

Ensuring Access to Safe Drinking Water For All California Communities

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ll Californians have a right to safe, clean, affordable and accessible water under the “human right to water” established in state law in 2012. In recent years the

State has made considerable progress toward addressing areas that lack safe drinking water beginning with the enactment of SB 200 and the creation of the Safe and Affordable Drinking Water Fund in 2019, funding for small water suppliers and rural communities under SB 552 in 2021, as well as a suite of on-line tools, including the Aquifer Risk Map for Domestic Wells and State Small Systems, the Public Water System Risk Assessment Map, and Drinking Water Systems Violations Map. These tools provide both a policy framework and significant financial resources to support activities that are otherwise cost prohibitive for impacted communities. With these tools in place both state and local entities have the resources to help ensure that all California communities have access to water that meets the health-based standards of the state and federal Safe Drinking Water Acts.



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Providing clean, dependable water supplies to communities, agriculture, and industry while restoring and maintaining the health of our watersheds is both necessary and possible...”

Governor Gavin Newsom, Executive Order E-10-19 (April 2019)



Leaders in the Sacramento Valley are committed to advancing ridgetop to river mouth water management, with a comprehensive approach to expand and ensure access to safe drinking water.

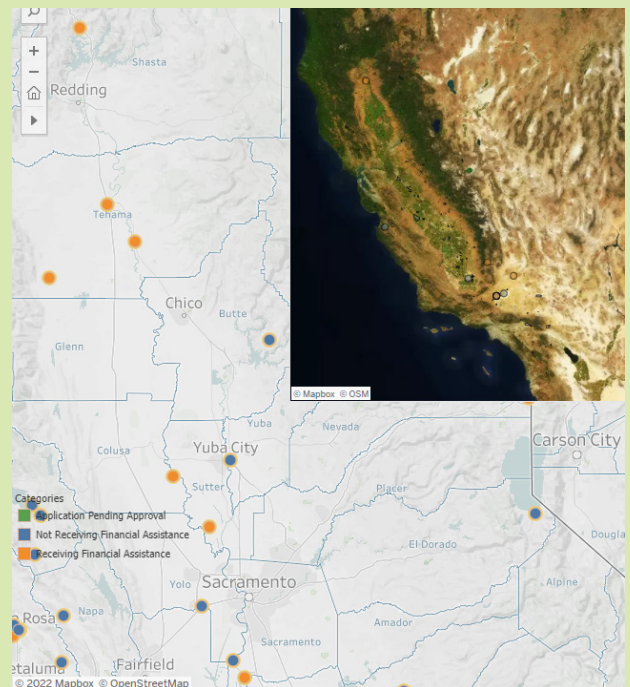


As Governor Newsom has emphasized, solving this problem will “demand political will from each and every one of us.” The Northern California Water Association’s (NCWA) approach consists of a broad suite of actions that provide solutions for the various technical, managerial, and financial challenges that local communities face in serving safe and reliable drinking water in the Sacramento Valley and other parts of the state.

Elements of this comprehensive approach include:

Addressing Specific Community Needs through Local & State Partnerships and the North State Drinking Water Solutions Network

NCWA, through its Board of Directors representing local water agencies, counties and rural communities, is committed to continued work within the Sacramento Valley to help ensure that water systems currently out of compliance can make progress toward meeting all relevant state and federal standards. NCWA has convened the North State Drinking Water Solutions Network (Network) to serve as a forum for all interested parties to share information and coordinate efforts related to ensuring that all communities in the Sacramento River Basin have access to safe drinking water. Successful implementation of sustainable drinking water solutions for communities requires utilization of both the policy tools and financial resources



Northern California water systems listed as Failing, At-Risk or Potentially At-Risk

[California Water Boards](#), March 2022

available to state agencies as well as the knowledge and expertise of local communities and water managers. By emphasizing partnerships with local agencies and administrators, the state will be best positioned to identify and help implement sustainable, locally-appropriate solutions.

With the Network's sustained focus on entities that are in violation of one or more primary drinking water standards, the number of water systems listed by the State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board) as out of compliance and needing funding in the Sacramento Valley has been significantly reduced in the past several years. These efforts to return water systems to compliance through local actions under new and existing state programs will continue with a goal to have no communities on the list within the next several years.

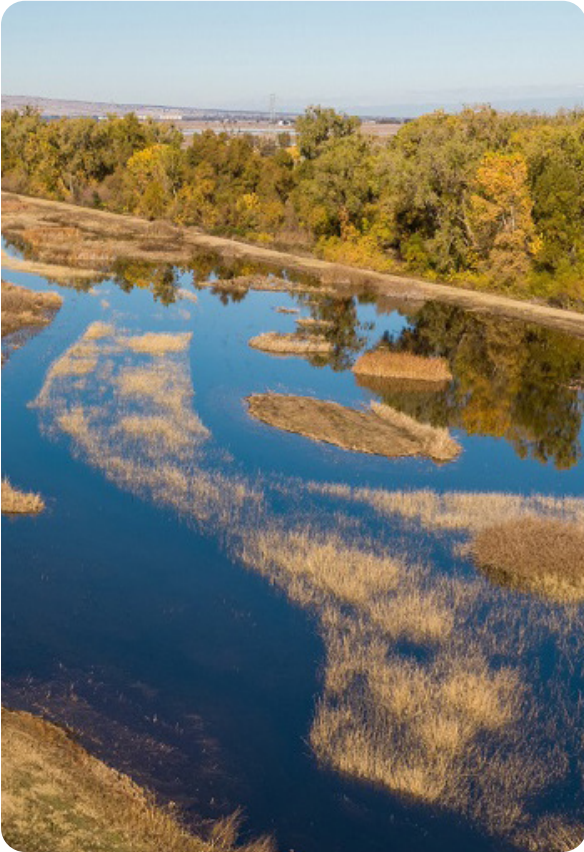
Protecting Water Quality through Existing Regulatory Programs

