

SAC-VALLEY NEWS

SVWQC actions, accomplishments, and updates

1.1+ MILLION IRRIGATED ACRES

7300+ PARTICIPANTS

11 SUBWATERSHEDS



This Holiday season, people across the world will be sitting down to enjoy the food and drink that you have worked hard to produce throughout the year.

The Coalition wishes to recognize and thank ranchers and farmers for their incredible work during this Holiday season and always.

We wish you and your families a happy and prosperous New Year.



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STATE WATER BOARD MOVES FORWARD WITH SECOND AG EXPERT PANEL

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State Water Board Moves Forward with Convening an Irrigated Lands Regulatory Program *Second* Statewide Agricultural Expert Panel

In 2014, the State Water Board convened an agricultural expert panel (2014 Agricultural Expert Panel) to assess existing agricultural nitrate control programs and develop recommendations to ensure that ongoing efforts are protective of groundwater quality. In 2018, in response to recommendations made by the Panel, the State Water Board adopted Order WQ 2018-0002, (Eastern San Joaquin Precedential Order). The State Water Board incorporated a number of the recommendations from the 2014 Agricultural Expert Panel and established new statewide precedential requirements for the Irrigated Lands Regulatory Program (ILRP) in the Eastern San Joaquin Water Quality Order.

Among the precedential requirements was the requirement for growers to report nitrogen applied (A) and nitrogen removed (R) values to their representative third-party group to identify outliers based on similar crops and similar growing practices. At the time, the 2014 Agricultural Expert Panel determined there was insufficient data to set regulatory limits and suggested the use of A/R to determine which growers should receive additional education requirements. In accordance with the Eastern San Joaquin Precedential Order's directions, growers submit A and R data via the Irrigation and Nitrogen Management Plan (INMP) Summary Report. Members in the Sacramento Valley began submitting INMP Summary Reports in 2019.

After several years of collecting nitrogen use data in the Central Valley and the adoption of Waste Discharge Requirements in other regions, notably, the Central Coast Region, State Water Board staff believe that convening a second Agricultural Expert Panel is now critical for program development and propose moving forward with convening the second Agricultural Expert Panel to evaluate current reporting practices in addition to recent research to provide recommendations for the program moving forward. A contract is being developed with a third-party facilitator to convene and lead the expert panel.

Staff issued a public notice with draft questions, a request for areas of expertise, and a call for materials for the proposed expert panel to consider on May 13, 2024. The public comment period ended on June 28, 2024. The finalized questions for the second Agricultural Expert Panel and a general response to comments received on the draft questions are available on the Agriculture webpage > https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/centralvalley/water_issues/irrigated_lands/

The implications on changes to the Irrigation Nitrogen Management Plan Report, Acceptable Ranges, and/or Groundwater Protection Formula, Values and Targets is unknown, but with Environmental Justice Advocates relentless in expressing their dissatisfaction with the current methodology and process for ensuring safe drinking water for communities that depend on groundwater, this will be another opportunity for them to change the ILRP program requirements. Coalition leadership is closely watching and involved in the process advocating for Sacramento Valley grower interests.



Improving Our Amazing Water System in California

By David Guy, Northern California Water Association

With the recent precipitation that has been emerging in the new water year and the weather whiplash we have seen in California the past several decades, this is a good time to think about the importance of our amazing water system in California, how we can continually modernize and improve our water system, and provide our water resources managers with the tools to effectively prepare for the new water year—not knowing whether this upcoming year will be wet, dry, or another average water year like 2024.



