BAY AREA WATER SUPPLY AND CONSERVATION AGENCY
BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING

November 20, 2025

Correspondence and media coverage of received November 18, 2025

From:	Peter Drekmeier, Policy Director, Yosemite Rivers Alliance (formerly Tuolumne River Trust)
To:	Chair Chambers and BAWSCA Board of Directors
Date:	November 18, 2025
Subject:	Tuolumne River Voluntary Agreement

Water Supply Conditions:

Date:	November 18, 2025
Source:	SF Gate
Article:	National weather pattern change set to arrive in California for Thanksgiving

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From: Peter Drekmeier
To: tchambe@comcast.net; bawscaboardofdirectors
Subject: Tuolumne River Voluntary Agreement
Date: Tuesday, November 18, 2025 1:28:32 PM
Attachments: TRT Letter to BAWSCA - TVA Scientific Basis Report.pdf
PastedGraphic-1.png

Dear Chair Chambers and BAWSCA Board Members:

Please see my attached letter on the Scientific Basis Report for the Tuolumne River Voluntary Agreement.

Thank you.

-Peter

Please note my new email address.

Peter Drekmeier
Policy Director
Yosemite Rivers Alliance
(Formerly Tuolumne River Trust)
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YOSEMITE RIVERS ALLIANCE

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November 18, 2025

Chair Tom Chambers and Board Members
BAWSCA
bawscaboardofdirectors@bawsca.org

Re: Tuolumne River Voluntary Agreement (TVA) draft Scientific Basis Report (SBR).

Dear Chair Chambers and Board Members:

BAWSCA's response to the draft SBR for the TVA is extremely disappointing, to say the least.

In his comment letter, GM Smegal stated, "BAWSCA has expressed its support of a thorough, robust and defensible analysis of the Tuolumne HRL."

The SBR provides this analysis and the outcome is crystal clear. The TVA would fail to meet the Water Board's revised water quality objectives. It would not provide reasonable protections for fish and wildlife. And it would not enable the State to meet its co-equal goals of ensuring reliable water supplies AND restoring the Bay-Delta ecosystem.

Despite all the evidence, GM Smegal reached a very different conclusion. He stated, "…the Draft SBR provides sufficient documentation to warrant moving the Tuolumne HRL forward as part of an updated Bay-Delta Water Quality Control Plan."

Where is Smegal's evidence? His letter does not produce a single citation from the SBR to support his claim.

Smegal states, "It [TVA] is also predicted to result in a 150% increase in juvenile salmon compared to current conditions."

This might be the case, but the SBR is clear – spawning habitat and the production of baby fish are not limiting factors on the Tuolumne. We could produce more fry, but without adequate rearing habitat, suitable water temperature and sufficient flows, the baby fish will simply get eaten by nonnative bass. The bass population would grow and the predation problem would get worse.

Smegal states, "The Draft SBR confirms that the Tuolumne HRL proposal is a holistic and integrated approach to improving the

Bay-Delta ecosystem for fish and wildlife by aligning a broad spectrum of habitat, science, and adaptive management tools."

Smegal's claim is divorced from reality. If he stands by this comment, he should be prepared to provide evidence. The SBR does not reach such a conclusion.

Smegal states, "BAWSCA member agencies have adopted State-required UWMPs that show they would suffer up to a 50-percent loss of water supply from the Regional Water System during multi-year droughts if the adopted Bay-Delta Plan was in force."

Not a single BAWSCA agency came to this conclusion on its own. They all simply accepted language provided by the SFPUC for incorporation into their UWMPs. The City of Palo Alto's Utilities Advisory Commission recently questioned the 50-percent loss figure and rejected it unanimously. Unfortunately, damage had already been done. Based on the SFPUC's manufactured rationing figure, the City spent more than half a million dollars on a One Water Plan that is now gathering dust on a shelf.

To avoid more bad investments, Palo Alto sent an information request to the SFPUC to help improve water supply planning. The SFPUC refused to respond, and GM Smegal declined to support Palo Alto's request. He sent his own letter with questions about how the SFPUC might respond to questions, but to my knowledge has done nothing on the topic since. Meanwhile, the UWMP deadline is approaching. Shouldn't we want our UWMPs to be as accurate as possible for wise planning?

