

Association  
of California  
Water Agencies

# NO TIME TO WASTE

A Blueprint for California Water



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Water Agencies  
Since 1910  
Leadership  
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Information

EXECUTIVE  
SUMMARY



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**ACWA's mission** is to assist its members in promoting the development, management and reasonable beneficial use of good quality water at the lowest practical cost in an environmentally balanced manner.

**May 2005**

**Association of California  
Water Agencies**

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Executive Director  
Steve Hall

*ACWA is a statewide non-profit association whose 440 public agency members are responsible for about 90% of the water deliveries in California.*

## The Association of California Water Agencies (ACWA) set out to develop this Blueprint with three purposes in mind.

The first was to bring together the diverse voices within the water community to identify our biggest challenges and agree on actions needed to resolve them. The second was to collectively put together a forward-looking action plan for meeting California's future water needs. The third was to create a policy-oriented document that would encourage leaders at the state and federal level to re-engage in water issues and also provide a roadmap for investing in our water future.

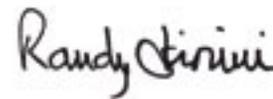
We believe this Blueprint achieves those goals. As the local public agencies responsible for delivering water to Californians throughout the state, ACWA's 440-plus members have a unique perspective on our state's changing water needs and how best to address them. The recommendations set forth in this document reflect the on-the-ground experiences and insight of individual water agencies – each with its own view of the state of our water resources, local priorities and future demands.

As work progressed on our Blueprint, developments inside and outside the state Capitol made it clear our effort was well timed. Frank discussions are under way about the need for all types of infrastructure including water facilities. The debate is raising very real policy issues that must be addressed openly and earnestly to ensure our water supply system remains viable for future generations.

Our hope is that the ACWA Blueprint will help frame the discussion and decision-making required to provide all Californians with adequate, reliable supplies of high quality water, a healthy environment and a strong economy for decades to come.



E.G. "Jerry" Gladbach  
ACWA President



Randy Fiorini  
ACWA Vice President

*Vision without action is merely a dream.  
Action without vision just passes time.  
Vision with action can change the world.*

– Joel A. Barker

Author, Teacher, Management/Leadership Expert

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**California has been well served** by its water supply system, but it has been more than 30 years since improvements were made on the scale required to keep pace with the state's growing population and changing water needs.



That dynamic must end. Without significant new investments in our statewide infrastructure starting now, it will be increasingly difficult and expensive for California to support both a healthy environment and a strong economy in future years.

ACWA has called together local water leaders from throughout the state to craft an action plan for meeting California's diverse water supply needs in the coming decades. This Blueprint is the result of that effort. It includes a list of actions, summarized below, that collectively will take us a long way toward meeting that goal.

California cannot just conserve its way or transfer its way or build its way to a secure water future. Indeed, it will take a diverse mix of programs and projects that incorporate infrastructure improvements, water use efficiency, water recycling, desalination, voluntary water transfers and a variety of other sound water management techniques to provide the level of flexibility and reliability required. ACWA's Blueprint is built on that mix of strategies, and draws on years of planning and study at the federal, state and local levels. It complements ongoing local initiatives and promotes regional solutions that will play an increasingly critical role in our future.

ACWA calls on policy leaders and lawmakers at all levels to embrace this Blueprint and begin taking action today to address California's water future.

## Summary of Action Plan

### **I Improve the existing Delta water conveyance system to increase flexibility and enhance water supply, water quality, levee stability and environmental protection in the near term.**



Aerial View of Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta.

The Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta is the single most important link in California's water supply system. Two of the state's largest water projects – the State Water Project (SWP) and federal Central Valley Project (CVP) – convey water through the Delta to more than 22 million Californians and 7 million acres of highly productive farmland. Improvements to the existing conveyance system are needed to increase flexibility and enhance water supply, water quality, levee stability and environmental protection in the near term.

A coordinated set of actions known as the Delta Improvements Package has been developed through the CALFED Bay-Delta Program to achieve those goals in a balanced manner. The package includes an expansion of permitted pumping capacity in the Delta to provide flexibility to move pumping from fish-sensitive, drier periods to less sensitive wetter periods. It also includes actions to protect levees, enhance ecosystem health and improve water quality for in-Delta water users as well as others who rely on the Delta for their water supply. ACWA recommends that state and federal agencies complete environmental reviews now under way, vigorously defend against litigation challenging the actions and implement the Delta Improvements Package in a timely way.

### **II Evaluate long-term threats to the Delta levee and conveyance system and pursue actions to reduce risks to the state's water supply and the environment.**

Beyond the immediate need for the improvements described above, the Delta faces threats to its long-term viability as a water supply source and as an ecosystem. Risks posed by levee instability, land subsidence, major flood events, rising sea levels and earthquakes together make the Delta increasingly vulnerable as a long-term water conveyance system and could imperil the water supply for much of the state. In addition to urging implementation of the Delta Improvements Package, ACWA strongly recommends that the Governor appoint a Blue Ribbon Commission to evaluate the Delta's long-term vulnerability and recommend actions by December 2006 to reduce risks to the state's water supply, agricultural resources and the environment. Our elected leaders and policy makers must begin addressing these risks now before a major disruption takes place and we have little choice but to act on an emergency basis.