I. Starting the Water Year

Here is where we are starting the water year:

- **Reservoir Levels.** California is starting the water year with good reservoir storage, as most of the reservoirs are hovering around 100% of historical average. For the Central Valley Project (CVP), Shasta Lake is at 104% and Folsom Reservoir is at 90%. The State Water Project has Lake Oroville at 94%. Other major reservoirs in the Sacramento Valley, such as New Bullards Bar, Camp Far West, and Indian Valley, are also starting the water year in a good position that allow for flood control operations, while storing as much water as possible for the future. For off-stream reservoirs, in Southern California Diamond Valley is at 135% and San Luis Reservoir, the jointly operated reservoir in Merced County, sits at 108% of historical average. You can find reservoir levels at [California Water Watch](#). DWR and Reclamation are closely coordinating with local agencies to ensure the state's reservoirs have flood space available, if necessary, as well as store as much water as possible if we return to drier conditions.
- **Groundwater Supplies.** Groundwater conditions throughout California are a little more mixed and vary across the state, with aquifer health and conditions generally good in the Sacramento Valley. Water resources managers and Groundwater Sustainability Agencies (GSAs) are watching groundwater levels and quality to see how the aquifer systems have recovered the past several years from the previous dry decade. One indicator of trends in the aquifer systems is seen by the groundwater level conditions that have been monitored and reported on the Department of Water Resources (DWR) California's Groundwater Live. There is a lot to learn from the various trends seen on this website that will help inform local water and land use management. The encouraging signs are that most of the aquifer systems have recovered with several years with full surface supplies. You can see more information at the [Semi-Annual Groundwater Conditions Reports](#).

II. Improvements to our Water Management System

This scenario to begin the water year with generally full surface reservoirs and good aquifer conditions points toward several opportunities as we plan for the 2025 water year. The nature of California—with the maldistribution of water in time and place—coupled with seemingly more extreme weather events, offers new opportunities to advance a more modern water

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management system that better adapts to a changing climate and our state's important values. We look forward to working with state and federal agencies on the following in 2025 to help ensure more reliable water supplies for all beneficial uses of water:

- Full surface water deliveries. The available water supplies point toward full surface water deliveries in the Sacramento Valley in 2025, which is the foundation and necessary for good water management throughout California. In other words, we need full deliveries to make the water system work well in California and full reservoirs support these deliveries. Full deliveries are very important for every beneficial use of water: cities and rural communities, farms, wildlife refuges and floodplain reactivation for fish and birds. As described below, we are increasingly learning the value of water on the landscape for farms, fish and wildlife and groundwater recharge as we both explore and implement the reactivation of our historic floodplains, watershed management with a focus on forest health, and healthy farms and soils. Full water deliveries will serve these important purposes, it will help with further aquifer recovery and health and it will avoid the dramatic impacts we saw earlier this decade on the west-side of the Sacramento Valley.
- Facilitate groundwater recharge. The Sacramento Valley has a strong interest in accelerating the pace and scale of multi-benefit groundwater recharge projects and want to partner more deeply with state agencies to achieve this goal. Although there have been some important strides in the policy arena to help facilitate groundwater recharge over the past several years, the ability to physically divert and recharge groundwater is very limited. As an example, this past March was one of the wettest periods in the Sacramento Valley, as shown in the aerial view shown below. Yet, during this time, when the entire Sacramento Valley had water on the landscape, certain recharge projects could not divert water because of very limiting conditions in their permits. How was this possible? As a result, a more concerted effort is needed for local agencies to maximize the opportunities to recharge groundwater during these types of years to support our aquifer systems.
- Floodplain reactivation. Federal and State of California government agencies overseeing water, agriculture, fish and wildlife, public lands and flood control recently came together to enhance and scale up landscape-scale, multi-beneficial floodplain water projects in the Sacramento River Basin. The agreement represents a growing effort by public and private stakeholders in creating long-term, sustainable solutions to protect and benefit people, fish, birds, and wildlife. Through reactivating our historic floodplains with straightforward permitting processes and an increase in funding, we can work toward floodplain activation goals that will modernize our flood system to meet various demands on our water resources.
- Advancing Sites Reservoir as new backbone infrastructure. Sites Reservoir is an environmentally beneficial, off-river reservoir that will capture excess water from major storms and save it for drier periods, helping California's farms, businesses, cities, and refuges continue to supply reliable water when other sources are low. When operated in coordination with other Northern California reservoirs such as Shasta, Oroville, and Folsom, which function as the backbone to both the Central Valley Project and the State Water Project, Sites Reservoir will greatly increase flexibility, reliability, and resiliency of statewide water supplies to better prepare for our next dry year. Sites Reservoir has amazing momentum as described in [Sites Reservoir a Once-In-A-Generation Opportunity](#).
- Utilize advanced forecasting tools. California's investments in forecasting and emergency preparedness have paid off during storm events the past several years and the state is incorporating lessons learned to advance the science and technology that will be critical to managing water in the coming years. DWR and Reclamation will utilize the most advanced forecasting tools working with local water agencies and other partners like NOAA, Scripps, and others to prepare for the year ahead.

