

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

October 4, 2024

Correspondence and media coverage of interest between September 18, 2024 and October 3, 2024

Correspondence

From: Cindy Currie – Sacramento, Ca
To: BAWSCA Board of Directors
Date: September 27, 2024
Subject: Restore Remote Public Comment at BAWSCA

From: Los Vaqueros Reservoir Expansion Project JPA
Date: September 20, 2024
Subject: Statement from Executive Director Ravazzini Following September 18 Contra Costa Water District Board Meeting

From: Los Vaqueros Reservoir Expansion Project JPA
Date: September 18, 2024
Subject: Public Statement from Anthea Hansen, Chair, to CCWD Board of Directors

Press Release

From: Office of Governor Newsom
Date: October 3, 2024
Subject: California makes major strides for water supplies and climate resilience over the past year

From: Department of Water Resources
Date: September 26, 2024
Subject: California Prepares for Extreme Weather Swings as new Water Year Approaches

Water Supply Conditions:

Date: October 1, 2024
Source: Public Policy Institute of California
Article: Is California Ready for Climate Change?

Date: October 2, 2024
Source: Maven
Article: USBR: Start of 2025 water year is a reminder of the need for caution and preparedness

Date: September 27, 2024
Source: Bay City News
Article: La Nina pattern brings risks of dry winter, dangerous flooding

Water Infrastructure:

Date: October 2, 2024
Source: Ag Alert News
Article: Tuolumne River salmon habitat enhanced

Date: September 25, 2024
Source: Mercury News
Article: \$1.5 billion project to expand major Bay Area reservoir collapses

Date: September 24, 2024
Source: Contra Costa News
Article: Plans for Los Vaqueros Reservoir Expansion End

Date: September 24, 2024
Source: San Francisco Chronicle
Article: Plans for \$1.5 billion expansion of East Bay reservoir unravel

Date: September 24, 2024
Source: SF Gate
Article: Yearslong effort to expand Bay Area reservoir by 3.7 billion gallons faces sudden collapse

Date: September 24, 2024
Source: KQED
Article: Major East Bay Reservoir Expansion Is Axed After years of Rising Costs, Waning Interests

Water Agencies:

Date: September 25, 2024
Source: San Mateo Daily Journal
Article: New CEO set for Bay Area Water Supply and Conservation Agency

Date: September 23, 2024
Source: SF Gate
Article: Thousands of San Francisco residents to soon get much higher water bills due to glitch

From: [Cindy Currie \(ccurrie778@gmail.com\) Sent You a Personal Message](#)
To: [bawscaboardofdirectors](#)
Subject: Restore Remote Public Comment at BAWSCA
Date: Friday, September 27, 2024 2:35:18 AM

Dear BAWSCA Board of Directors,

Dear Board Members,

The removal of remote participation in BAWSCA Board meetings has reduced the transparency of the agency and has excluded the voices of the elderly, working-class, and caregiving community members from sharing their vital perspectives on the actions BAWSCA takes.

Remote participation became the new normal during the pandemic and remains in place in the majority of California cities. BAWSCA has made great progress by returning livestreams of Board meetings and the Agency must continue by implementing remote public comment services. As BAWSCA considers continuing its anti-environmental lawsuit against the State Water Board and chooses to support environmentally harmful voluntary agreements (VAs), the Board must remain transparent and ensure the voices of marginalized communities are heard at public meetings.

The Board must restore remote participation, including remote public comment. Thank you for recognizing the impact that remote participation has on increasing the accessibility and transparency of BAWSCA.

Sincerely,

Sincerely,

Cindy Currie
3642 2nd Ave
Sacramento, CA 95817
ccurrie778@gmail.com
(916) 217-4677

This message was sent by KnowWho, as a service provider, on behalf of an individual associated with Sierra Club. If you need more information, please contact Member Care at Sierra Club at member.care@sierraclub.org or (415) 977-5673.

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For Immediate Release: 9/20/2024
Contact: Taryn Ravazzini, (916) 206-5367

Statement from Executive Director Ravazzini Following Sept. 18 Contra Costa Water District Board Meeting

Board of Directors

Anthea Hansen, Chair

San Luis & Delta-Mendota Water
Authority

Michael Tognolini, Vice Chair

East Bay Municipal Utility District

Ric Ortega, Secretary

Grassland Water District

Paul Sethy, Treasurer

Alameda County Water District

Kathy Narum

Zone 7 Water Agency

Antonio Martinez

Contra Costa Water District

Dennis Herrera

San Francisco Public Utilities
Commission

John Varela

Santa Clara Valley Water District

Executive Director

Taryn Ravazzini

The Los Vaqueros Reservoir Joint Powers Authority (JPA) is extremely disappointed by the Contra Costa Water District (CCWD) Board's consideration of withdrawal from the Phase 2 Los Vaqueros Reservoir Expansion Project (Project). It comes at a pivotal time for the Project, when we are making progress in negotiating agreements with the individual Member agencies and CCWD as the facility owner and operator. Unlike the roles of the other Member agencies, should CCWD ultimately take action to withdraw from the Project, it would signal the premature end to a decades-long effort to perfect a model for cross-agency collaboration and cooperation on such a major scale.

We are also concerned about the statewide impacts that CCWD's direction will have on the Project and its many benefits, which include strengthening the region's water supply reliability and supporting our region's urban and agricultural customers. The Project would also serve as a lifeline for South-of-Delta wildlife refuges to help protect multiple species nearing extinction. These wide-ranging Project benefits are further showcased in a recently released [educational video](#) from the JPA.

During the past few years, the JPA and its Member agencies, along with the California Water Commission, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, California Department of Water Resources, and numerous stakeholders, have participated in extensive planning efforts and invested a significant amount of time, resources, and public funding in this project.

The JPA remains committed to the regional partnership and working through the various challenges that can often arise during the development of a major infrastructure venture, such as the Phase 2 Expansion. Many of the agreements key to informing completion of the Project are not yet fully negotiated, and although their completion may not be a guarantee for success, the JPA will continue to identify and implement collaborative solutions for moving this once-in-a-generation opportunity forward. As a collective of public agencies that serve 11 million Californians and many thousands of acres of productive farmland, the JPA Member agencies are at the ready to assist our key partner agency in resolving the issues of greatest concern for their Board and customers.

- more -

Los Vaqueros Reservoir Joint Powers Authority

The Los Vaqueros Reservoir Joint Powers Authority (JPA) was formed in 2021 and provides governance and administration for the Phase 2 Los Vaqueros Reservoir Expansion Project (Project). The Los Vaqueros Reservoir is an off-stream reservoir owned and operated by the Contra Costa Water District.

The Project will increase Bay Area and Central Valley water supply reliability, develop water supplies for wildlife refuges, and improve water quality while protecting Delta fisheries and providing additional Delta ecosystem benefits. When completed, it will increase the Los Vaqueros Reservoir capacity from 160,000 acre-feet to 275,000 acre-feet and add new and modified conveyance facilities to provide environmental, water supply reliability, operational flexibility, water quality, and recreational benefits.

