisevansd@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, August 3, 2022 8:18 AM
To: bawscaboardofdirectors
Subject: Rain Barrel Workshop

Urban Rain Gardens is a nonprofit in Merced California. Our goal is to give 20,000 residents rain barrels. Any advice would be greatly appreciated.

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JULY 27, 2022

UPCOMING ACTIVITIES

August 8 at 1:30 – Finance workshop to review WIFIA proforma model

August 10 at 9:30 a.m. – JPA Regular Board Meeting

August 18 at 10 a.m. – Operations & Engineering Committee

August 19 at 10 a.m. – Washington D.C. trip coordination meeting

August 25 at 1:00 p.m. – Finance Committee

UPCOMING LAP BOARD COORDINATION

TBD – Valley Water Storage Committee

ADDITIONAL PROJECT INFO

<https://www.ccwater.com/lvstudies>

<https://www.usbr.gov/mp/vaqueros/>

<https://cwc.ca.gov/Water-Storage/WSIP-Project-Review-Portal/All-Projects/Los-Vaqueros-Reservoir-Expansion-Project>

www.losvaquerosjpa.com

MONTHLY REPORT

FUNDING

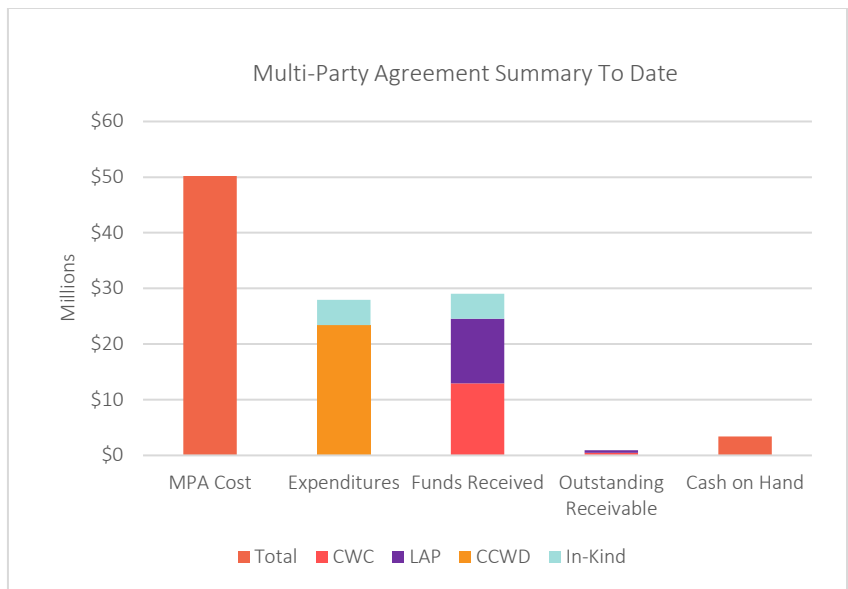
A funding agreement with Reclamation for the planning cost share provided to the LAPs (approximately \$7.2 million) has been executed and the initial invoice will be submitted by the end of the month.

Future Federal funding requests include the remainder of the maximum federal share of 25 percent of the total project cost (approximately \$160 million). Some portion of the federal funding share may be available in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act that was signed on November 15, 2021).

The Project qualified for funding under the Water Storage Investment Program and received an adjusted Maximum Conditional Eligibility Determination of \$477,558,343 from the California Water Commission (CWC) on March 16, 2022. This amount reflects an inflation adjustment of 1.5 percent and an increase in over \$7 million from the previous award. An amendment to the Early Funding Agreement with the CWC is being developed to reflect the increased award and align with the current project schedule.

Amendment No. 3 to the Multi-party Cost Share Agreement was previously executed and provides local funding through December 2022. All partner accounts are currently in good standing, and the second invoice of \$448,560 per agency were sent.

The following chart provides an overview of the Multiparty Agreement (MPA) expenditures through May 31, 2022. The funds received, outstanding receivable, and cash on hand are shown through May 31, 2022.



JPA BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETINGS

On July 13 the Los Vaqueros Reservoir Joint Powers Authority (JPA) Board of Directors met via Zoom. The JPA adopted records retention and social media policy. The Board authorized a budget transfer from contingency to cover the Transfer Pipeline inspection contract. The next JPA Board Meeting has been scheduled for August 10 and the meeting agenda packet will be distributed to JPA Directors and Alternate Directors on Thursday, August 4 and posted to the JPA website on Friday, August 5.

PERMITTING

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) has begun drafting the Biological Opinion for terrestrial species. District staff responded to USFWS comments on the Compensatory Mitigation Plan which supports the federal and state Endangered Species Act permitting processes. USFWS Migratory Bird Program staff continue drafting an Environmental Assessment for their eagle take permit action. California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) continues work on the Incidental Take Permit for terrestrial species and Lake and Streambed Alteration Agreement. The second draft of the Incidental Take Permit for aquatic species has been reviewed CDFW and staff are addressing comments. Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board (CVRWQCB) issued its Section 401 permit on June 30, 2022. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) continues work on its Section 404 permit which will be issued after Reclamation issues its Record of Decision. A Delta Plan Consistency Package has been prepared and will be submitted in August after completing the ongoing outreach to key stakeholders. Draft water rights change petitions have been prepared and submitted to staff at the State Water Resources Control Board for preliminary review.

DESIGN

The District awarded the Transfer Pipeline Inspection contract on July 6, 2022, which will inspect the interior of the inlet/outlet pipeline to the Los Vaqueros Dam. Inspections will confirm the pipeline conditions meet the pressure requirements of the increased water level of the expanded reservoir. Inspection work is planned to begin in September.

Pipeline alignment coordination with regional transportation agencies continues on the Transfer-Bethany Pipeline (TBPL). Geotechnical investigations have been completed at the terminus of the TBPL, where the pipeline connects to the California Aqueduct (Turn-In). The 60-percent design of the Turn-In has been prepared and is under review. An amendment to the consulting services agreement with Carollo Engineers for design support is planned for August.

Geotechnical investigations for the Pumping Plant No. 1 Replacement project have also been completed and 60-percent design is being developed. The District is also preparing responses to the value engineering report completed by Reclamation.

Design of the dam expansion is nearing completion, and the plans and technical specifications have been submitted to the California Division of Safety of Dams (DSOD) for review along with various technical memoranda. A Basis of Design Report will be submitted to DSOD in August. With these submissions, the District will request approval to construct from DSOD, which is needed to satisfy the requirements of the CWC Final Award Hearing.

The District received two proposals from consultants to provide Capital Project Management Support services. Interviews are scheduled on July 29, with award of a final agreement with the selected consultant planned for September.

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NEWS RELEASE

Joseph Sweiss, (628) 231-9861
jsweiss@sfgwater.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Monday, August 8, 2022

SFPUC General Manager Dennis Herrera Taps Nancy Hom as CFO & Assistant General Manager of Business Services

Hom brings over two decades of experience in fiscal planning, risk management, and policymaking to the position as the SFPUC continues to invest in major clean energy, water reliability, and infrastructure upgrades.

SAN FRANCISCO – San Francisco Public Utilities Commission (SFPUC) General Manager Dennis Herrera today announced that Nancy Hom will be the agency's new Chief Financial Officer & Assistant General Manager of Business Services. As the current Co-Deputy CFO for the SFPUC, Hom has invaluable knowledge of the City's financial procedures and systems, capital improvement projects, and regulatory affairs. She will start in her new role on September 3, 2022.

"I am proud to appoint Nancy Hom to serve as our new Chief Financial Officer," General Manager Dennis Herrera said. "Nancy has demonstrated strong, proven leadership and will be a fantastic Assistant General Manager. In this role, Nancy's work ethic and commitment to excellence will ensure we continue to provide customers with high-quality services that are innovative, affordable, and fiscally responsible."

Hom brings over 20 years of demonstrated career experience and achievements. She has been a key part of the SFPUC's leadership for the past 14 years, serving as the Assurance & Internal Controls Director and more recently as Co-Deputy Chief Financial Officer. Prior to joining the SFPUC, Hom served as the CFO to the City and County of San Francisco's Department of Child Support Services and in the Budget & Analysis Division of the Controller's Office. In addition, Hom worked for six years in the private sector in various finance roles specializing in financial analysis, systems, and audits. She holds a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration from San Francisco State University with concentrations in finance, internal audit, and project management. She is a Certified Internal Auditor and Certified Risk Management Assurance professional with the Institute of Internal Auditors.

"I'm honored to accept this new role with the SFPUC as we continue to invest in our water, sewer, and power services and deliver on our pledge to be the utility of the future," Ms. Hom said. "We've achieved so much in the last decade, especially the past few years through the pandemic as our agency ensured our customers retained reliable access to high-quality utility

services. I look forward to continuing our mission-driven work for the over 2.7 million residents and businesses across the Bay Area who depend on us every day.”

Leading a team of over 275 employees, the CFO & Assistant General Manager of Business Services provides direction and oversight for the SFPUC's Financial Services, Audit, Information Technology Services, Customer Services, and Strategy Innovation & Change bureaus. The role is integral to the Executive Team and includes strategic and operational matters involving fiscal planning and forecasting, budget development, governance, and risk management. It also involves successfully delivering programs and policies through effective relationships and partnerships with policy-making, legislative, and regulatory officials at local, state and federal agencies, as well as representatives of other utilities.

The CFO & Assistant General Manager of Business Services position became vacant upon the retirement of Eric Sandler on December 31, 2021.

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About the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission

The San Francisco Public Utilities Commission (SFPUC) is a department of the City and County of San Francisco. It delivers drinking water to 2.7 million people in the San Francisco Bay Area, collects and treats wastewater for the City and County of San Francisco, and meets over 70 percent of the electricity demand in San Francisco. Our mission is to provide our customers with high quality, efficient and reliable water, power, and sewer services in a manner that values environmental and community interests and sustains the resources entrusted to our care. Learn more at www.sfpuc.org.



NEWS RELEASE

Joseph Sweiss, (628) 231-9861
jsweiss@sfgiants.com
Casey Baksa, (415) 972-2494
cbaksa@sfgiants.com

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Tuesday, July 26, 2022

The City & County of San Francisco and the Giants Team Up to Reduce Water Use this Summer

The "Game Up to Save Up" drought awareness campaign will run July to October and encourage Bay Area residents to use less water.

SAN FRANCISCO – The City and County of San Francisco and the San Francisco Giants are teaming up this baseball- and drought- season to spread awareness of the importance of using less water outdoors this summer. Water use historically increases during hot summer months when water agencies are struggling to stretch their water supplies. Starting July 29 through the end of the season, the new, multilingual campaign encourages fans to do their part in reducing water consumption.

"Every year, San Franciscans pitch in to conserve our most precious resource, which is why San Francisco's water usage remains the lowest throughout California," Mayor London N. Breed said. "We know climate conditions are worsening and during summer months especially, our water supplies are strained. Any contribution made is a critical step in reducing water consumption. I want to thank the San Francisco Giants for stepping up to help the City urge everyone to be mindful of their water usage."