If Smegal really believes we might face 50% rationing, why doesn't he participate in community forums and make his case? Why is he unwilling to give us time at BAWSCA meetings to educate the Board and engage in dialogue? Understanding water supply risk is critical to wise investments in expensive alternative water supplies, yet Strategy 2050 appears to include no such analysis. Has BAWSCA learned anything from the recent Palo Alto debacle?

Smegal states, "The Bay-Delta Plan must take into account these substantial impacts to the Bay Area. The 2018 adopted Plan did not do so, which is why BAWSCA could not support the 2018 adopted Plan."

This statement is absurd, because the final Substitute Environmental Document for Phase 1 of the Bay Delta Plan dedicated an entire appendix to potential impacts of the Plan to SFPUC water supply. Has anyone at BAWSCA actually read Appendix L? It's available here – https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/waterrights/water_issues/programs/bay_delta/bay_delta_plan/water_quality_control_planning/2018_sed/docs/appx_l.pdf

Following are actual citations from the SBR that clearly demonstrate that the TVA would fail to meet the State Water Board's water quality objectives.

Sufficient Flows Are Critical for Fish

"Fish habitat quantity and quality on the Tuolumne River is primarily controlled by flows." – SBR, p. 2-15.

“This is consistent with increases in fry, smolt, and total juvenile survival indices between Tuolumne River rotary screw trap monitoring at Waterford (RM 29.8) and Grayson (RM 5.2) when flows were elevated from flood control releases (Table 2-3). For example, total juvenile survival indices were 24.9% and 94.8% for 2011 and 2017, respectively, whereas survival was below 8% in the other years.” – SBR, p. 2-16.

Note: Juvenile fish survival was much higher in wet years (2011 and 2017) than in the other years.

“The TVA is expected to result in new flow contributions (change relative to Existing Conditions) downstream of La Grange Dam from January through June that range from 2 to 12 thousand-acre feet (TAF) per year on average…” – SBR, p. ES-6.

Note: The average yield of the Tuolumne River is 1,850 TAF.

“From 1970 to 2024, 17 out of the 55 years would have included sequential dry year off-ramps which is a frequency of 1 out of every 3 years.” – SBR, p. 5-65.

Note: Off-ramps would decrease flows substantially in the years when fish need it most.

The TVA Does Not Prioritize Limiting Factors

"These findings suggest that spawning habitat and instream rearing habitat are not as limiting to recruitment as temperature, flow, and floodplain habitat during the rearing period in the Tuolumne River (Table 2-6).” – SBR, p. 2-29.

Water Temperature

“Providing suitable water temperatures is critical to the health of the lower Tuolumne River aquatic ecosystem. Water temperature influences every freshwater life stage of anadromous salmonids…” – SBR, p. 2-26.

“Water temperature is likely the most important abiotic factor (besides water itself), in the environment for fish and the ecosystem for which they depend, because without suitable water temperatures habitats become unusable.” – SBR, p. 5-1.

“…the TVA temperatures would exceed the Existing Conditions scenario from mid-April through mid-May when the off-ramps are being implemented.” – SBR, p. 5-69.

Rearing Habitat

“Floodplain habitat provides substantial benefits to juvenile Chinook salmon by supporting faster growth and higher survival through improved access to drift invertebrate prey, greater feeding success, and refuge from predators (Sommer et al. 2001; Jeffres 2008; see Section 7.2.2.2, *Growth Benefits in Floodplains*, of Chapter 7).” – SBR, p. 2-29.

"Existing habitat availability on the lower Tuolumne River is far less than what is estimated to be required to recover listed salmonid species populations. For example, it is estimated that rearing habitat in the Tuolumne River can only support the offspring from no more than 434 fall-run Chinook salmon adults during managed flow releases (Mesick 2009)." – SBR, p. 2-3.