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PUBLIC STATEMENT TO CCWD BOARD OF DIRECTORS

FROM: Anthea Hansen, Chair

DATE: September 18, 2024

RE: Agenda Item No. 4

Board of Directors

Anthea Hansen, Chair

San Luis & Delta-Mendota Water Authority

Michael Tognolini, Vice Chair

East Bay Municipal Utility District

Ric Ortega, Secretary

Grassland Water District

Paul Sethy, Treasurer

Alameda County Water District

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Santa Clara Valley Water District

Executive Director

Taryn Ravazzini

The Los Vaqueros Reservoir JPA and its individual Member agencies would like to convey sincere and continued interest in the Los Vaqueros Reservoir Phase 2 Expansion Project. The Los Vaqueros Reservoir Expansion, contemplated over 20 years ago, is an innovative, collaborative regional Project and it is at a critical stage right now. All large water infrastructure projects in California, even those with existing facilities to build upon, take considerable time to achieve, especially with multiple parties involved, along with various state and federal agency stakeholders. Adjustments and changes in response to regulatory and economic variables are part of the process.

The JPA Member agencies have been diligently working individually and collectively with our partner CCWD, as the Los Vaqueros Reservoir owner and operator, to develop and finalize key agreements critical to informing the Member agencies' respective business cases. Tremendous staff time and significant resources have been invested by all parties over the years to bring this exceptional Project to fruition. There is more work to be done, and the JPA and its members are ready, willing, and able to undertake those efforts.

The JPA is committed to continuing to work with CCWD as the key Project partner, making progress through good faith negotiations on

partner agreements and closely collaborating in the negotiations with our state and federal partners to make this Project happen. We sincerely hope these efforts will continue and that our collective agencies will be successful in bringing the vision of a second successful expansion of the Los Vaqueros Reservoir to completion to benefit the many Californians, businesses, ecosystems, and agricultural lands served by the JPA Member agencies.

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Press release from the Office of the Governor:
Maven | October 3, 2024

GOVERNOR NEWSOM: California makes major strides for water supplies and climate resilience over the past year

With California experiencing climate-driven extremes in weather, the state is continuing to take aggressive action to protect and expand the state's water supplies, including prioritizing groundwater recharge and infrastructure improvements and supporting vulnerable drinking water systems.

The State of California, under the leadership of Governor Gavin Newsom, has made significant strides in securing and enhancing water supplies while building climate resilience. Over the past year, California has implemented innovative water management strategies and invested heavily in drinking water systems, groundwater protection and infrastructure projects, benefitting millions of residents statewide.

As the state begins a new water year, here's an overview of some key developments:

Key milestones

- Connecting hundreds of thousands of people to clean drinking water: Close to 900,000 more Californians now have [access to clean drinking water](#) since 2019, thanks to consolidation efforts and infrastructure improvements benefiting underserved areas across the state. Since Governor Newsom took office, California has reduced the number of people who lack access from 1.6 million to approximately 700,000.
- Supporting drinking water systems: Nearly 400 communities across California have [received support](#) to bolster their drinking water and wastewater systems and build resilience against climate impacts through \$880 million distributed by the State Water Board in the 2023-2024 fiscal year alone. These projects, which focus on both immediate and long-term needs, ensure cleaner and more reliable water access for local communities. Since 2019, California has facilitated more than 140 water system consolidations to provide safe drinking water, and the Governor last month signed SB 1188 (Laird) to support struggling small water systems with technical resources.
- Streamlining Sites Reservoir project: California is forging ahead with this major water storage project which could store enough water for 3 million households' yearly usage. The Sites Reservoir project cleared a legal hurdle last month under expedited judicial review enabled by the Governor's infrastructure streamlining law.
- Making progress on the [Delta Conveyance Project](#): California [released](#) the final Environmental Impact Report for this critical project, as well as a new [cost-benefit analysis](#) showing that it would create billions of dollars in benefits for California communities – including reliable water supplies, climate change adaptation, earthquake preparedness and improved water quality. With every \$1 spent, \$2.20 in benefits would

be generated. Through the rest of the year, local water districts that depend upon the [State Water Project](#) will vote on funding the project. To date, the boards of the first three such districts to vote have committed to providing planning funds for the project.

- 10 years of protecting groundwater supplies: California last month marked the first [decade](#) of protecting and sustaining our critical groundwater supplies through the [Sustainable Groundwater Management Act](#) (SGMA), which empowers local agencies to tackle overpumping that endangers water supplies for communities, agriculture and ecosystems. Since the law's enactment, more than 300 local Groundwater Sustainability Agencies have been formed and are implementing enforceable groundwater sustainability plans. The state has invested nearly \$1 billion in SGMA to achieve groundwater sustainability for future generations.
- Increasing groundwater supplies: California has increased its groundwater reserves, investing in projects that recharge groundwater basins, including capturing excess stormwater. In 2023 alone, [4.1 million acre-feet of water were added](#) to underground aquifers through managed efforts.
- Water Plan for extreme weather: Governor Newsom unveiled an [update](#) to the California Water Plan, outlining comprehensive solutions to enhance the state's ability to capture and store more water, especially during extreme weather events like floods. This plan includes infrastructure improvements and technological advancements to build climate resilience.
- Clearing \$880 million in water utility debts: The state distributed \$880 million to [eliminate water utility debts](#) for 4 million Californians, alleviating financial burdens on residents and businesses and ensuring continued access to water services during challenging economic times.

As California begins a new water year, the state remains ready to respond to changing water conditions, including the potential return of dry conditions. With estimates that hotter, drier conditions could reduce California's water supply by up to 10% by the year 2040, the state is implementing an all-of-the-above approach to safeguard and boost water supplies as outlined in the [California Water Plan](#), [Water Supply Strategy](#) and [Water Resilience Portfolio](#).

Barbara Barrigan-Parrilla, Executive Director of Restore the Delta, responded:

"Governor Newsom claims the Delta Tunnel is about water resilience, but the truth is this project will drain our wallets and the Delta itself with declining water supplies resulting from climate change. His rosy cost-benefit analysis conveniently ignores the environmental destruction to environmental justice communities, harm to tribal communities, and massive financial risks for Southern California ratepayers. He is pushing a \$20 billion gamble on a pipe dream for the benefit of powerful political donors. California needs real climate solutions that reduce Delta reliance, not a boondoggle that benefits a few at the expense of our most vital ecosystems economies and people."

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CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF WATER RESOURCES

Published: Sep 26, 2024

Contact:

Jason Ince, Information Officer,
Public Affairs, Department of Water Resources
(916) 820-8138 | Media@water.ca.gov

California Prepares for Extreme Weather Swings as New Water Year Approaches

Record hot summer, looming La Niña conditions, and early-season uncertainty means California must be prepared for both dry conditions and flood risk.

SACRAMENTO, Calif. – The Department of Water Resources (DWR) today previewed the new Water Year which starts on October 1 by highlighting preparations for more extreme weather events this season following a record hot summer across much of California and a looming La Niña pattern.