The "Game Up to Save Up" drought awareness campaign, developed by the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission (SFPUC) in collaboration with the Giants, includes:

- A unique water conservation video public service announcement in which Giants mascot Lou Seal encourages residents to take small actions that can make a big difference in water use: check for leaks, water outdoors no more than twice a week, and replace landscaping with drought-tolerant plants;
- In-ballpark messaging on the scoreboard and concourse LED displays;
- Interactive pop-up activations in the ballpark plazas with water conservation experts; and
- Bilingual radio, television, social, and other digital campaigns.

“No one knows how long this drought will last. It’s time for all of us to be water-saving Giants,” SFPUC General Manager Dennis Herrera said. “In November, San Francisco declared a water shortage emergency, calling for a voluntary reduction across our entire service area, not just in the City, but also Alameda, Santa Clara, and San Mateo counties. I’m proud of the progress we have made together, but we can do even more, particularly when it comes to reducing outdoor water use this summer.”

San Francisco continues to lead the state on water conservation. San Franciscans consume an average of 42 gallons of water per day, one of the lowest rates in California and half the state average. Additionally, SFPUC offers many resources to encourage efficient water use for customers. These include free onsite irrigation checkups and landscape evaluations, grants, and leak alerts. The agency also provides extensive indoor water-saving assistance, including free replacement of old toilets, rebates for efficient clothes washers and other equipment, and home and business conservation consultations.

“Since we opened the ballpark in 2000, we have been committed to making it the most sustainable and greenest ballpark in the country. We continue each year to refine and reevaluate our sustainability and efficiency practices to remain an environmental leader,” Jorge Costa, Senior Vice President of Operations and Facilities for the San Francisco Giants said.

The Giants have implemented numerous water conservation efforts to maintain one of the best playing fields in baseball. Oracle Park is the only ballpark in the country to have earned U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) platinum (2019), gold (2015) and silver (2010) certification for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) for Existing Buildings, Operations and Maintenance (EBOM). Water conservation efforts include:

- Soil sensors that monitor zones of the field to ensure that water is only being used when necessary;
- Improved infield mix with a higher clay concentration, reducing the need for watering the field by over 33 percent;
- The installation of a dilution system that conserves 30 percent of water usage;
- The installation of water efficient fixtures in the sinks and toilets; and

Reduced ballpark power washing.

These efforts, and more, serve as a model of sustainability for MLB teams nationwide as climate change calls for more drastic and urgent measures in every field and industry. Through the “Game Up to Save Up” partnership, the Giants are using their brand and extensive reach to encourage others to do their part.

“I’m proud to represent a District where industry leaders are showcasing to the world what’s possible,” District 6 Supervisor Matt Dorsey said. “Right here in SoMa, the Giants take seriously what it means to be a good neighbor and partner. This season, we get to appreciate the Giants for winning in more ways than one at the ballpark.”

For more information on the “Game Up to Save Up” campaign, please visit www.sfpuc.org/SaveUp. Members of the media wishing to interview representatives of the San Francisco Giants or SFPUC, please email communications@sfwater.org.

About the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission

The San Francisco Public Utilities Commission (SFPUC) is a department of the City and County of San Francisco. It delivers drinking water to 2.7 million people in the San Francisco Bay Area, collects and treats wastewater for the City and County of San Francisco, and meets over 70 percent of the electricity demand in San Francisco. Our mission is to provide our customers with high quality, efficient and reliable water, power, and sewer services in a manner that values environmental and community interests and sustains the resources entrusted to our care. Learn more at www.sfpuc.org.

About the San Francisco Giants

One of the oldest teams in Major League Baseball, the 139-year old franchise moved to San Francisco from New York in 1958. After playing a total of 42 years in Seals Stadium and Candlestick Park, the team moved to the privately constructed, downtown ballpark on the corner of 3rd and King in 2000. The organization is widely recognized for its innovative business practices and baseball excellence having been named in the past decade the Sports Organization of the Year by Street & Smith's Sports Business Journal, Organization of the Year by Baseball America and ESPN's Sports Humanitarian Team of the Year. Oracle Park is also the only ballpark in the country to have earned Silver, Gold and Platinum LEED certification for an existing building.

Since opening its gates, Oracle Park has become internationally-renowned as a premier venue in the world of both sports and entertainment. On the diamond, more than 65 million spectators have witnessed countless magical moments, including three World Series Championships (2010, 2012 & 2014), the raising of four National League Pennants and eight playoff appearances. The ballpark has also hosted some of music's biggest acts, including Lady Gaga, Beyoncé & Jay Z, Ed Sheeran, the Rolling Stones, the Eagles, Bruce Springsteen and the E-Street Band, Green Day and Billy Joel.

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Court Victory for Clean Water and State Regulators in California

YubaNet.com | August 4, 2022 | South Yuba River Citizens League (SYRCL)

August 4, 2022 – Today, a panel of judges from the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit overruled the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC), re-establishing California’s right to protect water quality in the Yuba, Bear, and Merced River Watersheds for the next 40 years.

One of FERC’s primary duties is licensing and inspecting private, municipal, and state hydroelectric projects. As part of this licensing process, Section 401 of the federal Clean Water Act requires license applicants for hydroelectric projects to request that the state and Tribal Nations with certification responsibilities certify that new licenses will protect water quality as required by state law.

The Clean Water Act gives states a year to act on certification. In the three cases, the applicants for certification withdrew their requests before one year expired. FERC had found that the California State Water Resources Control Board’s acceptance of the applicants’ withdrawals, including perfunctory emails and comments outlining options, showed that the state was complicit in circumventing the one-year rule. Essentially, FERC, relying on a 2019 case called Hoopa Valley Tribe v. FERC, had held that the Board waived its chance to certify.

The court disagreed, reversing FERC’s orders, finding there was no substantial evidence that the Board had acted to skirt the one-year rule. Instead, the court found: “a state’s mere acceptance of a withdrawal-and-resubmission is not enough to show that the state engaged in a coordinated scheme to avoid its statutory deadline for action. Accordingly, FERC’s orders cannot stand.”

FERC had also said that the applicants’ failure to complete environmental review as required by the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) didn’t matter. Again, the court disagreed with this assertion, stating, “In short, the records in all three orders under review demonstrate that the Project Applicants chose to withdraw and resubmit their certification requests because they had not complied with California’s CEQA regulations.”

The court was clear on the stakes of the decision, noting: “[I]f a state waives its authority to impose conditions on a hydroelectric project’s federal license through Section 401’s certification procedure, that project may be noncompliant with prevailing state water quality standards for decades.”

South Yuba River Citizens League, California Sportfishing Protection Alliance, Friends of the River, and Sierra Club and its Mother Lode and Tehipite chapters were environmental litigants in the case, along with the California Attorney General’s Office on behalf of the Board. Water Power Law Group and the Western Environmental Law Center represented the environmental litigants.

“The South Yuba River Citizens League and our colleagues have been working in FERC relicensing on the Yuba River for 15 years,” said Melinda Booth, executive director of the South Yuba River Citizens League. “It is a huge relief that the state’s protection will be in force in the decades to come.”

“Since the Hoopa Valley Tribe ruling in 2019, some hydropower operators have been looking for ways to skate from the Clean Water Act,” said Chris Shutes, FERC projects director for the California Sportfishing Protection Alliance. “Today’s ruling restores process discipline and affirms the Act’s primary role to protect water quality.”

“The court got it right,” said Ron Stork, senior policy advocate with Friends of the River. “No applicant for a FERC license should be able to not follow the rules and then turn around and blame the state.”

“This decision is local, but it could have national significance,” said Rob Burness, Vice Chair, Conservation Committee, Sierra Club Mother Lode Chapter.

“Today’s reversal of FERC’s string of illogical rulings errantly waiving states’ rights to enforce their environmental laws under the Clean Water Act feels like the end of an era of abuse,” said Andrew Hawley, senior attorney at the Western Environmental Law Center. “Before today, people unconcerned with protecting clean water were positioned to weaponize a decision called Hoopa Valley v. FERC to severely constrain well-established state and Tribal rights guaranteed by the Clean Water Act. Today, we closed the Hoopa Valley Clean Water Act loophole.”

The cases are No. 20-72432, No. 20-72452, and No. 20-72782.

#

Californians see drought as top priority, demand more action: survey

The Hill | August 9, 2022 | Sharon Udasin



Californians in a new statewide survey cite drought and water supply issues as their chief environmental concern for the third year in a row.

Thirty percent of respondents ranked water as the most pressing issue — topping wildfires and climate change, which garnered 13 percent and 11 percent, respectively, in the poll, released by the Public Policy Institute of California.

About 68 percent of respondents, regardless of political affiliation or region, said they consider the state's water supply to be a "big problem," per the survey.

"Strong majorities want state and local governments to do more to address drought and climate resilience, and they support ambitious climate action from the state," the authors wrote in a blog post accompanying the report.

Researchers at the Public Policy Institute of California surveyed 1,648 adult residents from July 8 to July 15 in both English and Spanish through a third-party market research firm, according to the team.

They presented results for five geographic regions, which they said represent about 90 percent of the state population.

Respondents spanned a wide range of demographic and socioeconomic groups, and just over half were men. About 47 percent self-identified as registered Democrats, 24 percent self-identified as registered Republicans, and 29 percent self-identified as independents or another party or declined to state.

Asked how they view the way that Gov. Gavin Newsom (D) is handling California's environmental issues, 59 percent of respondents said they approve, while 39 percent disapproved and 2 percent said they didn't know.

The exact same percentages applied to the governor's treatment of jobs and the economy, according to the survey.

Public opinion on the California legislature's handling of environmental issues was slightly lower, with 55 percent approving and 42 percent disapproving.

Only 7 percent of respondents said they could trust the state government on environmental issues "just about always," while 43 percent said they could "most of the time" and 49 percent said they could "some of the time."

Ahead of November's gubernatorial elections, 45 percent of respondents said that candidate positions on environmental issues are "very important," while 42 percent answered "somewhat important."

Despite their relative satisfaction with both Newsom and the state legislature on environmental matters, about 68 percent of respondents said that state and local governments are not doing enough to respond to the statewide drought.

Newsom asked Californians to voluntarily curb water use by 15 percent last year and then enacted emergency regulations this spring. But the survey's authors likewise stressed that these efforts may be insufficient.

An increasing number of California households are reporting that their drinking water wells are going dry, with residents of small communities especially at risk, according to the researchers.

"California's challenges are urgent, and the state has shown strong willingness to dedicate its budgetary surplus to environmental goals," the authors stated.

"Given the severity of looming environmental threats, continued state attention on these matters will be critical — and public opinion clearly supports more swift action from government," they added.

#

California's water chief steps up to fight historic drought

Capitol Weekly | August 8, 2022 | Lisa Renner



As a native of the Coachella Valley near Palm Springs where it hardly ever rains, Joaquin Esquivel has always known that water is precious.

His uncle often took him to the Salton Sea, and he had family served by a well.

He carries that respect for the resource as chair of California's State Water Resources Control Board. "Growing up in the desert, you are very aware of water," he said.

"It wasn't something I sought out as a career." — Joaquin Esquivel

At the request of Gov. Gavin Newsom, who declared a drought last year, the board has adopted emergency regulations requiring residents to cut back water use, such as turning off fountains and not watering decorative grass at commercial sites.