Predation

"In general, reduced spring flows, elevated water temperatures, and the presence of low-velocity habitats…favor fish communities dominated by non-native, warmwater species, such as largemouth bass and other potential predators on native salmonids (EA 1992; McBain & Trush 2000; Brown and Ford 2002)." – SBR, p. 2-5.

"Another predation study performed on the Tuolumne River at high flows found no salmonid predation occurred (Stillwater Sciences and McBain & Trush 2006)." – SBR, p. 2-5.

"Predator control is not likely to be effective on a broad scale without considering the habitat conditions that make non-native predators successful." – SBR, p. 6-6.

Bay-Delta Ecosystem Improvements

"These volumes, when provided, will not be subject to flow protection below La Grange Diversion Dam. It's expected that these flows will be released when the State Water Project and the Central Valley Project (Projects) would be able to increase exports, which means these flows would not result in Delta outflow." – SBR, p. 3-3.

If you would like to view my presentation to the State Water Board at the recent TVA workshop, it's available at 5:09:00 at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pbg0wr4k3Dc

Thank you for the opportunity to share my thoughts.

Sincerely,

Peter Drekmeier

Peter Drekmeier
Policy Director
peter.drekmeier@yosemiterivers.org

National weather pattern change set to arrive in California for Thanksgiving
La Niña is at play
SF Gate | November 18, 2025 | Anna FitzGerald Guth

Many areas in Northern California, including the Bay Area, have received above-normal rainfall for the time of year. Tayfun Coskun/Anadolu via Getty Images

Forecasters are warning irregular weather could be in store for California through Thanksgiving thanks to multiple atmospheric events, including La Niña.

Temperatures across the state are predicted to lean cooler than normal from at least Saturday, Nov. 22, until Black Friday, according to a national memo flagging a potential “significant pattern change” from the National Weather Service’s Climate Prediction Center.

“The original forecast for the end of November going into December was quite different, so this bulletin shows that new factors came into the forecast,” Brayden Murdock, a meteorologist for the National Weather Service based in San Francisco, told SFGATE. “Here in the Bay Area, we are leaning on the colder side, because a lot of the heat that was coming our way will actually now be transported to the East Coast.”

During the week of Thanksgiving, there’s up to a 50% chance that temperatures will trend cooler than normal throughout California and most of the West. Those traveling to the East Coast for the holiday can expect warmer-than-normal weather in some areas.

Three weather phenomena are at play, influencing the forecast. The first involves the La Niña conditions, which emerged in October and have a good chance of persisting through March. Additionally, there will be combined effects from the Madden-Julian Oscillation — a tropical disturbance of clouds, rainfall, winds and pressure that travels east — and a potential sudden stratospheric warming event, which involves cold air from the polar region pushing south.

“The upcoming pattern change favors a transition from above-normal temperatures to below-normal temperatures across California and the San Francisco Bay Area toward the end of November, with some chilly overnight temperatures likely, particularly across higher elevations and away from the coast,” Tom Collow, a meteorologist at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s Climate Prediction Center and the author of the new outlook, wrote to SFGATE.

Later, from Nov. 29 through mid-December, the weather changes course again, according to the same outlook. California has equal chances of temperatures that fall below or above normal. Meanwhile, “a transition to a colder pattern is forecast across much of the central and northern U.S.” That sudden change after Black Friday could involve some turbulent weather for travelers, especially in the Midwest, Murdock said, though California should be spared.

“The Bay Area, California and most of the West Coast stays pretty unaffected by this second phase,” Murdock said. “We get back to average.”

As far as rain and snow expected for California through February 2026, forecasters predicted a drier-than-average winter in Southern California — but gave equal chances of a rainy, normal or parched season for much of the northern part of the state, including the Bay Area. For the end of November into December, precipitation looks like a coin toss for the whole state.

Since the new water year began in October, however, California has already received a lot of rain. Many areas in Northern California, including the Bay Area, have received above-normal rainfall for the time of year. In Southern California, fall storms broke decades-old rainfall records.

Another storm is forecast to arrive later this week, bringing more rain to the state.

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