



CALIFORNIA FOUNDATION  
ON THE ENVIRONMENT  
AND THE ECONOMY

## DRAFT AGENDA CFEE Water Conference

### *Welcome to the Land of Extremes: Lessons for Living in a Wetter and Drier California*

December 7-8, 2023

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*After the California water pendulum swung a mighty arc this past winter, we were reminded once more that neither drought nor deluge solely lay claim to our landscape.*

*Rather, we live in the Land of Extremes where scarcity, abundance, and worsening climate impacts collectively stress our infrastructure, customs, communities, and patience.*

*As we size up El Niño in the short term and intensifying variability in the long, this conference will highlight opportunities to simultaneously plan for a wetter and a drier California while seeking the trifecta of water affordability, a healthy environment, and a secure food supply.*

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## THURSDAY, DECEMBER 7

11:30 – 12:45pm	Arrival – Check-In and Lunch
12:45 – 1:00pm	<b>Welcome – Conference Overview and Roundtable Introductions</b>

Preview of conference topics, speakers, and goals

**Jay Hansen**, President & CEO, CFEE

1:00 – 2:15pm	<b><u>Session 1</u></b> <b>Back to Basics – Getting Clarity on California’s Water System</b>
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California’s water system is governed by a hodgepodge of rules, municipalities, demands, and the vagaries of Mother Nature herself. Our opening panel will clarify the regulations, infrastructure, and interests that both enable and challenge the sustainable and equitable management of California water.

- From where does California get its water supplies? What storage facilities do we have?
- How is water moved throughout the state? Who is responsible for operating the infrastructure? Who is responsible for enforcing rules? And who makes them?
- Why do water sources and costs vary so much between different regions?
- What are the primary uses of California water?
- What rules determine how much water must flow for environmental purposes versus agricultural use or municipal consumption?
- What are the different types of water rights in California? How do these claims get adjudicated when there is less water than rights holders have claim to?

**Jay Ziegler**, Delta Water Master

**Kristin White**, Deputy Regional Director, US Bureau of Reclamation

2:15 – 2:30pm	Break
2:30 – 4:00pm	<b><u>Session 2</u></b> <b>From Bust to Boom! What Did We Learn? What Do We Do Now?</b>

In 2023, California largely burst through a multi-year drought with one of its wettest years in history. What did we learn from this historic water year? And what should we be doing NOW to gear up for the next major episode of downpours and droughts, which are always right around the corner?

- What did water management look like this past year as reservoirs filled up and groundwater recharge was prioritized?

- How effectively did we take advantage of excess supplies to recharge aquifers? What growing pains did we endure that could inform new regulations and infrastructure to sustainably manage groundwater?
- With El Niño primed to hit California this year, what does that mean for our water supply and preparedness for extreme weather? Are we ready for another big wet winter?
- As we enjoy the brief respite from severe drought, what work must be done in the meantime as supplies inevitably dwindle again?

**Karla Nemeth**, Director, California Department of Water Resources

**Adel Hagekhalil**, General Manager, Metropolitan Water District of Southern California

**Allison Febbo**, General Manager, Westlands Water District

**Amanda FencI**, Western States Senior Climate Scientist, Union of Concerned Scientists

4:00 – 4:15pm	Break
4:15 – 5:30pm	<b>Session 3</b> <b>Powering Progress: Harnessing the Energy-Water Nexus</b>

Though water and energy are often viewed and managed as separate issues, there is an important interplay between the two. The management of water accounts for 12 percent of the state’s total energy demand while the production of energy often requires the use of water. Harmonizing this nexus can unlock opportunities to advance state climate priorities, drive down costs, and better steward our resources.

- What are the most energy-intensive aspects of water management? How might alternative water supply projects like desalination, reuse, and stormwater capture increase energy demand?
- What projects are already tapping into the energy-water nexus? How can we replicate their successes across the state?
- As the electricity grid decarbonizes, how can changes to water management support its evolution? How can the water sector use less energy when energy demand is high? Can hydropower and water facilities be used when electricity supplies are stretched thin?
- What funding opportunities are available for projects that synchronize energy and water priorities?
- What is the role of the legislature in helping to manage energy and water more holistically?
- As water stops flowing to some farms, clean energy projects may be one use for vacant land – what does this conversion look like? Do we have a strategy for ensuring optimal outcomes for communities and state goals?

**Michelle Reimers**, General Manager, Turlock Irrigation District

**Gary Bradford**, Supervisor, Yuba County and Chairman, Yuba Water Agency

**Jon Reiter**, Founder and Principal, Cavalrei

6:30pm	Reception & Dinner
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## FRIDAY, DECEMBER 8

7:30 – 8:45am	Breakfast
8:45am – 10:15am	<b>Session 4</b> <b>Improving Water Management Through Better Data – Atmospheric Forecasting, Water Rights, and More</b>

While data has reshaped other aspects of our life, its application has been uneven in the world of water management. Yet there is an increasing recognition that better data about weather forecasting, surface and groundwater conditions, ecosystem health, and consumption can lead to water management tailored to a wetter and drier California. What data do we need to make better use of our water resources, and how can we put it to use?

- How is the state helping to coordinate the collection, sharing, and use of data to improve water management?
- How accurate is our climate forecasting? How can it be improved? What are we missing?
- What about more short term forecasting in the days ahead of a storm? How well are we leveraging data about atmospheric rivers to inform water storage, conveyance, aquifer recharge, and use? How can we further integrate real-time weather data into water management?
- What data do we need about surface flows, groundwater reserves, and ecosystem health to better divvy up water? What additional legislation might be needed to track and use this information?
- As the legislature mulls adjustments to California water rights, what do we know about who has claims to water and how much water they are actually using? What is needed to make changes to our water rights system, if any?
- What other information could help us make smarter decisions?

**Marty Ralph**, Director, Center for Western Weather and Water Extremes, UC San Diego Scripps Institution of Oceanography

**Robyn Grimm**, Director, Climate Resilient Water Systems, Environmental Defense Fund

**Steve Ritchie**, Assistant General Manager for Water Enterprise, San Francisco  
Public Utilities Commission

10:15 – 10:30am	Break
10:30 – 12:00pm	<b>Session 5</b> <b>Up, Up and Away...How Can We Reel in the Rising Price of Water?</b>

There's no escaping the looming affordability pinch coming to California. Water bills, which have been outpacing inflation for years, are slated for additional increases as water agencies upgrade outdated water systems to improve supply diversity, maintain reliability, enhance climate resiliency, and fulfill evolving state requirements. How can we address these necessary and rising costs recognizing some California households will simply be unable to afford the bill?

- How much does the average household pay for water in California? How do these costs vary between regions of the state?
- What are the different costs that go into sourcing, conveying, treating, and distributing water?
- What are the primary drivers of rising water costs?
- What is the "beneficiary pays" principal in the water world? What would it mean to broaden our interpretation of beneficiary?
- What percentage of water funding is currently coming from state taxpayers? Absent more public funding, how much are water bills projected to increase for ratepayers?
- How are water agencies planning to manage rising costs and protect consumers?
- If not all from rates, how else can California finance needed upgrades to infrastructure?
- If California passes another water bond, how do we ensure it is expended efficiently and wisely?

**Laurel Firestone**, Board Member, California, State Water Resources Control Board

**Tish Berge**, Deputy General Manager, San Diego County Water Authority

**Rami Kahlon**, Director of Regulatory Affairs, California Water Service

**Claire Collins**, Partner, Hanson Bridgett

12:00pm	<b>Closing Remarks and Adjournment</b>
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