The board also oversees water quality (along with nine regional boards), drinking water, water rights and financial assistance for loans and grant funding for water projects. California has more than 7,500 public water systems serving its 40 million residents.

Esquivel, 39 (he turns 40 Aug. 11), has taken a roundabout path to get to his current job. "I just feel it was by happenstance that I came to the board," he said. "It wasn't something I sought out as a career."

His parents both worked in the local school district, and he thought at first that he might pursue a career in academia. He majored in English at the University of California at Santa Barbara, and got interested in government service after landing an internship at Sen. Barbara Boxer's Washington, D.C. office. He started out as a research assistant and IT administrator and ended up working full-time for eight-and-a-half years on a range of issues, including water, agriculture and Native American concerns.

He was appointed by former Gov. Jerry Brown in 2017 to serve on the water board and was designated to serve as chair in 2019 by Gov. Newsom.

"Literature is still my first passion," Esquivel said, adding that he loves science fiction and fantasy. He also enjoys exploring narratives. "For me, one of the most powerful things we do is the stories we tell ourselves."

He said this is especially true with water; people can reflect on their personal relationships with water and why they're concerned about contaminants and purity. In this time of great division, all Californians should think about what they have in common and how they can create a future that works for all, he said.

He was appointed by former Gov. Jerry Brown in 2017 to serve on the water board and was designated to serve as chair in 2019 by Gov. Newsom.

Esquivel said one of the biggest challenges of his job is dealing with the general mistrust the public has for government. It can be difficult to communicate when people don't agree on what the truth is. "There can be a lot of confusion and concern about the quality of one's water," he said.

It doesn't help that there has been so much change in the last decade, said Samuel Sandoval Solis, UC Davis associate professor in cooperative extension and water resource management.

In the years before Esquivel joined the board, California approved major new legislation, including the Human Right to Water Act (2012) recognizing every person's right to clean, affordable and accessible water, the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (2016), and the legalization of adult marijuana use and cultivation for personal use (2016).

"He is always frank in what he says and that is something ACWA appreciates." — Cindy Tuck

Esquivel didn't come up with these changes, but he has to implement them, Solis said. "That's a lot on any person's plate," he said. "He has done it in a proficient way. That really speaks a lot about him."

Cindy Tuck, deputy executive director of government relations for the Association of California Water Agencies, agrees. "Joaquin devotes time to talking with and listening to stake holders

with different perspectives,” she said. “He is always frank in what he says and that is something ACWA appreciates.”

Esquivel said his biggest accomplishment in his job so far is data work. He has worked hard to get better data available to leaders so they can make better decisions. “We have an opportunity to be a 21st century regulatory agency,” he said.

The board is reconciling water systems it inherited that produced wealth and progress in the state but aren’t sustainable in the future. The board is considering how native Californians were able to live sustainably on the land for years before Europeans arrived.

“I always idealized places with running water and forests and I always imagined how great it would be to live in those places.” — Joaquin Esquivel

Esquivel is proud that the water board is making racial equity a priority. This month (July), the board has held a series of public meetings seeking comments about how to get there. “Race is a strong predictor of access to clean water,” Esquivel said. “Redlining has had a huge impact on access to clean water.”

He has had his own experiences with facing bias as a closeted gay teen in the early 2000s. At that time, he said he never imagined that he could be open about his sexuality and supported. “It has been an incredible change,” said Esquivel, who recently got engaged.

Esquivel said he is grateful to be able to serve in the state government under such great leadership. He loves living in Sacramento, where he can visit the American River and it’s an easy drive to the coast. “I always idealized places with running water and forests and I always imagined how great it would be to live in those places,” he said.

He is heartened by how much Californians are interested in preserving water for all, and how they engage with the state’s complex water systems. “I think people get it,” he said. “People understand there’s a value and scarcity in it.”

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Critically low water levels at Lake Shasta, California's largest reservoir

KTVU 2 | August 4, 2022 | Mark Sayre

LAKE SHASTA, Calif. - KTVU is continuing its week-long series of stories about the drought with a look at the dire situation at California's largest reservoir.

Lake Shasta provides water not only to agriculture in the Central Valley, but also to several regional Bay Area water systems. Lake Shasta is located 10 miles from Redding, in Shasta County, and about 200 miles north of the Bay Area.

"This year, we are 124 feet down, which is a significant loss of a lot of storage," said Don Bader, the northern California area manager for the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, which oversees Shasta Dam and manages the water flowing from the lake.

No matter where you look at Lake Shasta you can see the dramatic "bathtub ring" – bright orange soil contrasting with the blue water and the green tree line. It's a visual reminder of the severity of California's drought, and one not seen on a day-to-day basis in places like the Bay Area.

But for those who work and live at Lake Shasta, it serves as a daily warning.

"The past 3 years it has been really, really dreadful to see these days having zero rainfall throughout the months," Bader said.

KTVU spoke to Bader standing on top of Shasta Dam.

"Why are we that low? Well, we just went through the worst three years – consecutive years – for lack of rainfall. The worst three years we have had up here since this dam was built," Bader said.

An original tower from the dam's construction can now be seen from the top of Shasta Dam. It only becomes visible when the lake is down about 90 feet so more than 30 feet of the tower is now visible above the water.

"Everybody starts to feel the pinch when they start to realize that they are not going to get the amount of water that they normally do," Bader said.

Unlike other reservoirs that depend on snow runoff about 90% of the water flowing into Lake Shasta comes from pure rainfall. The ongoing drought means farmers in the Central Valley have now been cut back to just 18% of the water they would get in a normal year.

Less water also means less electricity is generated from the five massive generator turbines at the base of the dam.

Additionally, some colder lake water, which is drawn from lower levels of the Lake Shasta, must be held back, so it can be sent down the Sacramento River so that migrating salmon can survive.

What is happening here at Lake Shasta also directly impacts water policy here in the Bay Area such as watering restrictions and drought surcharges on your bill.

"Conservation is a new way of life," said John Varela, chair of the Board of Directors of the Santa Clara Valley Water District.

Varela says the district imports about 40% of its water from outside sources one being Lake Shasta.

"We are dependent on water that we import which is less than we have received in the past because of the drought," Varela said.

The Santa Clara Valley Water District receives its allotment of water from Lake Shasta through the Central Valley Project, a water distribution canal system which runs up and down the Central Valley and delivers water from Lake Shasta to locations as far south as Bakersfield.

The drought is also impacting tourism which is a key driver of the local economy in Shasta County. Christopher Fermatt, from Pittsburg in Contra Costa County, was house boating at Lake Shasta with some friends. He was interviewed well below what would be considered the normal waterline.

"It is unfathomable to be this deep in the water that I used to believe was so high," Fematt said.

Fematt said coming to the lake, and seeing the drought firsthand, makes it even more real for him.

"For those that do not leave the Bay Area, they are not going to see this," Fematt said.

At the Holiday Harbor Marina, on the shores of Lake Shasta north of the I-5 bridge, workers must actually push the docks out into the receding lake in order to keep their business running.

"Normally we are back up in our cove. But due to low lake levels, we do move our docks out. It takes about 2 weeks to move them out," said Kevin Kelley, the operations manager of Holiday Harbor.

But there is a bright side: Lake Shasta can fill up after just one good year of rainfall.

The lake was last completely full in 2019. The all-time low point for Lake Shasta was in 1977 when the lake was 230-feet below its maximum level. The very next year, after a very wet winter, it was nearly full.

Despite some adjustments, the lake is still open for recreation, which is an important point for local businesses that fear the drought could scare off tourists and hurt the local economy.

"We have rebounded from this before and here on the lake, even though it is down, there is tons of water out here for recreation, and to ski, and vacation," Kelley said.

Kelley, who has spent his whole life on and around Lake Shasta, has this message for water users throughout the state.

"Conserve water if you can. If you can conserve water, it helps all of California, not just Lake Shasta," Kelley said.

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Water woes are biggest worry for Californians as drought drags on
But fewer than half of Californians took big steps to reduce their water use
Mercury News | July 29, 2022 | Maris Kendall



SAN LUIS RESERVOIR, MERCED COUNTY, CA - SEPTEMBER 16: Looking north at the San Luis Reservoir in Merced County, Calif., on Thursday, Sept. 16, 2021. (Nhat V. Meyer/Bay Area News Group)

As the drought punishing California drags on, water is a top — and growing — worry for residents of our parched state, outpacing wildfires and climate change, according to a new poll about environmental issues.

With reservoirs and snowpack shrinking, Californians listed the state's water supply as their number one environmental worry, with 68% of adults saying it's a big problem — up from 63% a year ago.

But while most have water on their minds, fewer than half said they have done a lot to reduce their water use, and 16% say they have done nothing. At the same time, people are pointing fingers at their neighbors — 69% of Californians said people in their area are not doing enough to conserve.

"This is maybe one of the reasons they are so concerned about it," said Mark Baldassare, president and survey director for the Public Policy Institute of California, which conducted the

poll earlier this month. “Because they know they’re going to be asked to do a lot more, and there are a lot of people who haven’t done a lot.”

Indeed, earlier this year, Gov. Gavin Newsom asked, but didn’t require, Californians to cut their water usage by 15% compared to 2020. But the results so far have fallen dramatically short. In May, Northern California reduced consumption by 8.5%, while Southern California saw a reduction of just 2.2%.

Overall, water supply was the state’s top environmental concern, with 30% of Californians ranking it No. 1, followed by wildfires (13%), then climate change (11%).

The survey also found nearly half of Californians said wildfires are a big problem where they live, and nearly nine in 10 are concerned about power shutoffs as PG&E attempts to mitigate the danger of a new blaze.

“Californians have a lot of concerns about environmental issues that they see as interconnected, right now in particular drought and wildfires and climate change,” said Baldassare. “And this is leading to, I think, greater recognition and awareness that something needs to be done.”

The state is in its third year of drought, with January and February turning out to be the driest combined first two months of a year since tracking began in 1921. Dry vegetation has turned into kindling that has fueled massive wildfires up and down the state, including the Oak Fire currently blazing in Mariposa County, which has become California’s largest fire of 2022.

The poll also reflected the economic hardships Californians are facing. More than half of respondents said the sky-high price of gas has caused them financial hardship.

In the past, when the PPIC poll took place during years of high gas prices or a struggling economy, Californians became more receptive to offshore oil drilling, said Baldassare, who has been conducting the poll since 2000. But that wasn’t the case this year. Highlighting residents’ strong concerns about the environment, 67% of this year’s respondents opposed increasing drilling off the coast.

Just one-in-four Californians favored exploring the increased production of oil, coal and natural gas in general, while about three-quarters wanted to prioritize wind, solar and hydrogen technology. Nearly half of Californians have seriously considered buying an electric vehicle, while 6% already have one.

Even though more than two-thirds of Californians are calling the drought a serious problem, that’s still not enough, said RL Miller, founder and president of Climate Hawks Vote.

“The vast majority of Californians are properly concerned,” she said, “and as for the remainder, I don’t know if it’s that they’re angry or in denial or if they simply just are out of touch with reality.”