Over the past decade, climate extremes have posed significant challenges to water managers, especially the extreme hot and dry conditions that frequently persist well past summer months and into the fall. California is seeing that right now with above-average temperatures forecast into October and no rain in the current forecast. At the same time, the water that California does receive will arrive from more powerful storms, and hotter temperatures will mean less winter precipitation falls as snow and more will arrive as rain, increasing flood risk.

“California has experienced the full range of climate challenges in recent years from extreme drought to severe flooding and we will be seeing more of that in the future,” said DWR Director Karla Nemeth. “To meet these dramatic challenges, California is starting this water year with more accurate forecasting and additional investments in flood protection and groundwater recharge.”

DWR and partner agencies are making California more climate resilient, taking actions to protect and boost California’s water supplies by taking an all-of-the-above approach to creating a resilient water supply in the face of a changing climate.

Investments in Forecast Informed Reservoir Operations and improved data collection on hydrological conditions across the state through DWR’s \$7 million California Stream Gage Improvement Program (CalSIP) will allow California to incorporate the best available science and data into its water management decisions.



Drone photo of Lake Oroville. Photo taken September 5, 2024.

California is also investing in protecting Californians from extreme weather events. Floodplain restoration and flood infrastructure projects such as the Lookout Slough Tidal Habitat Restoration and Flood Improvement Project and the Lower Elkhorn Basin Levee Setback Project will work with nature to improve wildlife habitat while reducing flood risk to hundreds of thousands of Californians.

California is also starting this water year with significant progress in bringing groundwater basins across the state closer to long-term sustainability, protecting drinking water supplies against the impacts of climate change. Last winter, DWR launched the Flood Diversion and Recharge Enhancement Initiative, which supports local groundwater recharge efforts that increase the volume of flood flows diverted from local waterways to recharge areas and expand local capacity to divert and receive future flood flows. DWR has invested over \$100 million in groundwater recharge projects since the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act was signed into law in 2014.

While Lake Oroville, the State Water Project's largest reservoir, is currently 101 percent of average for this date, the latest outlook from NOAA's Climate Prediction Center shows a 71 percent chance of La Niña conditions emerging this fall. While seven of the 10 La Niña events this century resulted in dry years, research also suggests that even as the climate grows hotter and drier overall, the precipitation that California does receive will arrive in stronger storms, increasing the risk from flooding.

"California experienced record heat and dry conditions this summer, drying out the landscape and putting our hydrology behind before the water year even starts," said State Climatologist Dr. Michael Anderson. "While there is still a lot of uncertainty around how La Niña could impact the state this year, we know we can count on it to include extreme conditions."

The record dry conditions this summer broke multiple records across the state for consecutive days of triple digit temperatures. In the critically important Sierra Nevada watersheds, precipitation this fall will be vitally important to ensure the winter snowpack can translate into runoff that fills our reservoirs, which provides a third of the water used in California.

In addition to today's preview of the new Water Year, DWR will also release the 2024 Annual Water Supply and Demand Assessment Summary Report on Monday, September 30. The summary report, which includes water shortage information at the supplier level, as well as regional and statewide analyses of water supply conditions, finds that all suppliers have assessed that they will have adequate supplies to meet demand in the coming year.

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Is California Ready for Climate Change?

Public Policy Institute of California | October 1, 2024 | Sarah Bardeen



Dr. Benjamin Cook is a scientist at the Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory and the NASA Goddard Institute for Space Studies, where he studies drought and the interaction between hydrology and climate. We asked him to tell us more about drought and aridity in California.

You've studied drought all over the world. How do you measure drought?

When most people think about drought, they think about precipitation: rainfall and snow. That's obviously very important, because that's how most droughts start. When we talk about water resources needed by people and ecosystems, however, we're really talking about soil moisture, streamflow, and groundwater. I tend to focus more on these aspects of drought because they're not just dependent on rainfall—they also depend on things like evaporation, which is sensitive to temperature. Generally speaking, as temperatures rise, evaporation also rises, drying out the soil; this is why we expect soils to become drier with climate change in many regions.

In California, we keep hearing about increasing aridity. What does that mean, and does it reflect changes in climate?

Aridity refers to how dry on average a given region is. For example, Phoenix, Arizona is more arid than New York City—that's the climatological difference between the two places. Drought refers to a deviation in the water balance from the baseline climate: is it dryer or wetter than normal? Drought in Phoenix and drought in New York look very different because the baseline aridity is so different.

This brings up an interesting problem when we look at climate change projections. With climate change, we're starting to see an aridification trend in many regions, including in the southwestern United States. As warming continues, this is shifting regions towards drier average conditions. That becomes a challenge: how do we interpret droughts in the context of a continuously drying baseline? And when do we decide it's no longer a drought but a shift in aridity to a more permanent, drier state? There's a lot of discussion in the community about this.

California is kind of funny, because one of its defining features is whiplash, where you'll go very quickly from a really bad drought year to a year with flooding or record-breaking snowfall. For California, it's harder to say if it's going through an aridification trend. We can say more confidently that climate change is likely to amplify the extremes. When you get a drought, it's going to be hotter and drier than it would have been. And probably when you get these atmospheric rivers, a warmer world means they'll have more water, which could lead to more flooding.

In the West, there are droughts all the time. Everyone's worried when it's going on, but as soon as it ends, people feel they have nothing to worry about. I always say that when a drought ends, it's time to start preparing for next one.

There are numerous policy implications for growing aridity in California. What issues are at the top of your list?

There are some clear pain points here. The vast majority of the water used in the western US—about 70%—is used for agriculture. Any solution will have to reckon with that. There may be a need to change cropping practices. On the other side, the Colorado River Basin has a very complicated network of water rights. Some of these rights go back generations with different levels of seniority, and that adds a layer of complexity to finding a solution that works for everybody.

California will probably have to adapt to changes in snowpack. The state manages reservoirs for flood control during the wintertime, with the expectation that in the spring, all the snow in the Sierras will melt and refill the reservoirs, and we'll have that available for everybody during the dry season. With climate change, that snowpack will get smaller, because more of it will come down as rainfall, and you'll have earlier snowmelt and even sublimation (where snow evaporates directly into the atmosphere). In a warmer future, you can't count on snowpack to be there in spring to capture and use for the dry season. We'll have to adapt management around that.

Anything else you're excited about?

We're now looking at the opposite of droughts: pluvials (extended periods of above-average wetness). The early 20th century was one of the wettest periods in western North America, and the water allotments in the Colorado River Compact are based on measurements made during this time. The 1980s and '90s was also one of the wettest 20-year periods in the last thousand years, and there was massive population and economic growth. These periods of abundant water very likely shaped much of the expansive development in western North America.

We're looking more deeply at these really wet periods to understand them better. How often have they happened in the past, and what kind of dynamics underlie them? What might they look like in the future? Pluvials are really critical for drought management. For example, groundwater in California is recharged during wet years, and this groundwater is used during dry years to mitigate drought impacts. There's an underlying, implicit assumption that whenever droughts end, these pluvial events will come and fill up the water resources for use during the next drought. We're trying to determine how credible that assumption is.

