INVESTMENTS IN RELIABILITY

In response to California’s last severe drought (2012-’16), the state Legislature enacted the comprehensive framework “Making Conservation a California Way of Life.” The framework established long-term requirements in water use efficiency and drought planning to adapt to longer and more intense droughts caused by climate change.

In addition to the new framework, local water agencies, cities and other water suppliers continue to invest in water supply projects that will help meet the water needs of California’s communities, economy and the environment. Here are just a few examples:

- Soquel Creek Water District is constructing the innovative Pure Water Soquel Project that will use advanced-treated recycled water from Santa Cruz to replenish the critically overdrafted Santa Cruz Mid-County Groundwater Basin. This project aims to help bring the basin back to sustainability, provide a drought-proof water supply for the community and provide a barrier against seawater intrusion.

- Contra Costa Water District’s (CCWD) proposed Los Vaqueros Reservoir Expansion Project would enlarge the current reservoir from 160,000 acre-feet to 275,000 acre-feet. This surface storage project would increase water supply during dry periods, add emergency water supply storage for Bay Area agencies, increase environmental water supply and improve the quality of water delivered to municipal and industrial water treatment facilities. The project received Proposition 1 funding in 2018.

- The Orange County Water District’s Groundwater Replenishment System takes highly treated wastewater that would have previously been discharged into the Pacific Ocean and purifies it using a three-step advanced treatment process to provide high-quality drinking water to the community.

- The Kaweah Delta Water Conservation District’s Packwood Creek Water Conservation Project benefits local water supplies by utilizing five automated check structures to maintain high water levels and maximize storage and recharge capabilities with the capacity to recharge 1,465 acre-feet per year and better manage 29,360 acre-feet per year.

- The East County Advanced Water Purification Project, a collaborative partnership between several entities in San Diego County, will treat and purify local recycled water to create a new, reliable and drought-proof drinking water supply. The project is under construction and is expected to eventually produce up to 30% of East San Diego County’s drinking water supply.

- The City of Santa Barbara’s Charles E. Meyer Desalination Plant uses state-of-the-art technology and design elements to provide a critical water supply to the city. The plant was re-commissioned and operational in 2017 and now produces three million gallons of drinking water per day. The new design uses 40% less energy than the original design and has ocean intake pumps equipped with wedge wire screens that have one-millimeter openings to minimize marine life entrapment.
HOW CALIFORNIANS CAN HELP

While water agencies work to increase water supplies, Californians can help reduce water demand. Absent the statewide mandatory conservation requirements implemented during the last drought, local water agencies’ responses will vary depending on local water supply conditions. In areas where a local water shortage condition exists, agencies might mandate actions to reduce demand, while other areas focus on voluntary efforts to promote the efficient use of water. Wherever you live, Californians can take the following steps to help embrace the water-efficient California Way of Life.

- **Install efficient appliances.** Replace older appliances with water efficient products, including toilets, washing machines and showerheads. High-efficiency toilets, for example, save approximately 19 gallons per person each day.

- **Irrigate without waste.** Adjust your sprinkler times based on the climate. Installing a drip irrigation system and smart controller can help make sure you aren’t wasting water on landscaping that doesn’t need it.

- **Use Low Water Using and Drought-Tolerant Plants.** Local water districts and gardening resources can often provide seasonal irrigation guidelines and suggest plants for designing a water-efficient landscaping.

- **Fix leaks.** Leaks occur both inside the home and with your outdoor irrigation system. Depending on the location and size of the leak, you could be wasting hundreds of gallons of water each day.

- **Save money.** Many water agencies, cities and other entities offer rebate or discount programs to help you accomplish the tips on this list. Research opportunities in your area.

AGRICULTURE’S INVESTMENT

- Farmers across the state are constantly innovating, allowing them to conserve more water, use resources more efficiently, and continue supplying the healthy, safe, food supply Californians count on. For example, new technology, such as remote sensors and satellite imaging, allows farmers to monitor soil moisture and only use water where and when it’s needed.

- Farmers have invested heavily in more efficient irrigation systems, including expanded use of drip, micro-sprinkler and subsurface irrigation. California farmers have installed 69% of the country’s micro-irrigation.

STATE AND FEDERAL INVESTMENTS

California’s Proposition 1 (2014) dedicated $2.7 billion for investments in water storage projects, and the California Water Commission continues to administer funding for storage projects that collectively would boost California’s water storage capacity by an estimated 4.3 million acre-feet.

ACWA has been advocating on behalf of local water agencies at both the state and federal levels for increased funding for infrastructure and water-related climate resilience projects.

At the state level, ACWA has been supporting a number of different efforts to place a climate resilience bond on a statewide ballot. With input from member agencies, ACWA is working to ensure a bond includes funding for much-needed water-related climate resilience projects that will help provide a reliable water supply during drought and flood conditions.

Additionally, ACWA belongs to a national coalition of more than 200 agricultural organizations working alongside urban and rural water districts that are urging President Joe Biden and Congressional leadership to make further investments into a diversified water management portfolio, one that can keep water flowing while enhancing water supply and quality for both urban and environmental uses.

In response to new regulations approved during the last drought, the state and water suppliers are in the process of calculating urban retail water suppliers’ water use objectives. These objectives will be placed only on water suppliers (not individual customers) and be based on: efficiency standards for indoor water use, outdoor water use, water loss, variances for unique local circumstances, and a bonus for recycled water.