The biggest thing a homeowner can do to reduce their water use — potentially by as much as half — is to tear out their thirsty lawn and replace it with a different type of landscaping, Miller said. But many people are hesitant to make that leap, even though local agencies offer big bucks for those who trade in their grass for drought-tolerant plants.

While just under half of Californians consider wildfires to be a big problem where they live, more than eight in 10 residents say the threat of fire is at least somewhat of a problem. These days, everyone knows someone who has been directly affected by a wildfire, Miller said.

“I think that as wildfires become more prevalent throughout the state,” she said, “people are getting more and more aware that this can happen to us, this can happen anywhere.”

Nearly half of Californians say climate will play a major role in shaping their vote for governor in November, when Republican state Sen. Brian Dahle challenges Newsom. The poll found six in 10 likely voters approve of the way Newsom is handling environmental issues. Miller hopes environmental policy drives voters in that election and others.

“I am heartened to hear that environmental issues are a top priority for voters,” she said. “I just hope that the proof will be in the pudding.”

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State Releases June Water Conservation Numbers

ACWA News | August 3, 2022 | ACWA STAFF

SACRAMENTO – The State Water Resources Control Board announced Aug. 2 that statewide water use in June was 7.6% lower than in June 2020, and more than double the statewide savings in May (3.1%), putting California solidly back on track toward meeting Gov. Gavin Newsom’s call for 15% voluntary conservation.

“Californians throughout the state are responding to the need to conserve water,” said ACWA Executive Director Dave Eggerton. Despite already using 16% less water than in 2013, they continue to make steady progress toward achieving the governor’s statewide conservation goal.”

According to a State Water Board news release, regional numbers show a decline in water use by about 10% in most of the state for June. Exceptions included the San Francisco Bay Area, which saw a 12.6% decrease in its June numbers, with the Central and South Coast reporting 5.5% and 5.9% reductions. The lower Central Valley reported at 4.7% reduction, while the southeastern corner bordering the Colorado River saw a 4.2% decrease in June water use over June 2020 figures.

ACWA member agencies have been doing their part by promoting conservation, offering rebate and incentive programs and educating customers about water efficiency. However, conservation is just one component of the comprehensive strategy needed to address long-term climate resilience.

“We appreciate Governor Newsom’s continued approach to drought response that empowers water suppliers to manage their water supply based on local conditions,” Eggerton said. “As the severe drought continues in California, water managers throughout the state are addressing the challenges of managing and maintaining a safe and reliable water supply for communities, the environment and local economies. A critical component of this effort is investment in water infrastructure, especially to capture more water during wet years to be available during the state’s longer and drier periods.”

ACWA staff continue to advocate at the state and federal levels for further investments in water infrastructure.

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Bay Area leading in water conservation

Daily Journal | August 3, 2022 | Kiley Russell

The latest statewide water conservation numbers are improving, having more than doubled from May to June, and the Bay Area is leading the way.

In June, statewide water consumption dropped by 7.6% compared to June 2020, whereas in May Californians reduced water use by just 3.1%, according to a report to the State Water Resources Control Board on Tuesday.

“The second round of the drought emergency regulations took effect at the end of May and the numbers seem to indicate we’re seeing some positive impacts from that,” said Marielle Pinheiro, a data specialist with the Water Board’s Office of Research, Planning and Performance.

The emergency regulations require all of the state’s 436 urban water suppliers to implement Stage 2 Water Shortage Contingency Plans, which vary from supplier to supplier but can include things like fines or additional charges for over-consumption of water, as well as incentives for conservation and for replacing water-intensive landscaping.

For example, the East Bay Municipal Utility District, which delivers drinking water to 1.4 million customers in Alameda and Contra Costa counties, mandated a 10% water use reduction, tightened restrictions on outdoor water use and reinstated its Excessive Use Penalty Ordinance, which includes fines of \$2 for every 748 gallons of water used above a 1,646-gallon threshold, among other things.

The district says it has recorded water use reductions of 6% in May, 12% in June and 16% in July compared to 2020.

Also, in June the Water Board banned the use of potable water on “decorative or nonfunctional grass” at commercial, industrial and institutional properties across the state.

“I think the numbers are definitely heading in the right direction,” Dave Eggerton, executive director of the Association of California Water Agencies, said.

“It’s positive and only getting better,” said Eggerton, whose association represents hundreds of water systems that collectively deliver about 90% of the state’s water to residential and commercial users.

Water Board chairman Joaquin Esquivel said June’s conservation numbers are heartening since they come on the heels of two months, March and April, that saw statewide water use numbers increase by 18.7% and 17.8%.

“What is important to see is that turn around,” Esquivel said. “We did pass in late May our regs, all water agencies are now at Level 2 of their Water Shortage Contingency Plan and we began banning the irrigation of nonfunctional turf.”

In June, all of the state’s 10 hydrologic regions reported a decrease in water use, with the Bay Area heading up the list with 12.6%, followed by the North Coast and San Joaquin River regions with a bit over 10% each.

The South Coast region, which includes Los Angeles and San Diego and is home to more than 55% of the state’s population, recorded a nearly 6% drop in water use.

From July 2021 to June 2022, the state’s cumulative water use dropped by 2.7% compared to 2020, still well below the 15% conservation goal set by Gov. Gavin Newsom.

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Bay Area Leads In Latest Water Conservation Numbers

As the state continues to grapple with extreme drought conditions, the Bay Area appears to be moving in the right direction.

Bay City News | August 2, 2022



A sign posted on browning grass outside the state Capitol in Sacramento, Calif., on Monday, July 11, 2022, notes watering restrictions are in place. (Rich Pedroncelli/AP Photo)

WALNUT CREEK, CA — The latest statewide water conservation numbers are improving, having more than doubled from May to June, and the Bay Area is leading the way.

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The district says it has recorded water use reductions of 6 percent in May, 12 percent in June and 16 percent in July compared to 2020.

"Customer savings figures are moving in the right direction, but we know we must do more," said EBMUD General Manager Clifford Chan in a news release Tuesday.

"EBMUD asks its customers to continue to conserve, and if they are able, make more changes to make long-term impacts to their water use habits," Chan said.

Also, in June the Water Board banned the use of potable water on "decorative or non-functional grass" at commercial, industrial and institutional properties across the state.

"I think the numbers are definitely heading in the right direction," said Dave Eggerton, executive director of the Association of California Water Agencies.

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The South Coast region, which includes Los Angeles and San Diego and is home to more than 55 percent of the state's population, recorded a nearly 6 percent drop in water use.

From July 2021 to June 2022, the state's cumulative water use dropped by 2.7 percent compared to 2020, still well below the 15 percent conservation goal set by Gov. Gavin Newsom.

"We met with the governor recently and he made it very clear that he wants to see this happen," Eggerton said. "It's a critical part of our response to the drought."

Eggerton also said the state needs to continue investing in water storage and delivery systems in order to build resiliency in the face of ongoing temperature rise and precipitation declines.

"We really need capture as much (water) as we can when we do have wet years so we're in a better position to deal with the challenges we have now," he said.

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Northern California tops Southland in water conservation as savings improve statewide

LA Times | August 2, 2022 | Salvador Hernandez



Urban residents across California reduced water usage by 7.6% in June when compared with the same month in 2020.(Francine Orr / Los Angeles Times)

New data suggest Californians are steadily reducing water usage in the face of severe drought, although cities and towns in the northern part of the state are cutting back more than those in the thirsty and more heavily populated south.

Water use in cities and towns across the state decreased 7.6% in June when compared with the same month in 2020 — significantly short of Gov. Gavin Newsom's voluntary 15% goal last year, but a significant shift compared with the previous month, according to data released by the State Water Resources Control Board. In May, statewide savings were just 3.1%.

Water officials called the reductions “encouraging,” especially since the savings were achieved in the middle of the summer.

“We’re all pulling in the same direction, in essence, and that helps,” said Brad Coffey, water resource manager for the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California. “We’re encouraged by the direction that things are going but we think that more can be done.”

The June numbers are the first sign of how state conservation efforts are progressing since the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California declared a water shortage emergency in April and imposed historic watering restrictions the following month.

Residents of the South Coast Hydrologic Region cut water use by 5.9% compared with the same month in 2020 — more than double the region's May savings of 2.2%. The region includes Los Angeles and San Diego and comprises more than half of the state's population.

Cumulative water use by hydrologic region

In July 2021, Gov. Gavin Newsom called on Californians to [voluntarily cut water use by 15%](#). Since then, residential water use overall in the state has remained relatively unchanged.

Percentage change since July 2021



Percentages show the change in water use between July 2021 and June, compared with the previous year.

[California State Water Resources Control Board](#)

Although South Coast conservation numbers were well below Newsom's goal, Coffey said the difference when compared with 2020 were significant because 2020 water use followed a particularly wet season, meaning water usage may not have been as high as other periods.

Reaching 15% conservation for the region may be a particularly tall order, Coffey said, referring to it as a "stretch goal." Water use per capita in Southern California is already about 40% lower than it was in the 1990s, he said.

"You can imagine that much of the low-hanging fruit has already been" done, he said. "It gets more difficult to reduce the more efficient you are already."

Still, he said June's conservation numbers showed the right momentum, and said the agency could eventually reach the governor's goal.

"We're building momentum," he said. "We think it is achievable, but it will take all of us pulling in the same direction."

The hydrologic region that saved the most water in the state was the San Francisco Bay Area, which cut urban water use by 12.6% in June. The Bay Area was followed by the North Coast Hydrologic Region, which cut usage by 10.3%

Fueled by climate change and high temperatures, the drought has placed most of the state's reservoirs below historical averages.

On June 1, the Metropolitan Water District imposed outdoor watering restrictions for areas of Los Angeles, Ventura and San Bernardino counties that are dependent on supplies from the State Water Project — a network of reservoirs and canals that channel water from Northern California to the south.

The agency had never before ordered such widespread restrictions, and officials warned that more restrictions could be imposed if residents did not significantly cut use.

The measures, MWD officials have said, are tough but necessary to ensure the health and safety of Californians.

Lake Shasta is currently at 1.7 million-acre-feet, or about 54% of its historical average storage. Lake Oroville is at only 62% of its historical average with 1.5 million-acre-feet.

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Water use in California dips, but still short of Newsom's goal

Ironically, residents living in the Colorado River Basin cut their water usage the least, even as lakes Powell and Mead shrivel to ghosts of their former selves.

Courthouse News Services | August 2, 2022 | Kevin Winter



California Governor Gavin Newsom met with water leaders from across California on Friday to press home the needed for additional water savings (Office of the California Governor)

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (CN) — Californians used less water in June but are still falling short of the 15% mark set by Governor Gavin Newsom.

According to numbers released Tuesday by the State Water Resources Control Board, Californians cut water usage by 7.5% in June compared to June 2020. However, between July 2021 and the end of June 2022, water usage dipped by just 2.7%.

Given the relatively slight drop in water use and the increasingly dire picture of the Golden State's drought, Newsom convened a panel with local water leaders for the second time in as many months to point out the importance in continuing to use less water.

"We are dealing with a changed climate in California that demands we reimagine not just how we use water, but how we capture, store and distribute it throughout the state," said Newsom. "We are heading in the right direction but we need local water providers to do more to not only save water, but to help the state manage and increase supply as rain and snowfall become less reliable."