### **III Ensure delivery of adequate Colorado River supplies for Southern California and defend California's rights on the Colorado River.**

Given the clear importance of a reliable Colorado River supply to California, ACWA recommends that state and federal agencies support actions to ensure long-term access to and efficient use of Colorado River supplies. Supporting these actions and defending California's rights on the Colorado River will provide stability to water systems throughout the state and reduce demands on the Delta.

### **IV Implement and fund the Sacramento Valley Water Management Program.**

The Sacramento Valley Water Management Program is a collaborative approach to meeting regional and statewide needs for water, environmental protection and water use efficiency. The program, which includes more than 50 projects encompassing groundwater management, water use efficiency measures, water transfers and other strategies, is one of the most positive developments in California water in recent decades. ACWA recommends that state and federal agencies provide support and funding for the program and streamline regulations as needed to allow key projects to move ahead.

### **V Develop additional groundwater and surface water storage, including proposed surface storage projects now under study if they are determined to be feasible.**

California must develop additional groundwater and surface water storage to add flexibility to our water system. Additional storage is needed to improve water quality at critical times, to meet real-time needs of fish and ecosystems, and to accommodate potential changes in California's climate that could significantly reduce the amount of water stored in the Sierra snow pack. ACWA strongly recommends that state and federal agencies complete feasibility studies now under way for several promising surface storage projects and move ahead with constructing those determined to be feasible. ACWA also recommends that the state partner with willing local and regional interests to develop local storage projects that allow groundwater and surface water to be used conjunctively.

Diamond Valley Reservoir, Metropolitan Water District of Southern California.



## **VI Support and fund local efforts to expand recycled water use and implement best management practices for urban and agricultural water use efficiency.**

The strides made by local agencies in water recycling and water use efficiency have been dramatic over the past two decades. Given the clear statewide interest in promoting these water management tools, ACWA recommends that the state and federal governments continue to support local options such as recycling and conservation through appropriate technical and financial assistance. The state also must reduce the regulatory and financial constraints that impede development of these projects.



## **VII Improve the quality of California's drinking water supplies to safeguard public health and enhance water quality for agriculture and the environment.**

Water quality is a critical issue for California. ACWA recommends that state and federal agencies work with local agencies to take a number of actions to improve water quality and protect public health. The actions include implementing the Delta Improvements Package, facilitating collaborative watershed-based management and pollution control programs, supporting programs designed to prevent groundwater contamination, and providing continued funding assistance for economically disadvantaged communities, especially in rural areas, to upgrade water treatment systems.

## **VIII Work with local agencies to overcome constraints to developing seawater and brackish groundwater desalination.**

Seawater and brackish groundwater desalination projects have the potential to play a critical role in the state's water supply mix. ACWA recommends that state and federal agencies work with local agencies to develop desalination by providing support and resources for needed research, streamlining and coordinating the approval process for projects, and exploring ways to allow desalination projects to take advantage of non-retail power rates.

## **IX Modernize the federal Endangered Species Act and other laws and regulations to allow water infrastructure projects, water supply and water quality activities to proceed while protecting species and habitats.**

Water agencies support the purposes of the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA) and other federal and state environmental statutes and regulations. These laws and regulations nonetheless must be modernized to achieve their intended environmental goals while at the same time reducing their burden on California's

water supplies and water supply reliability. ACWA recommends that the state support modernizing the federal ESA in a number of ways, including requiring greater precision in critical habitat designations and increasing habitat-focused species protection through more collaborative agreements with property owners and resource managers. ACWA also recommends modernizing provisions of the Clean Water Act dealing with wetlands protection and non-point pollutant discharges on a watershed basis.

## **X Expedite the approval process for voluntary water transfers.**

Voluntary water transfers and exchanges are a useful and well-accepted tool for meeting both short- and long-term water needs throughout the state. ACWA recommends that state and federal agencies expedite their approval processes for water transfers while protecting water rights, the environment and local economic interests. Expedited approvals are particularly important for annual transfers aimed at relieving drought and short-term water conditions.

## **XI Clarify and expand the state's role in flood control and promote multi-benefit flood control projects.**

A backlog of maintenance on levees, bypasses and channels and a recent court ruling expanding the state's liability for flood damage are creating an urgent need to re-examine and clarify the state's role in flood control. ACWA recommends that the Legislature consider measures to improve emergency response programs, require updated floodplain maps and provide better education on flood risks to the public and agencies responsible for land use decisions. ACWA also urges the state to provide necessary funding subventions to match local spending for flood control and to continue encouraging programs that integrate flood management strategies with environmental enhancements, water quality improvements, conjunctive use and water recycling.

Flooded structure resulting from the Jones Tract levee break, June 2004.



## XII Support integrated regional water management plans.

Integrated regional water management plans will play a critical part in meeting the state's water needs. ACWA recommends that the state support integrated regional plans by taking a number of actions, such as partnering with regions where requested to provide funding assistance and technical expertise and streamlining regulations and approval processes for strategies such as water transfers, water recycling and seawater and brackish groundwater desalination.

While the investments in infrastructure and programs outlined here and detailed in ACWA's Blueprint will come at a cost, our member agencies are prepared to pay their fair share for benefits received because they recognize that failure to make those investments will be costlier still. ACWA strongly recommends that the Governor, California Legislature, Congress and other state and federal officials join with local agencies now in acting on this Blueprint. Californians and their communities, farms and environment deserve nothing less.



North Richmond Water Reclamation Plant, East Bay Municipal Utility District.

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Mission Springs Water District  
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