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USBR: Start of 2025 water year is a reminder of the need for caution and preparedness
Climate volatility spurs need for quick and adaptive responsiveness
Maven | October 2, 2024 | Bureau of Reclamation

California’s 2025 water year begins with relatively good conditions in major Central Valley Project reservoirs, with 7.43 million acre-feet of water in storage, about 120% of the 15-year average. Shasta, the anchor of the CVP and California’s largest reservoir, is at a robust 2.78 million acre-feet of water, 113% of the 15-year average. The water year annually begins Oct 1. and concludes Sept. 30.

The 2024 water year began with more than 8 million acre-feet of storage in CVP reservoirs, the result of a wet 2023-2024 winter that helped erase several years of drought. However, precipitation totals in 2024 began slowly and conditions were well below average at the time of the Feb. 1 water supply forecast.

The water year did improve after that point, with close to average annual precipitation totals across the Sierra Nevada, but the transition from spring to summer ushered in record-setting warm weather. According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, August 2024 was the Earth’s hottest August in the agency’s 175-year climate record, and the Central Valley of California felt this trend.

The record heat and the recent experience of drought in California means Reclamation must be nimble and ready to react and respond quickly.

“California’s unpredictable and changing climate continues to challenge us as we aim to fulfill Reclamation’s mission of providing water and power for people, the economy and the environment,” said California-Great Basin Regional Director Karl Stock. “We must continue to invest all available resources in ensuring we are prepared for the most challenging impacts of climate change.”

Reclamation is responding with a broad portfolio of innovative investments and actions aimed at providing resilience in the face of water supply disruptions caused by extreme conditions. From improved forecasting methods to investments in aging infrastructure and additional water storage, Reclamation is taking actions to protect and improve our water supply and delivery systems.

Comparison of Previous End-of-Year Storage in Major CVP Reservoirs (Million Acre-Feet)

Year	2024	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019	1977 (Driest Year)	1983 (Wettest Year)
Total	7.43	8.17	3.6	3.21	6.01	9.02	1.5	9.8

The CVP is the largest single source of irrigation water in California, typically supplying water to about 3 million acres of agricultural land in the San Joaquin and Sacramento valleys. The CVP also provides

urban water for millions of people and industrial water, including that essential to the San Francisco Bay Area's economy. Water from the CVP is also vital for the environment, wildlife and fishery restoration, including providing water to 19 refuges in the Central Valley, and hydroelectric power production.

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For additional storage information, visit www.usbr.gov/mp/cvo ; for additional information on the 2024 water year, visit www.usbr.gov/mp/drought.

About Reclamation: The Bureau of Reclamation is a federal agency under the U.S. Department of the Interior and is the nation's largest wholesale water supplier and second largest producer of hydroelectric power. Our facilities also provide substantial flood control, recreation opportunities, and environmental benefits.

La Niña pattern brings risks of dry winter, dangerous flooding

Bay City News | September 27, 2024 | Kiley Russell



Lake Oroville. California Department of Water Resources Lake Oroville. (Sept. 5, 2024)

Looming La Niña climate conditions preceded by this year's hot, dry summer could spell trouble for California's water supply and increase the risk of flooding over the next 12 months, according to officials from the state Department of Water Resources.

In a media briefing to start the state's "water year," which begins Oct. 1, DWR Director Karla Nemeth said Thursday that state agencies are preparing for extreme weather events in the coming months.

"California has experienced the full range of climate challenges in recent years from extreme drought to severe flooding and we will be seeing more of that in the future," Nemeth said. "To meet these dramatic challenges, California is starting this water year with more accurate forecasting and additional investments in flood protection and groundwater recharge."

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Climate Prediction Center shows a 71% chance of La Niña conditions emerging this fall.

Over the past 100 years, 70% of La Niña years were dry but DWR officials also warn there is a good chance that whatever precipitation the state might get will arrive via stronger storms, which, along with sunbaked soils that dried out over the summer, increases the risk of flooding.

"California experienced record heat and dry conditions this summer, drying out the landscape and putting our hydrology behind before the water year even starts," said state climatologist Michael Anderson. "While there is still a lot of uncertainty around how La Niña could impact the state this year, we know we can count on it to include extreme conditions."

To help prepare for and mitigate those conditions, the state has invested in things like Forecast Informed Reservoir Operations, which allows water managers to better coordinate early releases of water into the Yuba and Feather rivers in advance of atmospheric rivers to better protect against flooding.

DWR officials also said they've spent \$7 million on an improved water management decision making program, California Stream Gage Improvement Program, and are investing millions on floodplain restoration and flood control improvement projects.

DWR officials struck a somewhat optimistic tone when describing the state's healthy water storage conditions as they exist now, with most of the state's reservoirs filled to 100% of historical averages or more heading into what could be a dry spell.

Still, fingers are being crossed for a decent amount of precipitation to fall this year, particularly in the Sierra Nevada watersheds, where the winter snowpack accounts for a third of the water used in California.

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Tuolumne River salmon habitat enhanced

Ag Alert News | October 2, 2024 | Christine Souza

Partnering with fisheries agencies, Central Valley irrigation districts, whose water users face flow reductions under the state's Bay-Delta water quality plan, are enhancing habitat along the Tuolumne River to improve conditions for struggling fish.

"The overarching goal of this project is to restore the river channel to provide spawning and rearing habitat that increase the productivity of chinook salmon and rainbow trout," said Michael Cooke, Turlock Irrigation District director of water resources and regulatory affairs. "We hope to see salmon spawning on the river this year."

The \$7.8 million habitat restoration project, happening down river from the La Grange Dam in Stanislaus County, includes a \$5.5 million grant from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife and \$2.3 million invested by TID, Modesto Irrigation District and the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission.

"The design of the project provides opportunities for spawning for adults but also ideal conditions for egg incubation and salmon rearing," Cooke said. "There's some additional flood plain that's been created, which results in an increase in the food that juvenile salmon rely on, like aquatic insects and small invertebrates."

The project unveiled in September adds 8 acres of main-stem restoration, 3 acres of flood-plain habitat and 50,000 cubic yards of spawning gravel. These actions, Cooke said, are expected to produce a five-fold increase in salmon habitat along the lower Tuolumne River.

As part of the project, crews have excavated more than 200,000 cubic yards of gravel from the flood plain, Cooke said. Gravel was washed and sorted. The process yielded 53,000 cubic yards of gravel for placement into the river. He said gravel was removed during the late 19th century and the early 20th century as the river was dredged during the Gold Rush.

"Even though most of that gravel was removed, this stretch of the river still remained the predominant spawning reach for salmonid species," he said. "Over time, the number of opportunities for spawning has decreased as high-flow events washed that gravel downstream. We are augmenting it and putting it back."

Pat Maloney, aquatic biologist for TID, compared the spot along the river where work is taking place to a shoebox, with vertical sides and a flat bottom, which he said are not conducive to spawning or juvenile rearing.