In its report, the water board noted the amount of water used now at 2019 levels, at 101 gallons per person per day.

The San Francisco Bay Area saw the largest decrease with a 12.6% drop. The North Coast, San Joaquin River watershed, South Lahontan and Sacramento River watersheds all saw 10% less water used.

Despite the conservation, curtailment orders will continue and will increase in intensity beginning this week through mid-August. Curtailments within the San Joaquin watershed will affect those with water rights newer than the mid-1800s. Senior water rightsholders after 1914 in the Sacramento River watershed and Legal Delta will also see water cut off.

The Colorado River basin saw the smallest decrease in water use at 4.2%. This comes as both Lake Mead and Lake Powell are nearing the point where they will no longer be able to generate hydroelectricity. Lake Powell stands within 47 feet of that mark and Lake Mead is within 90 feet of that mark.

The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission will be reducing flows into the Russian River from the Potter Valley project, as the dam was not re-licensed by Pacific Gas & Electric, and this will affect the amount of water available to users in the watershed. The water board said it will be examining the water available and what type of curtailments will be needed.

One thing residents can do to both save water and maintain a dynamic landscape is to install a gray water system in their homes. Some systems require a permit and others do not. Gray water — water from sinks, showers and washing machines — keeps plants and lawns alive without using fresh water, saving households anywhere from 16% to 40%.

The use of recycled water increased between 2020 and 2021 by 3,000 acre-feet per year. California has a goal of using 2.5 million acre-feet of recycled water per year to meet water use goals during dry years and take stress off surface and groundwater sources.

But the state is far from that goal: In 2021, 732,000 acre feet of recycled water was used in California across a number of sectors and locations. Los Angeles and Santa Ana had the highest usage of recycled water, mostly in landscape and industrial uses. The Sacramento and San Joaquin valleys used recycled water mostly for agricultural use.

Rebecca Greenwood, engineering geologist in the board's Division of Water Quality, said more money needs to be invested into recycled water projects to dramatically increase recycled water volumes. Given the state is not on track to meet its goal — set in 2009 — she said it's time to revisit what's feasible to expand the use of recycled water, especially potable recycled water.

Projects are coming online shortly which will add an additional 100,000 acre-feet of recycled water by 2030. But paradoxically, Californians using less water could mean some recycled water projects won't have enough water to function.

Newsom urged residents to limit outdoor watering to one day a week, take showers of five minutes or less, use a broom to clean outdoor areas and only run full laundry loads — all in an effort to meet his goal of cutting water use by 15%.

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California drought: Water conservation increasing statewide, Bay Area saving more than Southern California

Statewide urban water use fell 7.6% in June, short of Gov. Gavin Newsom's 15% target, but double the savings in May

Mercury News | August 2, 2022 | Paul Rogers

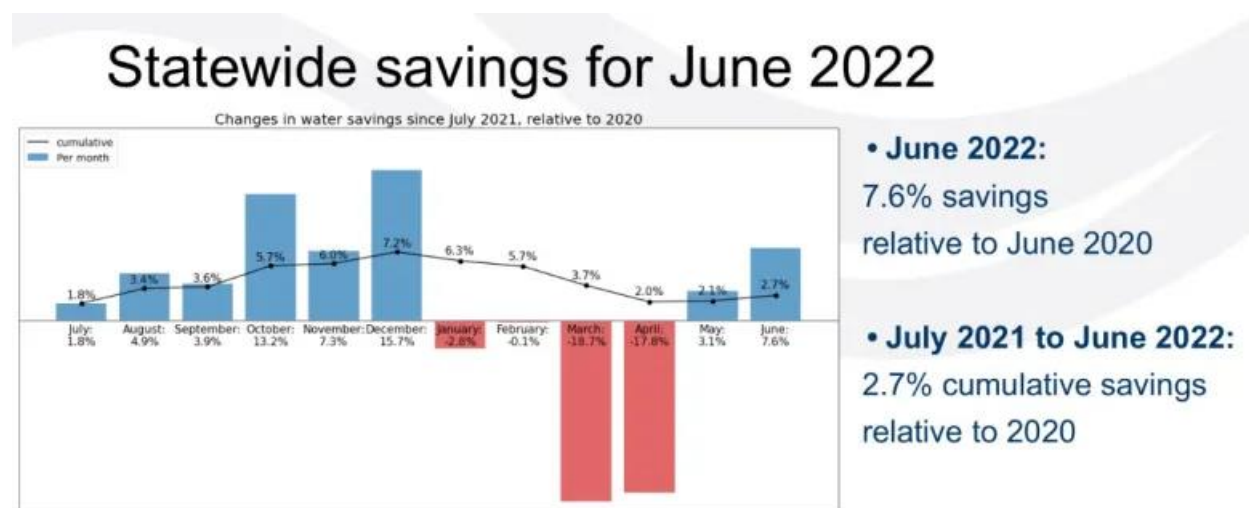


After months of failing to conserve water, Californians are finally starting to make significant progress as the state's three-year drought worsens, summer heats up and local agencies are increasing rules and penalties for water wasters.

New numbers out Tuesday showed that statewide, California's urban residents cut water use 7.6% in June compared to June 2020, the baseline year.

That's still short of the 15% goal that Gov. Gavin Newsom set last July. But it is a considerable jump from the 3.1% savings in May compared with May 2020. And it is a major change from March and April, when residents cranked up lawn sprinklers during an unseasonably dry spring, actually increasing water use statewide by 18.7% and 17.8% compared to those months two years ago.

“The numbers are an improvement to say the least,” said Joaquin Esquivel, chairman of the State Water Resources Control Board, which released the monthly data on Tuesday. “In March and April, we saw increased usage, and here in June we are starting to see a real response.”



California's urban water use dropped 7.6% in June 2022 compared with June 2020, according to new data from the State Water Resources Control Board released on Aug. 2, 2022. (Source: SWRCB)

Northern California continued to close in on Newsom’s goal, with the Bay Area saving 12.6% in June compared to June 2020 — the biggest savings of any region in California — while the South Coast area, which includes Los Angeles, Orange and San Diego counties, reduced by 5.9%.

In the Bay Area, the Marin Municipal Utility District dropped its water use by 25.3% while San Jose Water Company users reduced theirs by 17.5%, followed by the Santa Clara Valley Water District (15%), Alameda County Water District (13.2%), the East Bay Municipal Utility District (12.2%), the Contra Costa Water District (11.2%) and the San Francisco PUC (5.7%).

Local water agencies said Tuesday that any water saved now will help if the drought drags into a fourth year.

“Our residents and businesses are being mindful of their water use, and are fixing leaks and trading their grassy lawns for drought-tolerant gardens,” said Doug Linney, board president of the East Bay Municipal Utility District, which provides water to 1.5 million people in Alameda and Contra Costa counties. “These actions lead to long-term savings, which prepare us in case next year is dry, and help us respond to a climate that is changing in front of our eyes.”

On May 23, Newsom told the leaders of the state's largest water agencies that lagging conservation was a "black eye" as the state struggled with shrinking reservoirs and disappearing groundwater.

At the time, he said his office would monitor the situation over the next 60 days, and he told the agencies to step up outreach and education efforts to communicate the urgency of the crisis to the public. A few weeks later, the state water board required most cities and water districts to limit outdoor watering to two days a week and ban the irrigation of "non-functional turf," or grass at office parks and industrial sites, but not at schools, parks or golf courses.

Esquivel said that those measures are behind some of the improved conservation numbers now.

Newsom met again Friday with local water agency leaders from around the state. Since his request for 15% voluntary savings a year ago, the state cumulatively has a way to go, having reduced urban water use over the past year by just 2.7%.

So far, Newsom has not told the water board to shift to mandatory statewide targets with fines for agencies that fall short, as Gov. Jerry Brown did during in 2015 during the state's last drought. But he continues to meet with local water leaders and is watching closely, Esquivel said.

"He's keeping all those options open," Esquivel said. "The options are on the table. We are moving in the right direction."



Many water agencies oppose mandatory state targets. Some say they have ample local supplies, having made major investments in new reservoirs, groundwater projects or, in the

case of San Diego, which used 4.1% more water this June than in 2020, building a desalination plant.

Meanwhile, light rain that sporadically wet the Bay Area and much of Northern California on Monday may have helped curb fire risk for a few days, but it didn't make a dent in the drought. Most places got one-hundredth of an inch of measurable rainfall — about the thickness of two sheets of paper — if any.

After three dry years in a row, 97% of the state was in a severe drought on Thursday and 59% in an extreme drought, the third and fourth most severe of five drought categories, according to the U.S. Drought Monitor, a weekly federal report.

The state's largest reservoir, Shasta, near Redding, was just 37% full Tuesday. Its second-largest, Oroville, in Butte County, was 41% full.

Some urban residents grumble about conserving since agriculture is responsible for 80% of the water that Californians use. But Esquivel said that when local areas save, they are often preserving local supplies in reservoirs and groundwater banks. And he noted that farmers have seen major reductions in water use this year with near zero deliveries from the Central Valley Project and State Water Project, and new state rules curtailing how much they can divert from streams and rivers.

"Ag is taking a haircut just like everyone else," he said. "This is a society-wide challenge we are facing with climate change and these droughts. We have never seen conditions like this."

Water conservation in California

Major agencies' water use in June, compared with June 2020:

- Santa Clara Valley Water District: -15%
- San Jose Water Company: – 17.5%
- East Bay Municipal Utility District: -12.2%
- Contra Costa Water District: -11.2%
- San Francisco PUC: – 5.7%
- Alameda County Water District: -13.2%
- Marin Municipal Utility District: -25.3%
- City of Sacramento: -11.3%
- Los Angeles Department of Water and Power: -7.5%
- City of San Diego: +4.1%

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Draft EIR Released for Delta Conveyance Project

Nossaman LLP | August 2, 2022 | Alexander Van Roekel

A key priority of the Newsom Administration – the Delta Conveyance Project – has officially entered its next chapter. On July 22, the Department of Water Resources (DWR) released its draft environmental impact report ([Draft EIR](#)) for the Delta Conveyance Project.

The Delta Conveyance Project is DWR's and Governor Newsom's plan to build an underground tunnel to bring water from the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta to the State Water Project pumps near Tracy in order to reduce the risk from earthquakes and climate change to the State's water supplies. It is intended to protect water supplies to millions of Californians in an area that includes Silicon Valley, prime agricultural farmland in central California, and most of southern California. Newsom and DWR hope this project has more success than its past iterations – including the Peripheral Canal, the Bay Delta Conservation Plan, and the California Water Fix. Newsom overhauled the California Water Fix, which was his predecessor Jerry Brown's plan for two tunnels, shortly after entering office in 2019.

One substantial difference from Governor Brown's plan is that the Delta Conveyance Project will be only one tunnel. That tunnel will be 45 miles long and 39 feet high and buried underground. While DWR has not released any price estimates, the expectation is the price tag for the project will be roughly \$16 billion. That price would be paid by the recipients of the water from the project, including the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California, which is the largest wholesaler of water in the United States, serving 19 million people.

