



A G E N D A Water Conference

Hydro-Economics: The Rising Costs and Stakes of California Water

December 12-13, 2024
[Parker Hotel, Palm Springs](#)

California is diving headfirst into a world of affordability challenges as we strive for a sustainable, comprehensive water system. While many of the investments in infrastructure, supply diversity, conservation, and water quality make sense individually, collectively they represent a rising tide of costs that threaten to overwhelm our existing funding mechanisms.

Our 2024 Water Conference will explore the very real tradeoffs and costs of our water ambitions as we consider the right combination of necessary targets and practical solutions to upgrade, manage, and sustain a resilient and affordable water system for the decades to come.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 12

Ballroom

11:30 – 12:45pm	Arrival – Check-In and Lunch – Ballroom Lawn
12:45 – 1:00pm	Welcome – Conference Overview and Roundtable Introductions

Preview of conference topics, speakers, and goals

Jay Hansen, President & CEO, CFEE

1:00 – 2:15pm	<u>Session 1</u> Amid the Shifting Currents...What's Our Policy Outlook?
---------------	---

With the Newsom Administration looking to finish strong while the Legislature welcomes dozens of fresh faces, California water policy is entering a unique period as established and emerging priorities converge. Add in a new administration in Washington D.C. and the next few years seem poised to keep us busy. What can we expect?

- What key progress has the Newsom Administration made since 2018?
- As the Administration wraps up its second term, what are the top priorities in the final two years?
- With the 23-24 Legislative session behind us, what was accomplished? What is left undone that may come back in the new session?
- With so many new legislators, how will that affect the Legislature's ability to take on major water policy issues?
- What do the early tea leaves portend for the post-Biden era?

Wade Crowfoot, Secretary, California Natural Resources Agency

Diane Papan, Chair, Assembly Committee on Water, Parks and Wildlife

Ernest Conant, Counsel, Downey Brand and Former Regional Director, Mid-Pacific Region, Bureau of Reclamation

2:15 – 2:30pm	Break
---------------	-------

2:30 – 4:00pm

Session 2**Where Does Affordability Fit In? A Closer Look at Tradeoffs When Charting California's Water Future**

When making decisions about California's water future, policymakers and water managers are confronted with very real tradeoffs between affordability, social and environmental benefits, supply reliability, water quality, and speed of project delivery. What are some of these tradeoffs, and how can we smartly balance these sometimes competing considerations to ensure affordability remains a top priority?

- What are some of the key tradeoffs for different types of water supplies, including ground, surface, reused and desalinated water? Which projects are better for the environment? Which ones are more cost-effective?
- As the state works to increase water quality standards, how does that affect water treatment costs as well as liability concerns? On the other hand, how will Californians benefit from higher water quality standards?
- How can water agencies finance infrastructure maintenance and improvements while simultaneously fulfilling new regulations that come with new costs?
- Might a re-examination of the limits of Prop. 218 (1996) and Prop. 26 (2010) be warranted by the legislature?
- As costs continue to rise, what programs are in place to help low-income households pay their bills? Are they sufficient, or do we need additional financial assistance options?
- How are investor-owned utilities addressing cost concerns and addressing complex tradeoffs between different investment opportunities?
- For initiatives and projects with a desired benefit but a high price tag, what creative financing mechanisms can manage costs? How might public-private partnerships be a useful tool? Are there drawbacks to having greater private sector involvement for such a critical resource?
- How can legislators and regulators continue to support water agencies as they make system upgrades, which are often directed by the Legislature and the Administration?

Buzz Thompson, Professor, Stanford Law School, & Senior Fellow, Stanford Woods Institute for the Environment

Evan Jacobs, Vice President, Business Development, Communications & External Affairs, California and Hawaii American Water

Heather Dyer, CEO/General Manager, San Bernardino Valley Municipal Water District

Abraham Mendoza, Policy Manager, Community Water Center

4:00 – 4:15pm	Break
4:15 – 5:30pm	Session 3 Thirsty Yet Sustainable Industries: Waterwise & Climate-Forward Practices in Action

Water is a key input for many of the industrial activities that sustain our economy. As businesses confront water scarcity and rising costs, how are they innovating to make every drop count? And how can California policymakers ensure water challenges are not yet another excuse for businesses to leave the state or avoid setting up shop in the first place?

- How are industries finding new ways to sustainably manage water in their operations?
- Are businesses concerned about their long-term presence in California as it relates to water availability and costs?
- With California becoming a “Hydrogen Hub” and earning the \$1.2 billion federal funding package that comes with it, how can California support water-intensive electrolysis projects without undermining sustainability goals?
- What about carbon-smart ways to treat water? What are the solutions are being developed here in California to reduce the carbon footprint of water management activities?

Sam Thompson, Director of Quality and Innovation, Lagunitas

Angel S. Fernández-Bou, President of the Board, SocioEnvironmental and Education Network (SEEN)

Ethan Cohen-Cole, CEO, Capture6

5:30pm	Reception & Dinner – Palm Court
--------	---------------------------------

The reception will begin at 5:30pm in the Palm Court. A buffet dinner will follow.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 13**Ballroom**

7:30 – 8:45am	Breakfast – Ballroom Foyer
8:45 – 10:15am	<u>Session 4</u> SGMA Turns 10 Years Old – What’s the State of Groundwater Management?

In 2014, California passed the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA), a breakthrough law that sought to regulate groundwater statewide for the first time ever. A decade later, the story of SGMA continues to unfold as communities diligently chart the future of aquifer management. How is it going, and what more is to be done?

- Why is it so important to regulate groundwater basins?
- What key milestones have been reached since SGMA passage?
- Has California yet seen an uptick in groundwater recharge capabilities and efforts?
- What costs are associated with SGMA implementation? How are Groundwater Sustainability Agencies (GSAs) financing current and future investments?
- What oversight powers does the state possess? How does the potential for regulatory or executive intervention affect planning efforts?
- How does SGMA inform other key decisions like land use conversion, climate resiliency, and affordability? What might be the impact on the types of crops that are grown in California?
- Beyond SGMA-regulated basins, what best practices are emerging for groundwater management that could be applied elsewhere?

Joaquin Esquivel, Chair, State Water Resources Control Board

Juliet Christian-Smith, Western States Regional Director, Union of Concerned Scientists

Allison Febbo, General Manager, Westlands Water District

Jim Houston, Founder, The Houston Consulting Group

10:15 – 10:30am	Break
------------------------	-------

10:30 – 12:00pm

Session 5**The Climate Readiness Plan – Preparing for Downpours, Droughts, and More**

Led at the state and local levels, California has a multi-pronged strategy to deliver a modern, climate-adapted water system. Our final panel will highlight several key opportunities to promote resiliency and consider what more policymakers can do to align our management practices and infrastructure to our changing climate.

- How are advancements in atmospheric science filling gaps on how to mitigate extreme weather events and manage our supply?
- What does it take to capture stormwater and treat it for both discharge and drinking? How much of what is captured ends up being potable?
- What about flood control investments? What did we learn about 2023's round of severe flooding, and what must we do now to prepare for the next deluge?
- How can water conservation support drought preparedness? What is the latest with the new "Conservation as a Way of Life" framework that will require reductions to indoor water usage?
- What types of climate-related projects will Prop. 4 fund? What timeline can we expect for disbursement?

Eric Guerra, Councilmember, City of Sacramento and Board Member, California Air Resources Board

Adam Ariki, Deputy Director, Los Angeles County Public Works

Liz Forsburg Pardi, California Policy Director, The Nature Conservancy

Dan Curtin, Director, California Conference of Carpenters

12:00pm

Closing Remarks and Adjournment