"For the most part, (salmon) are going to the coldest, hyper-oxygenated water, which is coming out of the dam, so the majority of adults that come here to spawn are moving past this location," he said. "They're headed upstream to find a gravel location where they can lay their eggs."

With newly placed gravel, Maloney said, there are now many locations conducive for salmon to lay eggs.

“The transformation of the river from a shoebox to a riffle-run pool is just phenomenal,” he said. “The velocity increase just by the placement of alternating gravel bars means the river actually has more sinuosity, so more like a snake rather than a straight shot. It’s obvious to me that it’s going to work really well.”

The project also includes placing boulders and more than 60 almond trees and some cottonwoods and oaks into the river to add diversity and provide fish places to hide from predators. He said the partially submerged trees will provide refuge for juvenile fish and food for juvenile salmon and trout.

“A lot of this water was moving very slowly, which allows predators to just sit and wait for juvenile fish to come downstream, so by increasing the velocity and reducing the depth, we’ve reduced predator habitat significantly in this reach,” Maloney said.

Julie Vance, regional manager for the CDFW Central Region, said the Tuolumne River—the largest tributary to the San Joaquin River—and other San Joaquin River tributaries help support a diversity of species and habitats.

“Like many rivers in California, we’ve had an overall decline in salmon recently and a lot of fluctuations,” she said. “The Tuolumne (River) salmon escapement went from over 40,000 in the mid-1980s to as low as 186 in 2021.”

The Tuolumne River has the lowest salmon escapement rate of the San Joaquin River tributaries, she added.

While many factors affect the decline in the salmon population, Vance said the loss of spawning and rearing habitat is something that project partners seek to address.

“This project is in a part of the river that has the best water temperature for fall-run salmon and steelhead,” she said. “The project will greatly increase spawning and rearing habitats.”

The habitat restoration work is the first project developed under an agreement between the three utilities and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and is part of the Healthy Rivers and Landscapes Program. The Healthy Rivers approach, also known as “voluntary agreements,” is included as an alternative implementation action in the state’s updated Bay-Delta plan.

Adopted in December 2018 by the California State Water Resources Control Board, the Bay-Delta plan requires affected water users to leave unimpaired flows of 30% to 50% in each of three San Joaquin River tributaries—the Tuolumne, Stanislaus and Merced rivers.

TID and MID, which jointly operate Don Pedro Reservoir on the Tuolumne River, signed an agreement in 2022 to work with the state to advance a voluntary agreement for the Tuolumne River.

MID General Manager Jimi Netniss said the districts are investing \$80 million during the next eight years for many projects designed for the Tuolumne River and its flood plain from Don Pedro Reservoir downstream to the San Joaquin River to improve conditions for fish and other aquatic species.

“By 2030, the goal is to develop 77 acres of suitable salmon-rearing and flood plain habitat and add approximately 100,000 tons of gravel in specific areas of the river for optimal salmon spawning and rearing,” he said. “We continue to focus on habitat restoration, coupled with more water at the right times to improve the health and long-term recovery of the fishery.”

The effort, Netniss said, “builds on decades of collaborative stewardship along the Tuolumne River, with Tuolumne River-specific science.”

MID board member Larry Byrd, who for 40 years has raised cattle on property that borders a stretch of the Tuolumne River, said, “I have skin in the game too because I’m a rancher and a farmer, but I’m also an environmentalist.

“With this project, we’re optimistic that it is going to restore chinook salmon, and we’ll still have water availability for the farmers, the city of Modesto and the city of Turlock,” Byrd said, adding that the shared resource has to work for all uses. “We have to restore it, and I want to see the chinook salmon come back.”

Construction for the initial habitat restoration project began in June and is expected to be complete by summer of 2026.

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\$1.5 billion project to expand major Bay Area reservoir collapses

Stunning setback for water storage as local agencies abandon once-promising project to enlarge Los Vaqueros Reservoir

Mercury News | September 25, 2024 | Paul Rogers



People walk along the banks of the Los Vaqueros Reservoir in Brentwood, Calif., on Monday, Nov. 8, 2021. (Jose Carlos Fajardo/Bay Area News Group)

In a stunning setback for efforts to expand water storage in Northern California as the state struggles with more severe droughts from climate change, a \$1.5 billion plan to enlarge Los Vaqueros Reservoir in Contra Costa County and share the water with residents across the Bay Area has collapsed after more than seven years of planning and millions of dollars spent.

“We’ve gotten as far as we were able to on this project,” said Rachel Murphy, general manager of the Contra Costa Water District, which was overseeing the plan, on Monday. “It’s not a decision taken lightly.”

The project, which was promised \$477 million in state funding six years ago by the administration of former Gov. Jerry Brown, had been viewed by water planners as one of the most promising efforts to increase reservoir storage anywhere in the state. Plans called for raising the height of the earthen dam at Los Vaqueros by 55 feet to 281 feet high.

That would have enlarged the amount of water that the reservoir, a massive off-stream lake in the rural rolling hills near Brentwood, could hold, from its current 160,000 acre-feet capacity to 275,000 acre-feet, enough water when full for the annual needs of 1.4 million people. The additional water

storage was to have been shared among residents across the Bay Area in Alameda, Santa Clara and other counties to reduce water shortages during droughts.

But the project's costs have grown steadily, from \$980 million 2018 to nearly \$1.6 billion today.

On top of that, late last year the state Department of Fish and Game updated the permit that the Contra Costa Water District uses draw water from the Delta into the reservoir. The agency said tougher standards are needed to protect the endangered Delta smelt, a tiny fish, which reduced yield, or annual amount of water users could expect from the enlarged reservoir, by up to 30%.

Finally, the eight major water agencies that had formed a partnership to build the project couldn't agree on which should shoulder the most financial risk pay for additional cost overruns if they came up. Contra Costa Water District was unwilling to accept much risk, yet still would own and control the reservoir, other partners said.

"Contra Costa said if there were cost overruns, or construction delay or regulatory issues, then the other members would be shouldering all of the additional costs," said Rick Callender, CEO of the Santa Clara Valley Water District. "We wanted all of the partners to share in that risk."

Last month, the East Bay Municipal Utility District, which serves Alameda and Contra Costa County, dropped its commitment from buying 30,000 acre-feet of water to zero. Two weeks ago the Santa Clara Valley Water District in San Jose cut its commitment by 60%, from 50,000 acre feet to 20,000. The San Francisco Public Utilities District, which serves 2.4 million people in San Francisco, the Peninsula, the South Bay and Southern Alameda County, cut its share in half, from 40,000 acre-feet to 20,000.