DWR lays out much of the justification for the project in a press release. The benefits of the project include modernizing State Water Project infrastructure, adapting to climate change, protecting Southern California's water supply in the case of an earthquake, and capturing water from severe storms that would otherwise escape to the ocean. The last point is the key one – the project is primarily focused on moving that water during high flow conditions that is not being utilized by other water users. For example, DWR notes that it could have captured 236,000 acre-feet of water from the big storms in October and December of 2021. DWR explains that water is enough for 2.5 million people for a year, but standard industry estimates put it at closer to 700,000-800,000 people.

Opponents of the project have raised concern about community and wildlife impacts, for example, noting construction would require removal of 15 homes, 56 other buildings, take over 2,340 acres of farmland, and run through sites of cultural significance to tribal communities. That said, over time the State has made a series of refinements to the project to reduce such impacts where feasible. Opponents also have voiced skepticism about DWR's claims about the limits on the water the project will use. But there are multiple federal and state agencies that have a role in determining the amount of water the Department of Water Resources will be able to deliver through the project and assuring such deliveries comply with requirements to protect water quality, wildlife, and the rights of other water users in the watershed.

The Draft EIR is currently open for public comment, with the 90-day period ending on October 27. The Draft EIR is part of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) review process. In the best case scenario, the project would break ground in 2028 and take roughly 12 years to complete. However, it is also likely that process will be delayed by CEQA, and other, lawsuits. Only time will tell whether the Delta Conveyance Project is the project that finally accomplishes the goals imagined nearly 60 years ago, or if it will meet the same fate as its predecessors.

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After decades of failure, California dusts off controversial Delta tunnel water project

Sacramento Bee | July 28, 2022 | Dale Kasler and Ryan Sabalow



Governor Gavin Newsom unveiled a new version of the plan to create a 45-mile tunnel to divert water from the Sacramento River and route it under the Delta. BY CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF WATER RESOURCES

Here we go again.

Gov. Gavin Newsom's administration revived the Delta tunnel project Wednesday, unveiling a downsized version of the controversial, multibillion-dollar plan to re-engineer the fragile estuary on Sacramento's doorstep that serves as the hub of California's over-stressed water-delivery network.

After three years with little to no public activity, the state released an environmental blueprint for what's now called the Delta Conveyance — a 45-mile tunnel that would divert water from the Sacramento River and route it under the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta so that it can be shipped to farms and cities hundreds of miles away. The blueprint, a 3,000-page draft version of an environmental impact report, is a necessary initial step in securing approvals for the project.

Officials said the single-tunnel proposal, running roughly parallel to Interstate 5, is simpler and creates fewer disruptions than the twin-tunnel plan championed by former Gov. Jerry Brown. Newsom scrapped that plan within weeks of taking office in early 2019 and directed his administration to begin developing a Delta project with a smaller footprint.

But the pitch Newsom's team is making is much the same as the one Brown made: The project is needed to make the Bay Area and Southern California's water supply more reliable while reducing the harm the current system inflicts on the estuary's troubled ecosystem. The tunnel,

proponents say, would ease the stress on endangered fish species that ply the Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers.

Wade Crowfoot, secretary of the Natural Resources Agency, called the project “essential to California’s water future.”

ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS WITH THE DELTA TUNNEL The plan arrives with the state in the throes of one of the worst droughts ever recorded.

But a proposal to replumb the Delta, in one form or another, has been under consideration since Gov. Pat Brown, elected in 1959, began building the pumping stations, dams and canals that make up the State Water Project.

The movement gained new momentum under his son’s two stints as governor. A Delta water-delivery project — one tunnel or two — has been touted by Jerry Brown and Newsom’s teams as a way of correcting a fundamental problem with California’s delivery system that supplies water to millions of acres of San Joaquin Valley farmland and 25 million people in Southern California and Silicon Valley.

Two massive, arena-sized pumping stations built in the south Delta near Tracy decades ago are so powerful they alter the currents inside the estuary and cause problems for migrating fish. As fish numbers have dipped closer and closer to extinction over the years, regulators have forced the pumping stations to ratchet back the amount of Delta water that gets pumped into state and federal canals.

To address the growing Delta water-delivery bottleneck, both Newsom’s and Brown’s plans would build intakes a few miles south of Sacramento that would siphon off a portion of the Sacramento River’s flows during heavy storms and route it under the Delta so that fresh, clean water could head to the south state without as many environmental harms.

But the plan has come to embody everything that’s tedious and slow about modernizing California’s outdated water infrastructure. Water projects can take decades to plan, finance and build, if they get done at all.

California’s influential army of well-funded environmentalists oppose almost any new large-scale water infrastructure project, and the tunnels are no exception.

At the same time, Delta farmers and community leaders fear any tunneling project would degrade their estuary even more.

The state “needs to speak frankly about the sacrifices expected of the people of the Delta for this project to advance,” said Restore the Delta, a Stockton-based group adamantly opposed to a tunneling plan.

Doug Obegi, a lawyer with the Natural Resources Defense Council, said the project will lead to “far worse ecological conditions for native fish and wildlife in the Delta.”

And the Delta Counties Coalition, representing county supervisors from Sacramento, Yolo and other parts of the Delta, called it “another deeply deficient and flawed tunnel plan that would do very little to improve statewide water supplies and bring lasting harm to the Delta.”

Wednesday’s release of the 3,000-page environmental document is an attempt to address the opponents’ concerns.

TUNNEL WON’T BE BUILT UNTIL 2028

No matter how it’s received, Newsom’s administration acknowledged the project isn’t going to be breaking ground any time soon.

As it stands, it will take as much as 20 years to complete and will have to overcome enormous regulatory and political hurdles. Besides concerns raised by environmentalists and Delta residents, many Northern California elected officials are suspicious of anything that facilitates the movement of water to the southern half of the state.

Construction would begin in 2028 at the earliest.

“This is a complicated, challenging project that would be built in a terribly environmentally sensitive part of the state ... so it has required a lot of review,” Crowfoot said. “But I can tell you that Gov. Newsom is resolved and has been steadfast on moving this forward.”

Without the tunnel, the Delta as a water-delivery hub will become increasingly hostage to the impacts from climate change, he said, making it harder to ship water to urban Southern California and other regions that rely on the existing pumps. “

The status quo is less and less reliability,” Crowfoot said.

The project still lacks permits, environmental clearances — and a cost estimate. Carrie Buckman, the project’s environmental project manager, said a similar version of the project that’s been considered would be expected to cost \$15.9 billion — nearly as much as the twin-tunnel plan contemplated several years ago.

But Crowfoot said the version of the project the Newsom team now supports would probably cost less money.

The 2022 version of the Delta project also is lacking a potentially vital partner: the San Joaquin Valley farmers who also receive water from the Delta, but through a parallel system run by the federal government’s Central Valley Project.

WHO PAYS FOR THE TUNNEL?

Unlike Brown’s tunnels plan, California would build this project on its own, without any financial help from those Valley farmers who belong to the federal system. Agencies that are part of the State Water Project would reimburse the state for the costs.

An umbrella organization for those agencies, including those serving Silicon Valley and Southern California, quickly rallied behind the plan.

“This project is critical to ensuring Californians have access to high-quality, affordable and reliable water supplies amidst the growing impacts of climate change,” said Jennifer Pierre, general manager of the State Water Contractors, in a prepared statement.

The biggest agency of all, the deep-pocketed Metropolitan Water District of Southern California, has long been a big supporter of a plan to re-pipe the Delta.

The district, which serves 19 million customers, has been forced to institute stiff water-conservation rules this year as its deliveries from the Delta have slowed to a trickle during the drought. In a statement Wednesday, the agency’s response was much more guarded.

“Now is a learning moment to review this proposal,” Adel Hagekhalil, the agency’s new general manager said in a written statement. “And we look forward to dialogue and collaboration with many communities and advocates in the months ahead.”

Metropolitan committed billions of dollars to the project during its 2017 iteration. It even spent \$175 million buying five islands in the Delta, saying they could be used to stage construction equipment for the project.

Jeff Mount, a water expert with the Public Policy Institute of California, said a Delta tunneling project has always made more financial sense for urban Southern Californians than it does for San Joaquin Valley farmers — who’ve resisted participating in the project.

Urban water districts are more easily able to absorb the billions of dollars in costs, since millions of individual customers’ monthly water bills would only need to increase a few dollars a month.

By comparison, a comparatively small number of farmers have to absorb their share, cutting too deeply into their farms’ bottom lines.

Plus, all signs point to urban water supplies in Southern California becoming increasingly unreliable because of climate change — representing an unprecedented challenge for one of the world’s largest economies, he said.

“You’re faced with two stark choices: either reduce (water) demand or increase reliability,” Mount said. “One way or another, the reliability of those supplies is going to steadily go down. So, hey, it might not get built this generation. But I’d be willing to bet in a future generation, they’re going to do it.”

PREVIOUS DELTA PROJECTS FALTERED

Previous generations have said no. California voters in 1982 killed then-Gov. Brown’s plan for a “peripheral canal” that would route water from the Sacramento River completely around the Delta until it reached the pumps.

In his second stint as governor, Brown wanted to build a pair of underground tunnels directly beneath the Delta as a means of remedying the estuary's myriad environmental problems. The project at the time was called California WaterFix.

He was so committed to the plan that at one point he told tunnels opponents to "shut up" because they didn't understand the science behind the project.

His plan became bogged down in litigation and regulatory hurdles and, just as importantly, many of the local water agencies that would have to pay for the tunnels were reluctant to commit.

Newsom's version is significantly more scaled-down with less water flowing through it. It also seeks to become less controversial to Delta landowners and environmental groups fearful of the project's environmental harms.

For instance, Newsom's plan calls for the tunnel to be routed under the estuary's eastern edge, instead of going under the heart of the ecologically sensitive central Delta the way Brown's plan did.

The water tunnel also would feed directly into the California Aqueduct, the canal that supplies Southern California with Delta water, eliminating the need to build two new reservoirs called "forebays" that Brown's version of the twin tunnels called for.

It's also going to be governed differently than the plan Newsom inherited when he succeeded Brown in 2019. Brown's twin tunnels were going to be run and financed by the State Water Project and its federal counterpart, the Central Valley Project. But none of the water districts in the CVP wanted to pay their share of the estimated \$16 billion cost — and have shown no interest in participating in this new version, either, said Carrie Buckman, the project's environmental program manager.

The CVP districts, mainly farm irrigation agencies in the San Joaquin Valley, have chronic water shortages and are desperate for more reliable deliveries from the Delta — but have balked at paying the considerable cost of the tunnel project.

As a result, Buckman said, the single tunnel would be built and operated solely by the State Water Project — and would deliver water only to State Water Project member agencies, such as Metropolitan.

Crowfoot said the state is continuing to talk with federal officials about contributing, but has decided "we can't wait any longer to move this project forward."

CAPTURING HIGH DELTA FLOWS

Regardless of the changed format, the project is likely to face many of the same obstacles. Environmentalists and Delta residents believe the construction alone would create enormous problems, and the finished product would actually worsen conditions by diverting fresh water from the Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers and feeding it into the tunnel, leaving the remaining Delta water too salty for farming.