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II. Water Resource Managers at Work

We are also blessed in California to have many of the best water resources managers in the world. They devote their lives to understanding and continually learning about this dynamic, as we know that every water year is different and serving water for multiple benefits is hard work that calls upon the expertise of every discipline surrounding water. We should all take the time to thank the water resources managers operating our complex systems as they prepare and toggle between wet and dry years and manage through the various tradeoffs that inevitably stare at each and every water management decision in California. As the new water year emerges and the policy discourse continues to better prepare for both wet and dry years, we should look at the issues through the lens of a water resources manager and focus on improving the various tools that water resources managers use and have available to manage our precious water supplies for multiple benefits. This will help our great state through both wet and dry years.

We live in a special place where our water management must evolve in tandem and in sync with both the needs of California and our climate. Water supports our most basic needs—drinking water and sanitation, nutrition, and energy; as well the important values society has for fish and wildlife and recreation.

As we look to the future, our current population of 40 million will grow to 50 million by 2050; we are blessed with the most abundant agricultural bounty in the world; we are surrounded by a stunning landscape and related natural infrastructure; California is the 5th largest economy in the world; and people pursue endless recreational opportunities surrounding water in every part of the state. Water is essential for all these special features that define California. A strategic approach that recognizes this scenario and embraces California's unique values in water is needed for this great state to continue to protect and enhance our communities, economy, and environment.

SECP Self-Certification Portal OPEN for the Month of February, 2025 ONLY

The Sediment and Erosion Control Plan (SECP) Grower Self-Certification Training will be available from **February 1, 2025 to February 28, 2025.**

The Training Portal is designed for growers who are required to prepare a certified SECP as part of their membership in the Irrigated Lands Regulatory Program. If you are required to prepare an SECP, becoming self-certified is one option. Your Subwatershed will let you know if this requirement applies to you.

A link to the training can be found at <https://www.svwqc.org/outreach-and-education/>



Coalition Member Information Hub



DECEMBER 31, 2024 DEADLINES

1) RENEWAL OF INMP SELF-CERTIFICATION STATUS

Growers who completed the INMP Grower Self-Certification Training **between July 1, 2021 and December 31, 2021** have a **deadline of December 31, 2024**, to complete the required three continuing education units (CEUs) to renew their eligibility status. Growers who fail to obtain the three CEUs will have their eligibility expire and must retake the original training and exam (which is now available online). *Reminder: To renew eligibility, all growers must complete three hours of CEUs prior to the expiration date listed in their letter of eligibility. While CDFA attempts to track CEUs, it is the responsibility of the grower to maintain CEU certificates with Coalition membership records.*

If you have any questions regarding your eligibility or CEU status, email FREP@cdfa.ca.gov. CEU courses can be found at https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/is/ffldrs/frep/continuing_education.html

2) SAMPLING OF ACTIVE ON-FARM DRINKING WATER WELL FOR 2024

The deadline to complete your 2024 sampling event for the On-Farm Drinking Water Well Program is **January 1, 2025**. This sampling requirement applies to well on **ENROLLED** parcels that are **ACTIVELY** used for drinking or cooking.

Members must continue to sample the well until your results meet one of the following:

- **Less than 8 mg/L** submitted for three consecutive years – sampling frequency reduced to once every five years.
- **Greater than 10 mg/L** – no further sampling required. Must fulfill the notification requirement.
- **Between 8-10 mg/L** – continue to sample annually.

If you believe you are exempt or have questions, contact the Central Valley Regional Water Board (916-464-4611 or irrLands@waterboards.ca.gov). You may also visit https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/centralvalley/water_issues/irrigated_lands/drinking_water/.

General Questions

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