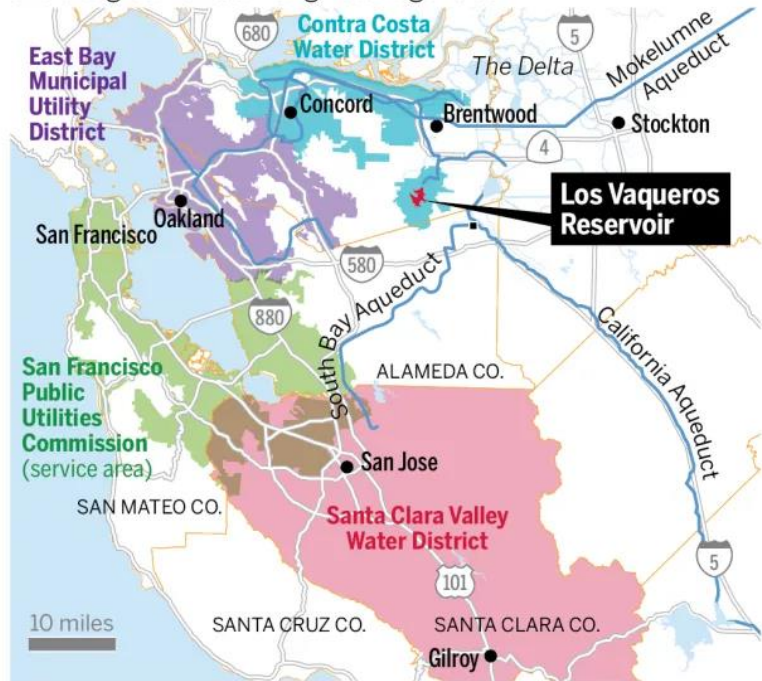
The agencies determined that other projects — including expanding groundwater storage, boosting recycled water and increasing conservation, all were cheaper.

"Los Vaqueros turned out to be less water than we thought, and at a higher cost," said Mike Tognolini, director of water and natural resources at East Bay MUD.

"We have some other alternatives. Underground storage looks more promising," he added.

EXPANSION OF BAY AREA RESERVOIR FAILS

A proposal to expand Los Vaqueros Reservoir and share its water across the Bay Area has collapsed due to cost overruns and disagreements among water agencies.



BAY AREA NEWS GROUP

Last Wednesday, in what appears to be the death knell for the project, the board of the Contra Costa Water District told its staff to draw up papers to pull their agency out of the deal. That formal vote is expected in November.

“We took a fresh clear look at the facts,” Murphy said. “We’ve seen an increase in costs, a reduction in benefits, and scheduling delays, along with challenges getting to agreements with our partners.”

“The project just is no longer viable,” she added.

The failure is a major setback for the eight water agencies — each of which contributed \$4.4 million and thousands of hours of staff time. But it also is a blow to the Newsom administration, which has said that more reservoir storage is needed for California to capture water in wet years for dry years, as droughts become more severe.

“I’m disappointed,” said Karla Nemeth, director of the state Department of Water Resources, on Monday. “The Bay Area really does need regional storage. And expansion projects like this are appealing. I was very hopeful the agencies were going to come together and have a project they could finance.”



The Los Vaqueros Reservoir dam, located in northeastern Contra Costa County between Brentwood and Livermore, is photographed on Thursday, Nov. 3, 2016. (Doug Duran/Bay Area News Group)

What made the Los Vaqueros expansion particularly hopeful, Nemeth said, was that it was an enlargement of an existing reservoir, already in place since 1998. There were no major environmental lawsuits, as there often are on other projects to build new reservoirs.

Asked if the Department of Water Resources could step in and make financial guarantees to save the project, Nemeth said “that would require the California Legislature.”

So far, \$70 million was given to the Contra Costa Water District for planning, environmental reports, engineering studies, legal work, and other costs. Of that, \$31 million came from the partner agencies in cash, \$9 million was partner agency staff time, \$7 million came from the federal government, and \$23 million came from the state. State officials at the California Water Commission now will have to figure out how to reallocate the remaining roughly \$450 million that was to be spent on the Los Vaqueros project.

The money originally came from Proposition 1, a water bond approved by voters in 2014. It could go now to other projects, like Sites Reservoir, a massive \$4.5 billion project in Colusa County that continues to move forward.

“Our governor is very keen on seeing these storage projects developed and constructed,” Nemeth said.

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Plans for Los Vaqueros Reservoir Expansion End

Contra Costa News | September 24, 2024



Los Vaqueros Reservoir. Photo by Los Vaqueros Reservoir Expansion Project

This week, the Contra Costa Water District Board announced an end to the Los Vaqueros Reservoir Phase 2 Expansion Project for a number of reasons.

Those reasons, which will not impact ratepayers, but those wanting to buy water, include:

- Funding/project costs – for example, in 2017 it was \$980 million. Today, it's nearly \$1.6 billion (inflation/delays)
- Regulation roadblocks – for example, water yield that now has to stay in the delta, CCWD says they saw a decrease in yield by up to 30%.
- Project sustainability/viability – reduced protections to ratepayers. Meanwhile, additional time may not create solutions.
- Decreased Interest in water storage – for example, interest in storage declined by 50%.

While this may seem like a negative to outside agencies, the CCWD board opted to protect ratepayers, than expand a reservoir simply for water storage for outside agencies to purchase—leaving them with one less resource in future droughts.

The Joint Powers Authority was formed in October of 2021 which included: Alameda County Water District, Contra Costa Water District, East Bay Municipal Utility District, Grassland Water District, San

Francisco Public Utilities Commission, San Luis & Delta-Mendota Water Authority, Valley Water, Zone 7 and the Department of Water Resources

Contra Costa Water District (CCWD) Board President Ernesto A. Avila issued the following statement regarding the CCWD Board's direction for staff to develop an approach to end CCWD's participation in the Los Vaqueros Reservoir Phase 2 Expansion Project.

Concord —“Contra Costa Water District (CCWD) has been a champion of a second expansion of our reservoir for decades. As difficult as the decision was for the Board to look at ending our participation, we have reached the point where the facts show that this well-intended project is not viable.”

“Due to a variety of factors, the projected benefits to all partners – urban, agriculture and wildlife refuges – have been diminishing while costs have been increasing significantly. Water agency requests to buy into the added storage have decreased substantially, leaving that component of the project undersubscribed. Meanwhile, discussions on the necessary agreements have been ongoing for years and a growing number of issues continue to be deferred instead of being resolved. These are the facts.”

“The latest project updates from members of the Los Vaqueros Joint Powers Authority (JPA) affirm that permitting and regulatory requirements have significantly reduced the amount of water that agencies can expect from the project. With increasing costs and other constraints, the project compares less favorably today to other water supply strategies.”

“All of the agencies involved in exploring the project are obligated to their governing boards and customers. For CCWD, protecting water supply and quality for our customers is a fundamental commitment of this Board as memorialized in CCWD's Principles guiding exploration of this regional project in 2003 and confirmed by CCWD's customers in 2004. Also fundamental is protecting our customers from financial risk from the project and the risk due to Los Vaqueros being offline for up to five years of dam construction, particularly with the potential for a severe drought occurring in any given year. With the deteriorating business cases among member agencies, these risks are increasing.”

“All of the partners have worked hard to address the issues, but the changed conditions and their impacts on the viability of this project necessitated CCWD to have a frank and timely discussion if continuing this path is a responsible use of public dollars including a difficult decision on whether to end our participation in this project. The Board agreed based on the facts we have that now is the appropriate time for CCWD to develop an approach to conclude its participation.”