Crowfoot, though, said state and federal laws would make sure the water flowing through the Delta would adhere to cleanliness standards.

The project, he said, also would allow California to take advantage of an aspect of climate change that causes the state to see fewer but more powerful storms that have the Delta gushing with additional water for short stretches of time.

“Our water infrastructure was not built for that,” Crowfoot said. “It’s critical that we’re able to move that water.”

As it stands, restrictions to protect fish often leave the state unable to pump as much during those heavy-flow events, infuriating water districts who see the water they would have once received from the pumps flow out instead to the Pacific Ocean. Environmental restrictions on Delta pumping have tightened in recent decades, starting with a major federal court ruling in 2007 requiring greater protections for fish.

The issue popped up last fall and winter, when heavy storms battered Northern California and produced high river flows in the estuary for short periods. Crowfoot said hardly any of that water was pumped in order to protect the nearly-extinct Delta smelt.

Had the tunnel been in place, state officials say they’d have been able to move about 236,000 acre-feet of water without harming the fish. That’s enough to supply 2.5 million people a year, according to the Department of Water Resources.

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Draft Impact Report Details Massive Calif. Water Diversion Project

ENR California | July 28, 2022 | Jim Parson



The Delta Conveyance Project would route water from the Sacramento River beneath the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta to reach the California Aqueduct.

Photo courtesy California Department of Water Resources

A controversial plan to build a 45-mile-long tunnel to divert water from northern California to the arid south has revived with release of a draft environmental impact report by the California Dept. of Water Resources (DWR).

The 3,000-page analysis outlines multiple alternatives for the proposed Delta Conveyance Project. If built, it would take water from the Sacramento River and move it beneath the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta to reach the state's main north-south water supply network. Optimistic scenarios estimate construction getting underway no earlier than 2028 and taking a decade to complete.

"Two out of three Californians rely on the State Water Project for all or part of their water supply," said DWR Director Karla Nemeth in a statement. "Modernizing this infrastructure is essential to adapting to a future that includes more frequent extremes of drought and flood, and greater water instability."

The current project was launched in 2019 by state Gov. Gavin Newsom when he scrapped a previous plan featuring a twin-tunnel solution for one with a single tunnel. The effort is aimed at balancing the state's water supply resources with ever-growing demand amid multiple climate-related uncertainties. Conservation groups have opposed the pipeline due to the possible environmental impacts it would entail.

A 2020 estimate puts the cost of a single-tunnel system at \$16 billion, although the projected costs of the current plan are not in the report. State-issued bonds for what is expected to be at least a ten-year-long construction effort would be funded by the non-profit State Water Contractors, a 27-member association of local public water agencies that purchase water from the DWR's 700-mile water storage and delivery system that supplies water to 27 million California residents.

Jennifer Pierre, SWC's general manager, said in a statement that the draft report, "clearly shows that the project has been downsized, refined and redesigned to avoid and reduce local impacts and address environmental concerns." Pierre also called the Delta Conveyance Project "the right project at the right time" to modernize the state's existing water supply infrastructure.

The current plan calls for building a pipeline capable of conveying up to 6,000 cu ft per second (cfs) of water drawn from the norther reaches of the Sacramento River's delta 45 miles downstream to connect with a new pumping station/aqueduct complex. The water would be deposited into the Bethany Reservoir, which connects to the California Aqueduct.

The draft report, which examines eight alignment alternatives, notes that the Bethany alignment "would provide the same climate resilience, seismic resilience, and water supply reliability as the other 6,000 cfs alternatives," but with fewer or substantially reduced environmental impacts.

Not everyone agrees. Originally conceived as part of the state water system in the 1960s, the concept of a water supply bypass around the Sacramento River delta has been criticized for its cost, construction impacts and long-term environmental consequences, particularly ecological effects of reduced freshwater flows through the estuary.

Information released by DWR as part of the draft report acknowledges that such changes to the delta "have the potential" to affect migration and spawning habitat of several salmon species. Up to 3,500 acres of wetlands would be restored to offset the environmental damage.

The acceleration of climate change has added another dimension to the debate. DWR claims the Delta Conveyance Project will help California water system users capitalize on the increasing frequency of major storms and other extreme weather events. Had the project been operational during the big storms in October and December of 2021, the agency claims it could have captured and moved about 236,000 acre-feet of water, enough to supply 2.5 million people for a year.

Opponents counter that a more likely scenario are protracted droughts, such as the current three-year-old dry spell that has drastically curbed state water allocations.

“Climate change continues to impact the state’s hydrology, and there is no certainty as to the amount of water that will be available for the project when it’s completed,” Sierra Club California Director Brandon Dawson said in a statement. Instead, he asserts that the state would be better served by focusing on sustainable water management efforts—conservation, efficiency, recycling and stormwater capture—that are environmentally beneficial and a better option for building regional resilience.

Another criticism is the potential effect that larger water diversions from the Sacramento River Delta will have on its existing agricultural customers.

Although DWR insists that the Delta Conveyance Project is not proposing to increase the total quantity of water permitted for diversion under its existing water rights, three Sacramento-area congressional representatives recently introduced legislation that would prevent the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers from issuing a Clean Water Act permit for the project.

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As drought intensifies, Newsom plans California's biggest water project in half a century
San Francisco Chronicle | July 27, 2022 | Kurtis Alexander



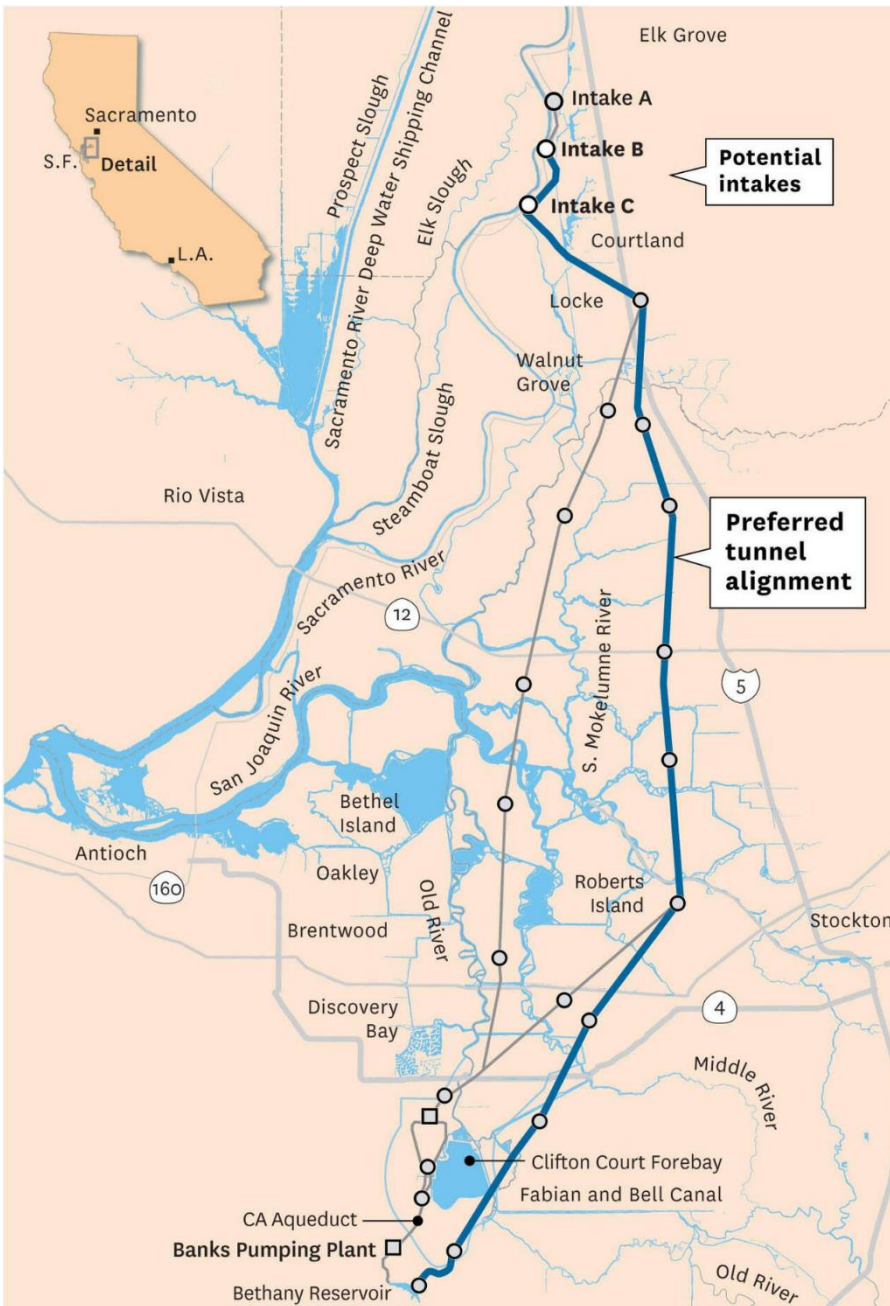
A jet ski rider makes his way down the Sacramento River in the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta near Courtland (Sacramento County) on Sunday. The proposed tunnel under the delta would have intakes near Courtland and Hood. Carlos Avila Gonzalez/The Chronicle

Gov. Gavin Newsom's office renewed its commitment on Wednesday to launching California's biggest water project in half a century, unveiling a newly configured plan for a 45-mile conveyance tunnel through the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta.

The estimated \$16 billion pipeline, iterations of which have circulated for decades, is designed to better move water from the state's wet, rural north to drier, more populated points south. The proposed tunnel would allow water shipments to bypass the delta's sensitive wetlands and aging water infrastructure, thereby protecting and even boosting water supplies for the Bay Area, Southern California and farmland in between.

The idea, however, has faced longtime opposition, as well as funding shortfalls. The Newsom administration hopes to clear these hurdles by altering the plans of his predecessors, notably downsizing the project to one tunnel instead of the two proposed by former Gov. Jerry Brown. The project is also routed farther east, close to Interstate 5, where construction would be less of a burden on delta towns.

“You know that Gov. Newsom, when he took office, took a step back and looked at whether this project was necessary,” Wade Crowfoot, the state’s natural resources secretary, told reporters this week. “The assessment that we collectively made is that delta conveyance remains essential for our water future.”



Map: John Blanchard / The Chronicle • Source: Delta Conveyance Project

With drought and climate change, Crowfoot said the need for a more water-resilient water supply is only growing.

The new plan, officially called the Delta Conveyance Project, was released by the state Department of Water Resources as part of the project’s draft environmental impact report.

The 3,000-plus-page document, which details the proposal as well as various alternatives, marks an early but critical stage of an initiative that could benefit 27 million Californians who receive water through the delta. The project, though, would have big and sometimes grave impacts on the 1,100-square-mile region and its many communities.

This vast estuary east of the Bay Area, now mostly farmland, is where California’s two largest rivers converge and where water is pumped off to cities and agricultural suppliers to the south.

Because of the innumerable problems there, from endangered fish to increasingly salty water to crumbling levees, the water supply remains vulnerable. Often, water shipments are constrained.