The Sacramento Valley, through its water quality coalitions, has been implementing waste discharge requirements through the Irrigated Lands Regulatory Program and Basin Plan Amendment with a goal of [Ensuring High Quality Water in the Sacramento River Basin for Communities, Ecosystems, and Farms](#). New elements, such as on-farm drinking water well testing and development of Groundwater Quality Protection Targets, will help advance the understanding of where to prioritize actions. These groundwater quality elements and others have and will continue to improve water quality in the region, including to help ensure that safe and clean water is fully protected in the future. More details are available from the [Sacramento Valley Water Quality Coalition](#) and the [California Rice Commission](#).



Supporting Successful Implementation of SB 200 and the Safe and Affordable Drinking Water Fund

Governor Newsom in July 2019 signed SB 200 (Monning) to establish a "Safe and Affordable Drinking Water Fund" and secure a long-term funding source that dedicates nearly \$1.5 billion in combined general and greenhouse gas reduction fund dollars to address the lack of safe drinking water in some communities across the state. SB 200 also establishes a policy framework to ensure these funds can



be efficiently allocated toward solving safe drinking water issues, including authorization for the State Water Board to appoint willing local agencies and others as administrators to provide administrative, technical, operational, legal, or managerial services when an existing water system is unable to discharge those functions.

Under SB 200, funding in the Safe and Affordable Drinking Water Fund has been available to the State Water Board for allocation as local assistance, grants, and contracts for purposes including water system operations and maintenance costs, consolidation costs, replacement water, and the provision of administrative and managerial services for the purpose of advancing long-term system sustainability. The State Water Board develops an annual Fund Expenditure Plan to identify public water systems, community water systems, and state small water systems that fail, or are at risk of failing, to provide safe drinking water, and to determine the amount and type of funding necessary to address these failures.

Implementation of this program will also be guided by SB 200's "high-risk area" mapping requirements and the State Water Board's ongoing safe drinking water needs analysis. Successful implementation of the program will require the input and expertise of local and regional partners. NCWA and a broad group of water, agriculture, local government, environmental justice and community organizations are all committed to work together to support successful implementation of SB 200 in both the Sacramento Valley, as described above, as well as other parts of the state with impacted communities.

NCWA and coalition partners will also continue to advocate for the development and deployment of additional funding as needed to ensure access to safe drinking water in all communities.

Improving Access to Surface Water

For many communities, surface water provides an essential source of high-quality water supply, particularly in areas where groundwater resources are unreliable or of poor quality. In the Sacramento Valley, a number of communities have expanded their access to surface water as part of programs to provide better quality water to their residents. Preserving and enhancing the ability of communities of all sizes across



the state to access surface water is key to expanding access to safe drinking water. NCWA will continue to aggressively protect surface water supplies for local communities and we encourage regulatory agencies, such as the State Water Board, to recognize this important dynamic and help enhance local communities' access to surface water supplies through their various plans and authorities.

Advancing Innovative New Policies that Empower Effective Local Agencies

Effective local agencies are key to the development and implementation of sustainable drinking water solutions. California can make additional progress by empowering effective local agencies in the areas of the state that need assistance. Local agencies in several parts of Northern California continue efforts to consolidate water systems to provide more effective delivery of water through larger economies of scale, expanded ratepayer bases, operational efficiencies, and enhanced funding opportunities. In the past several years, new laws—including SB 88 (2015), AB 2501 (2018), and SB 200 (2019)—have also enhanced the state's authority to mandate the consolidation of systems serving disadvantaged communities that consistently fail to provide access to safe drinking water into adjacent water systems. The appropriate use of this authority can help deliver drinking water solutions to some impacted communities.



Through all of our members' efforts to manage water from [ridgetop to river mouth](#) for [multiple beneficial uses](#)—including water for cities and rural communities, farms, fish, birds, and recreation—NCWA has found that locally-developed collaborative solutions provide the most successful path to addressing water management challenges.

NCWA will continue to support the development and implementation of a comprehensive policy approach to enable continued progress toward ensuring that all communities have access to safe drinking water.

As we move forward, we would welcome any thoughts, suggestions or ideas that will help advance these important efforts to ensure access to safe drinking water for all communities. Please provide your thoughts to bruceh@norcalwater.org.



NCWA
Northern California Water Association