Association of California Water Agencies
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Investing in Environmental and Economic **Sustainability**

The Association of California Water Agencies (ACWA) has formally adopted policy principles embracing environmental and economic sustainability as co-equal priorities for water management in California.

The principles, adopted by ACWA's Board of Directors in November 2008, express strong support for policies that promote significant improvements in both water supply reliability and ecosystem health. The principles are intended to expand on ACWA's 2005 water policy document, "No Time to Waste: A Blueprint for California Water" and guide the association as California grapples with numerous water supply challenges and the decline of aquatic species and habitats.

A key theme of the principles is that California's aquatic environment and its water supply system are on an unsustainable path today, and it is imperative that we change course for both the environment and the economy of California.

The principles note that sustainability can be achieved only through comprehensive solutions that include conveyance improvements in the Delta and elsewhere, additional surface and groundwater storage, substantial investments in water use efficiency and local resources, and investments in habitat and actions that address all significant environmental stressors.

California's physical water delivery system is a tribute to the far-sightedness and big thinking of previous generations. Developed largely in the mid-20th century, the system is unequaled anywhere on the planet. The system served California well during the last half of the 20th century, but today it is in crisis. The crisis stems not from any shortcomings of the engineers and planners who designed it, but from a fundamental change in society's environmental values and our inability to respond to those changing values with the physical system we have today.

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In the 1950s, the natural resource policy that governed California and the nation was based on the concept of extraction. The environment was valued — from a public policy standpoint at least — only to the extent that resources could be extracted for economic gain. Today, of course, that notion has been replaced by a dramatically different natural resource policy informed by new environmental sensibilities and by legislation such as the Endangered Species Act, the Clean Water Act, and protections for wild and scenic rivers.

It is not surprising that a system conceived and constructed under an extraction policy would face significant challenges operating under new rules that emphasize environmental restoration and sustainability. During the past quarter century, water managers have invested heavily to accommodate and address environmental concerns. We have built fish screens, modified and even removed dams to improve fish passage, and added a temperature control device on Shasta Dam to better manage the system for environmental values. We have dedicated substantial amounts of water to fishery management, and invested in a whole new set of water supply options, from widespread conservation and water recycling and other local resource investments to the development of water markets.

But as recent court decisions underscore, the water system we manage today continues to be in conflict with society's environmental objectives and policies. Simply put, our physical system is unable to meet the needs of the aquatic environment while still meeting the economy's needs for water. And that is not acceptable.

ACWA believes the chief statewide policy question facing water managers today is this: How can we invest in and modernize the system we have inherited from previous generations so that system can provide both a sustainable environment and economy for the future?

To guide ACWA staff in the future as the state navigates these uncharted waters, the Board has adapted principles that do the following:

- Identify a healthy aquatic ecosystem and a reliable water supply as the co-equal goals for sustainable water management in California.
- Specify that sustainability can only be achieved through comprehensive solutions that include substantial investments in ecosystem enhancement and water supply infrastructure.
- Recognize that investing in an environmentally sustainable water system serves the economic interests of the state.
- Emphasize the importance of providing high quality, reliable water supplies to promote a strong agricultural and urban economy and public health.
- Call for the water community to support substantial investments in conveyance, storage, and other improvements, recognizing that the investment criteria for infrastructure that can achieve both economic and environmental sustainability will be very different from the investment criteria of the past century.

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