The proposed tunnel would draw water from the Sacramento River at the north end of the delta, where most of the estuary's water enters, and carry it underground to the south end of the delta where it's exported, hence skirting the region and theoretically its problems.

Crowfoot added that, without the upgrade of a tunnel, a major earthquake in the delta would upend California's water supply and prompt an unprecedented "public health crisis."

Critics, though, have long decried the push for new conveyance as a thinly veiled water grab. They say such a project would deprive the delta of needed inflows and leave the region's farmers, small towns and fish and wildlife with less.

There's also concern about the inconvenience of years of construction and state land acquisitions, including the displacement of dozens of homes and buildings, that would be necessary.

"It's not a good thing," said Glenn Burgin, a fourth-generation delta grower who produces alfalfa, corn, wheat and rice on Roberts Island, just west of Stockton.

Like many farmers in the area, who generally take an opposing view to the agricultural interests to the south that stand to benefit from more delta water, Burgin fears that freshwater exports from the region would increase seawater intrusion from San Francisco Bay.

"If we get salt coming into our water, we're done for," he said.

State officials insist that the project would not cut into local supplies. Existing regulation, they say, maintains flows for water users, water quality and fish and wildlife.

Only during wet periods would more water be sent off through the tunnel, officials say.

Part of the reason more water would be available is that exports are currently limited because the giant pumps that move water south are sometimes slowed or shut down to protect threatened chinook salmon and delta smelt.

The pumps can alter currents in the delta and suck up fish. With the tunnel able to move water past the pumps, water could be shipped even when the pumps aren't operating.

The pumps would remain in use when they don't pose problems, offering a secondary method of pushing out water.

If the tunnel would have been in place during the big storms at the end of last year, state officials estimate that they would have been able to export an additional 236,000 acre-feet of water. That's enough to supply about 2.5 million people for a year.

For the project to move forward, not only does the Newsom administration have to overcome opposition but it will have to make the case to supporters that there will be enough extra water produced, or at least enough current risk to supplies, to justify the cost. There are also numerous approvals and permits the state will need to obtain from local, state and federal authorities to address such items as water quality and wildlife.

The cost is being borne by the agencies that contract for the water, from Southern California's huge Metropolitan Water District to the Bay Area's Santa Clara Valley Water District, Alameda County Water District and Zone 7 Water Agency. No state tax dollars will fund the venture.

One of the reasons that former Gov. Brown's tunnel proposal didn't get off the ground was that many benefactors didn't think the expense was worthwhile. Water contractors will likely have to raise customer rates to pay their share of the cost.

The estimated \$15.9 billion price tag for the new project is approaching the estimated cost of Brown's bigger, dual-tunnel proposal, which would have been able to move about 50% more water. However, that plan would likely have been billions of dollars more today due to rising costs.

Making things tougher, the federal government, which also moves water through the delta and operates one of the pumping stations there, has so far declined to participate in the project, meaning it won't help with the bill. The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation provides delta water primarily to farms in the San Joaquin Valley, which have been wary of shouldering the tunnel expense.

Santa Clara County's Valley Water, which receives much of its supply from the state, said it supports the new project, and will continue to back it financially, because it adds reliability to water for nearly 2 million people in the South Bay.

"We are pleased that the Delta Conveyance Project is reaching an important milestone," Valley Water Director Tony Estremera said in a statement to The Chronicle.

The idea of steering Northern California water around the delta dates back more than 50 years. One of the original brainstorms was to build a "peripheral" canal around the region, a proposal that was shot down by voters in a 1982 ballot initiative.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger more recently tried to jump-start the canal plan before Gov. Brown altered the vision, proposing a pair of massive tunnels.

State officials will take public comment on Newsom's plan and its environmental documents through Oct. 27. The draft environmental impact report will be followed by a final report, at which time the Department of Water Resources will make a final decision on whether to move forward with the single tunnel.

Permitting and final design could take through the end of the decade, with another 10 to 12 years for construction.

Brett Baker, a water and land-use attorney in Stockton whose family grows pears near Courtland in the delta, acknowledges that the region has problems. However, he'd like to see a more surgical and less invasive fix than a tunnel, suggesting, for example, habitat restoration projects to contain saltwater and upgrades to levees to ensure the safe flow of water.

"There are a lot of incremental things that can be done to improve the functioning of the delta," he said. "They're just not as sexy."

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Unsafe drinking water is a reality for nearly a million Californians, especially in Central Valley, new audit finds

CapRadio | July 28, 2022 | Mike Hagerty

Nearly a million Californians have unsafe drinking water and the agency charged with helping them is ill-equipped to do so.

That's according to a new state audit of the California Water Resources Control Board, which says 920,000 residents are at increased risk of liver and kidney problems — and even cancer — because they get water from systems that fail to meet contaminant standards for safe drinking water.

The auditor says more than 800 water systems in the state are in that “failing” category, a number that has more than doubled in the last year.

Residents in the Central Valley, including San Joaquin and Stanislaus counties, were most likely to be affected by failing water systems. Other counties include Merced, Fresno, Tulare, Kings, San Bernardino and Kern.

According to the report, Sacramento County experienced anywhere from 1 to 1,000 residents affected by failing water systems, which is one of the lowest rates in the state.

The California Water Resources Control Board is supposed to provide funding to water systems to fix issues and bring water back to meet safe standards. But the auditor's report says over the last five years, the average amount of time it took for water systems to complete their applications for these funds, and then for the State Water Board to review them and award funding, has nearly doubled, from almost a year and a half to almost three years.

“The longer the board takes to fund projects, the more expensive those projects become,” wrote Acting State Auditor Michael S. Tilden. “More importantly, delays increase the likelihood of negative health outcomes for Californians served by the failing water systems.”

Among the auditor's recommendations, a streamlining of the process by the Water Board and new laws requiring the Water Board to update the Legislature on the status of failing water systems as well as its own delays in addressing the issues, including plans to end the delays.

The Water Board says that the volume of applications has more than doubled in recent years.

The Board issued a statement in the auditor's report, saying that it would “implement many of its recommendations” but that board officials “respectfully disagree with the report's framing.”

Specifically, the board says it has been “advancing the Human Right to Water as one of its top priorities” since 2014, and that a SAFER Drinking Water program which started in 2019, has increased clean and safe drinking water access “for more than 650,000 Californians in 120

communities, reducing the population of those served by failing water systems by more than 40%.”

The board says the program also provided hundreds of millions of dollars in grant funding to disadvantaged communities, including emergency assistance to nearly 10,000 households and water systems.

Here are additional findings from the state audit:

- Some 370 of California’s water systems, which provide for nearly a million residents, “exceed the maximum contaminant levels for substances that are harmful to human health.” Additionally, the audit says more than 150 of these have been failing for at least five years. It adds that hundreds more are at risk of failing.
- It takes too long for water systems to navigate state bureaucracy to improve their services: “Over the past five years, the average length of time for water systems to complete their applications and receive funding nearly doubled, from 17 months to 33 months.”
- Many of the failing water systems are in the Central Valley, and more than two-third are in disadvantaged communities

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Audit: California too slow to fix contaminated water systems

Associated Press | July 26, 2022 | Kathleen Ronayne



Demonstrators call for safe drinking water during a rally at the Capitol in Sacramento, Calif., on Tuesday, May 31, 2022. A report issued by state auditors, Tuesday, July 26, 2022, says that water out of the tap for more than 900,000 Californians lack access to clean water and the state isn't acting fast enough help clean up those systems. Rich Pedroncelli/AP

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — The water that comes out of the tap for more than 900,000 Californians is unsafe to drink and the state isn't acting fast enough to help clean it up, state auditors said in a report released Tuesday.

Thousands of water systems supply the state's 39 million people, and about 5% of them have some type of contaminant, like nitrates or arsenic, in them, according to the audit. That means people can't safely drink the water or use it to cook or bathe. Most of the 370 failing systems are in economically disadvantaged communities, many in the Central Valley, the state's agricultural heartland.

The State Water Resources Control Board has provided at least \$1.7 billion in grants since 2016 for design and construction to improve water systems. That could include building new treatment plants, consolidating water systems or other actions designed to improve water quality.

But it took the board 33 months on average in 2021 for water system operators to complete the application process and receive money, the audit found — nearly double the time it took in 2017. The audit found a lack of clear metrics and poor communication created confusion for water districts seeking help and slowed down the award process.

“The longer the board takes to fund projects, the more expensive those projects become. More importantly, delays increase the likelihood of negative health outcomes for Californians served by the failing water systems,” acting state auditor Michael Tilden wrote in a letter to the Legislature.

Eileen Sobeck, executive director for the water board, told state auditors the board agrees the process could be clearer and faster. But she disagreed with the conclusion that the board hasn't acted with urgency to improve contaminated water systems, saying the board's “highest priority is advancing the human right to water.” California made a right to safe drinking water state law in 2013. The water board has previously said it would need \$4.5 billion to address all the needs through 2025.

She said the state has reduced the number of people who rely on contaminated water from 1.6 million in 2019 to less than 1 million today. It's also provided \$700 million in grants to water systems. It's helped pay for construction projects in 90 communities, consolidation of 73 water systems, and begun streamlining the application process, she said.

E. Joaquin Esquivel, chair of the water board, said the audit's finding that the board lacks urgency in addressing the problem is “salacious” but doesn't reflect the “tremendous amount of progress” the board has made in helping water systems.

The state sets requirements for more than 100 water contaminants, including nitrate, arsenic and E. coli, limiting the amount that can be in water. Some, like nitrates, come from excess fertilizer used by agriculture. Different contaminants can cause respiratory problems for infants, harm the liver and kidneys, and increase the risk of cancer. Even when water isn't safe to drink, people still have to pay the water bill, plus the added cost of buying bottled water or hauling it in from elsewhere.

“Just because you're not drinking from the tap doesn't mean you don't have to pay for the access,” said Kyle Jones, policy and legal director for the Community Water Center, which works to expand access to clean water.

Gov. Gavin Newsom, a Democrat, created a \$130 million fund in 2019 to improve drinking water systems, particularly those that serve low-income communities. At the time, he called it a “moral disgrace” that Californians couldn't rely on clean water to drink or bathe. His office didn't respond to an email Tuesday seeking comment on the audit.

In one example of the slow process, the audit found the water board wasn't checking in enough on a technical assistance project for a water system in Kern County. Ten months after the board had assigned a provider to help the district, no work had been completed, causing the board to look for another provider. In another case, it took the water board 14 months to figure out whether a water district in rural Northern California was eligible for grant funding to improve its drinking and wastewater.

Water districts that took a survey from the auditor called the board's application process a "nightmare" filled with red tape and unclear expectations.

Michael Claiborne, directing attorney for Leadership Council for Justice and Accountability, said many Californians have been fighting for decades for clean water to no avail.

His organization advocates for safe and affordable drinking water access for communities in the San Joaquin Valley and east Coachella Valley, and it has been hired as a legal and technical consultant for some of the projects that receive board funding. As both an advocate and a contractor on some projects, he agreed with the audit's findings that the board needs clear metrics to assess its progress and set expectations.

But he said local governments need to step up as well, as they can delay projects to consolidate water systems or begin new construction.

"Without cooperation from local governments and local water systems, you can't implement solutions," he said.

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