“CCWD appreciates and respects the collaboration with local, state, and federal partners to try to move this project forward. We need to take the valuable lessons learned in this process to further strengthen our efforts to work together on projects to improve water supply and water quality for our region.”

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Plans for \$1.5 billion expansion of East Bay reservoir unravel

San Francisco Chronicle | September 24, 2025 | Kurtis Alexander



Plans to expand Los Vaqueros Reservoir near Brentwood, seen here in 2018, have fallen apart. Michael Macor/The Chronicle

Efforts to expand a reservoir in the East Bay and share the additional water with San Francisco and others in the region have fallen apart after years of planning.

The Contra Costa Water District, which has been pursuing the enlargement of the Los Vaqueros Reservoir in the hills near Brentwood, confirmed Monday that it's seeking to end its commitment to the \$1.5 billion project, citing increasing costs and regulation.

The reservoir expansion had marked a collaborative and widely supported push to boost water supplies in the Bay Area after years of drought. Its termination leaves the eight partnering water agencies, which include the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission, East Bay Municipal Utility District and Santa Clara Valley Water District, with one less source of water for patching up future shortages.

"As difficult as the decision was for the board to look at ending our participation, we have reached the point where the facts show that this well-intended project is not viable," Ernesto A. Avila, the Contra Costa Water District board president, said in a statement.

The collapse of the project was first reported by the San Jose Mercury News.

The Los Vaqueros Reservoir is an off-stream reservoir, meaning it doesn't sit on a river, and its supplies are piped in from the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta. It can hold 160,000 acre-feet of water, enough to provide for more than 320,000 California households for a year.

The Contra Costa Water District, which owns the facility, had planned to elevate the earthen dam at the reservoir by 55 feet, increasing capacity by 70%. The district joined with other water agencies in the Bay Area to create a joint powers authority to pursue the work and secured a state financial pledge of \$478 million from voter-approved water bonds.

To date, about \$58 million has been spent on planning for the project, according to the district. This investment includes state money and initial sums from the partnering agencies as well as a contribution from the federal Bureau of Reclamation.

In recent months, the district has reported that the cost of the project has gone up — more than 50% from the \$980 million price tag cited six years ago — and that regulatory constraints would likely limit the amount of water expected with the expansion. Foremost, district officials say pumping restrictions in the delta, to protect fish, could reduce water yield by 30%.

The reports were not received well by the partnering agencies, which showed reduced interest in the project.

“All of the partners have worked hard to address the issues, but the changed conditions and their impacts on the viability of this project necessitated Contra Costa Water District to have a frank and timely discussion if continuing this path is a responsible use of public dollars,” Avila said.

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Yearslong effort to expand Bay Area reservoir by 37 billion gallons faces sudden collapse

SF Gate | September 24, 2024 | Stephen Council,



Los Vaqueros Reservoir, between Brentwood and Livermore in California's Contra Costa County, is seen on Feb. 2, 2018.

Michael Macor/San Francisco Chronicle via Getty Images

After years of planning and millions of dollars in investment, an effort to dramatically expand the Bay Area's Los Vaqueros Reservoir is on the brink of collapse. It's a blow for California's long-term water ambitions — amid climate change, the state increasingly relies on reservoirs like Los Vaqueros to battle droughts.

Planners across the Bay Area and Central Valley were hoping to expand the lake's water capacity from 160,000 acre-feet to 275,000 acre-feet, an addition of about 37.5 billion gallons. The plans also called for a new pipeline, and upgrades to a transfer facility and pumping plants.

Proponents touted the regional collaboration, and a range of benefits; the project was meant to deliver water for wildlife refuges, improve water quality and boost supply for a slew of water agencies that serve 11 million total Californians. The state pledged \$477 million to help; and the eight member agencies had already started contributing millions, even as projected costs ballooned from \$900 million to \$1.5 billion, according to the Mercury News.

But statements during a Wednesday board meeting of the Contra Costa Water District, which owns and operates the reservoir, cast major doubts on the expansion project. First, an administrator for the agency delivered a presentation that highlighted the expansion's struggles. A regulatory change meant to protect the endangered Delta smelt lowered the amount of water Los Vaqueros would be able to pipe in from the network of waterways. Agencies representing

water customers in San Francisco, the East Bay and the Santa Clara Valley each cut back their supply requests. And, crucially, CCWD hadn't figured out how to guarantee its community water during a potential five-year construction period on the lake.

Later in the meeting, the board members praised the work done so far, but minced no words when it came to the future of the expansion. Director Patt Young called the risk to Contra Costa's water users "unconscionable." Director John Burgh said the expansion had become "unbuildable and, more importantly, unwise" and suggested that the agency's staff come up with a plan to terminate CCWD's role in the expansion.

Sure enough, on Monday, CCWD President Ernesto Avila issued a statement saying that the "well-intended project is not viable."

"The projected benefits to all partners — urban, agriculture and wildlife refuges — have been diminishing while costs have been increasing significantly," Avila wrote. "... Meanwhile, discussions on the necessary agreements have been ongoing for years and a growing number of issues continue to be deferred instead of being resolved. These are the facts."



The dam at Los Vaqueros Reservoir in California, on Feb. 2, 2018. A group of local water agencies was trying to tap a windfall of pledged state funds to expand the lake to serve more of the Bay Area. Michael Macor/San Francisco Chronicle via Getty Images

Per the Mercury News, which first reported on the expansion effort's collapse, a formal CCWD vote in November will seal the project's fate.

Still, the Los Vaqueros Reservoir Joint Powers Authority, which governs the expansion, is hoping to keep up the effort. Its executive director, Taryn Ravazzini, told SFGATE on Tuesday that her organization is “extremely disappointed” by the CCWD’s proposed pullout.

“It comes at a pivotal time for the project when we are making progress and negotiating agreements with the individual member agencies and CCWD as facility owner and operator,” Ravazzini said. She called the likely withdrawal a “premature end” to the effort, adding that the project had epitomized the cross-agency work California’s water system needs.

The expansion’s shutdown runs contrary to Gov. Gavin Newsom’s water resiliency goals. In a Tuesday statement to SFGATE, Department of Water Resources Director Karla Nemeth called the expansion a “multi-benefit project” and said the administration wants to see projects like these completed.

Though Nemeth said there’s still interest in a Los Vaqueros expansion, she seemed to empathize with the CCWD. She wrote, “Local water district leaders must determine for themselves whether the project is a good investment for their ratepayers.”

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Major East Bay Reservoir Expansion Is Axed After Years of Rising Costs, Waning Interest

KQED | September 24, 2024 | Dana Cronin



Contra Costa Water District has ended a yearslong, \$1.5 billion project to expand Los Vaqueros Reservoir, a major setback for Bay Area water storage efforts. The project received nearly \$500 million in state funding in 2018 following the passage of Proposition 1. (Courtesy Linda Wingerd Meamber)

A long-percolating expansion of Los Vaqueros Reservoir in Contra Costa County will not move forward after costs and delays mounted in recent years, ending a project that would have significantly boosted the Bay Area's water supply.

