



Moving Forward to Improve Access to Safe Drinking Water

All Californians deserve safe drinking water and there should be no higher priority in California water policy than addressing the lack of reliable safe drinking water in some communities across the state. While progress has been made toward addressing this issue, there is a strong need and opportunity to further expand all Californians' access to drinking water that meets all relevant state and federal standards.

Leaders in the Sacramento Valley are fully committed to advancing a comprehensive approach to help ensure that all Californians have access to safe drinking water. This comprehensive approach should consist of a broad suite of actions that includes:



- **Innovative New Policies that Empower Effective Local Agencies.** We can make significant progress toward addressing this important health and safety problem by empowering local agencies that can more effectively supply clean and safe drinking water to their communities. In 2018, the Legislature approved AB 2050 (Caballero), which is one example of such a policy. AB 2050 would have created an innovative new option for small water system governance by enabling noncompliant drinking water systems to come together and consolidate within a larger “Small System Water Authority.” Under a responsible water authority, these water systems would benefit from larger economies of scale, expanded ratepayer bases, operational efficiencies, and enhanced funding opportunities. Approved by the Legislature in August 2018, AB 2050 was ultimately vetoed by the Governor.

Through all of our efforts to manage water in the Sacramento Valley for [multiple beneficial uses](#)—including water for cities and rural communities, farms, fish, birds, and recreation—we have found that locally-developed collaborative solutions provide the most successful path to addressing water management challenges. Consistent with this experience, policy approaches like AB 2050 can empower local entities to develop and implement solutions that are specifically tailored to their local situations and needs. We recently joined with water agencies throughout California to provide our perspective on the importance of empowering local agencies—[“A sensible way to keep struggling water systems afloat in California.”](#)

- **Targeted Funding to Address Needs Statewide.** California voters recently approved Proposition 68, which includes \$250 million for safe drinking water, including \$30 million for regional projects in the San Joaquin Valley. [Proposition 3](#), which will be considered by voters in November 2018, contains an additional \$500 million for safe drinking water, including public water system infrastructure improvements. Proposition 3 also includes significant funding for sustainable groundwater management and other designated funds for disadvantaged communities that will assist in the provision of safe drinking water.

This combined \$750 million in bond funding is a good foundation to begin addressing the remaining lack of safe drinking water in some communities. NCWA also supported the \$23.5 million in General Fund include in the 2018-19 State Budget for key safe drinking water actions over the next year, including \$3 million for a statewide needs' assessment and an additional \$6.8 million for the SWRCB's "Safe Drinking Water for Schools" grant program. NCWA and water resources managers in the Sacramento Valley have and will continue to actively support these measures.

- **Working Constructively to Improve Rural Water Quality.** Several agricultural organizations have worked with other partners to develop constructive provisions related to agricultural funding and related liability protections to address specific issues associated with providing safe drinking water in rural communities, including nitrate contamination. During the 2017-18 legislative session, the proposed "Safe and Affordable Drinking Water Act" (included in SB 623 (Monning) and several successor measures) included these important provisions. Importantly, the implementation of these provisions is not dependent upon a new tax or fee that would be assessed on water suppliers and their customers.
- **Implementation of New and Established Regulatory Programs.** The Sacramento Valley, through its water quality coalitions, has been implementing waste discharge requirements as part of the Irrigated Lands Regulatory Program and Basin Plan Amendment. These programs have and will continue to [improve water quality in the region](#). Moreover, these programs and others will also help implement the state's antidegradation policy to ensure that safe and clean water is fully protected in the Sacramento Valley in the future.

In the past several years, two new laws—SB 88 (2015) and AB 2501 (2018)—have also expanded the state's authority to mandate the consolidation of disadvantaged communities that lack access to safe drinking water into adjacent water system. The appropriate use of this authority can help deliver sustainable drinking water solutions to some impacted communities.

- **Addressing Specific Community Needs through Local Efforts.** NCWA, through its Board of Directors representing local water agencies and counties, is committed to work within the Sacramento Valley to help ensure that entities currently not in compliance can make progress toward meeting all relevant state and federal safe drinking water standards. The focus is on entities currently in violation of one or more federal/state primary drinking water standards where an enforcement action has been taken. This list has been significantly reduced in the Sacramento Valley this past year as a result of local actions under existing state programs. These efforts will continue. Deploying the additional resources in the 2018-19 State Budget for safe drinking water in schools is a key opportunity for the coming year.



In 2018, NCWA joined a broad statewide [coalition](#) united in its position that a new water tax or fee paid by water systems and their customers is not necessary to ensure access to safe drinking water in California. In fact, previously proposed water taxes and fees have proven very divisive and can stifle the development and implementation of policies that are needed to move toward ensuring that all Californians have access to safe drinking water. A comprehensive approach that empowers effective local agencies, targets funding to address specific needs, and emphasizes collaborative locally-appropriate solutions, will better enable continued progress toward ensuring that all Californians have access to safe drinking water.

As we move forward to improve access to safe drinking water in the Sacramento Valley, we would welcome any thoughts, suggestions or ideas that will help advance these important efforts. Please provide your thoughts to info@norcalwater.org.