The project, first proposed in 2017, would have increased the reservoir's capacity by more than 70% and distributed water to residents across the Bay Area. In a statement on Monday, Contra Costa Water District Board President Ernesto A. Avila announced the agency would end its participation in the project, citing increasing costs and declining participation from other local water agencies.

"As difficult as the decision was ... we have reached the point where the facts show that this well-intended project is not viable," he wrote.

The project's costs have grown steadily over the years, from \$980 million in 2017 to nearly \$1.6 billion, due to inflation and scheduling delays.

“We need to be very responsible with public dollars,” said Jennifer Allen, director of public affairs for the Contra Costa Water District. “If we see that there is no path to go forward with this expansion, it is important to have that discussion now.”

On top of the increased costs, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife recently updated the district’s incidental take permit, which dictates how much water it can divert from the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta to fill the reservoir.

“Because of additional restrictions to maintain more water in the Delta for aquatic species, we saw a decrease in yield by up to 30%,” Allen said.

The project was governed by a conglomerate of Bay Area water agencies, including the Alameda County Water District, East Bay Municipal Utility District, San Francisco Public Utilities Commission, Valley Water and others.

Over time, Allen said, those agencies pulled back on their requests for storage.

“We went from being oversubscribed to being undersubscribed, and pretty significantly in a short period of time,” she said.

Water agencies also disagreed on who should shoulder any additional costs. Contra Costa Water District thought it should be the partners.

“We’d already built the original reservoir,” Allen said. “The expansion was to the benefit of the partners. And so those costs would have been directed at the partners.”

“There were definitely some challenges and issues that came up around that concept,” she said.

Los Vaqueros Reservoir underwent a previous expansion that was completed in 2012, which expanded storage from 100,000 to 160,000 acre-feet. This second phase would have expanded the reservoir to 275,000 acre-feet.

The news comes as Gov. Gavin Newsom’s administration works to expand reservoir capacity in the state, including the Sites Reservoir in the Sacramento Valley.

“These are projects that will address our state’s biggest challenges faster, and the Sites Reservoir is fully representative of that goal – making sure Californians have access to clean drinking water and making sure we’re more resilient against future droughts,” Newsom said in a statement.

Allen, the Contra Costa Water District spokesperson, said agencies are starting to look at other ways to fortify the Bay Area’s water supply.

“Even though we don’t see a path for this project to move forward, we are still dedicated to working with partners to look at regional solutions,” Allen said.

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New CEO set for Bay Area Water Supply and Conservation Agency

Thomas Smegal will head the water agency beginning 2025

San Mateo Daily Journal | September 25, 2024 | Holly Rusch



Nicole Sandkulla, current Bay Area Water Supply and Conservation Agency CEO, is retiring at the end of December and will be replaced by Thomas Smegal, a longtime Cal Water executive.

BAWSCA, a public agency authorized by the state Legislature in 2002, represents 1.8 million Alameda, San Mateo and Santa Clara customers who receive water from San Francisco's regional water system.

Sandkulla was the second CEO in the agency's 20-year history and worked within BAWSCA since its inception.

Throughout her tenure, Sandkulla took seriously the legislatively-mandated mission to protect water customers in the region, she said, building relationships with nearby San Francisco entities like the Public Utilities Commission as well as BAWSCA's own 26 member agencies. Those include, cities, local water districts and two private entities.

"We are working together for the customers, in a lot of ways, and the agency has become stronger in who it is to represent [member] agencies and water customers, becoming a stronger regional voice," she said. "We have become an agency that effectively does planning for this region for water supplies."

She managed the agency through two droughts, leading negotiations for drought supplies among member agencies and ensuring all voices were heard. Now more than ever, water is an incredibly valuable resource that BAWSCA is working to ensure remains reliable at a fair price, Sandkulla said.

"In this region, at least, we all seem to be recognizing we are undergoing climate change, and it's impacting our environment around us. It's certainly impacting our water supply," she said.

Now, Smegal will spearhead that mission. He's served in various roles at Cal Water — the second-largest retail water provider in the state — over 27 years, including vice president, CFO and treasurer, according to a Sept. 20 BAWSCA press release. During that time, he worked on issues including drought, water supply and emergency response.

He's excited to take on the agency's Strategy 2050 planning process, which will look at new tactics and strategies for BAWSCA to ensure reliable supply of high-quality water at a fair price.

“The primary goal of the agency is to work with the city and county of San Francisco on those efforts ... as a result of that planning process, there may be local initiatives that we can take,” he said.

The direction that could be taken in terms of specific initiatives is still being studied, Sandkulla said, pointing to usage of recycled water and the process of desalination — removing salt from water to make it suitable for drinking — as possible points of interest.

“Those are the things we’re studying right now. No decisions have been made,” she said. “Water projects like these don’t take years, they take decades.”

As Smegal enters the CEO role, he’ll focus on interfacing with local leaders, customers and other agencies, he said.

“It’s really getting those connections, understanding what people want from BAWSCA,” he said.

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Thousands of San Francisco residents to soon get much higher water bills due to glitch
SF Gate | September 23, 2024 | Alec Regimbal,



Thousands of San Francisco residents will owe more on their water bills because of a technical issue with transponders on water meters operated by the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission. jada photo/Getty Images

Thousands of San Francisco residents will soon receive much higher sewer and water bills because of a technical glitch in the transponders on automated water meters operated by the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission.

In an email to SFGATE, agency spokesperson Nancy Hayden Crowley said that about 8,200 of the agency's water and sewer customers were receiving service over the last few months, or longer, but weren't being billed because the transponders on their meters weren't working properly.

"Certain water meters were accurately reading water usage but not transmitting that data to our billing system," the agency said in a letter to affected customers. "As a result, those accounts were not billed for several months. During that time, affected customers continued to receive water and sewer service even though they weren't receiving a bill."

Now, the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission wants that money and will be sending bills for that unpaid water use.

In its letter to customers, the commission apologized and acknowledged that “receiving an unexpected bill can be concerning.” It said it has allocated resources toward ensuring that those affected can easily enroll in monthly payment plans. It also noted that some low-income customers can receive as much as a 40% discount on their water and sewer bill.

Crowley’s email said the agency is working to fix the transponders on its meters and that customers are not on the hook for the repairs. She said 8,200 of the transponders on the agency’s 179,000 meters were affected by the glitch. All told, the agency said about 4% of its water and sewer customers — including residential and commercial — were impacted.

Crowley said such issues aren’t uncommon in the industry, citing recent examples from Newton, Massachusetts; Melbourne, Florida; Middletown, Ohio; and Toronto, Canada.

The agency said the amount of time that some transponders were inoperative varied, with some customers not being billed for a few months, while others weren’t billed for more than a year.

Crowley noted that waiving the bills isn’t an option, saying the state’s constitution requires the public utility to charge for “only the true and full cost of providing water and sewer service.”

“We sincerely apologize to these customers for any difficulty this may have caused,” Crowley said in her email.

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Editor's note: This story was updated at 1 p.m., Sept. 23, to clarify language around public utility billing.