



State Water Project Briefing: Operations Guided by Science

Introduction

The first [State Water Project](#) (SWP) briefing of 2026 will show how the [Department of Water Resources](#) (DWR) uses best science available to balance water supply needs and environmental protection when operating the SWP. It will also feature a presentation by the State Water Contractors (SWC), an association formed of 27 of the public water agencies who receive water from the SWP, on their science and policy agenda.

In 2024, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife issued DWR an Incidental Take Permit (ITP). The ITP uses best available science and adaptive management to balance water supply reliability with the protection of endangered fish species and allows for real-time decision making based on continued monitoring and scientific review. In 2025, DWR applied for, and was granted, an amendment to the ITP to allow for more flexibility in water operations. This flexibility supports more informed and responsive water operations and helps to optimize water supply when conditions allow.

DWR staff will share how adaptive management allowed DWR to capture approximately 15,000 additional acre-feet of water while still protecting fish during late December 2025 storms. DWR staff will also provide new information on fish protection projects and ongoing tidal habitat restoration projects. SWC staff will discuss how they are using science to identify opportunities to improve operations of the SWP.

Background

The SWP, constructed in the middle of the last century, consists of 36 water storage facilities and 700 miles of rivers, pipelines, and canals, and supplies water to 27 million people and irrigates 750,000 acres of farmland. The system includes 21 pumping plants, powered by a system of power-generation and power-recovery plants. The SWP also operates the world's tallest water lift – the Edmonston Pumping Plant – which pumps water more than 1,900 feet up and over the Tehachapi Mountains into Southern California.

DWR manages the SWP to ensure adequate water supplies are available under various hydrologic and legal conditions while maintaining operational flexibility. DWR also develops, plans and implements the operation of the SWP in coordination with environmental and regulatory agencies to meet fish, water, and environmental requirements for the Feather River and Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta.

Goal Five of the [Commission's Strategic Plan](#) directs the Commission to receive briefings on the SWP on an annual basis, and to produce a report, as specified by Water Code section 165, that

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includes findings and, as appropriate, recommendations for DWR and the Legislature. Through these briefings and reports, the Commission aims to improve the public's understanding of decision making within the SWP and create accountability by using previous findings and recommendations to guide subsequent briefings.

Meeting Overview

At this meeting, SWP Water Operations Manager Tracy Hinojosa will provide an update on current year operations, including the current water year allocation, planning decisions made to date, current hydrology, and considerations for the rest of the year. SWP Division of Integrated Science and Engineering Manager Alison Collins, and SWP Environmental Director Lenny Grimaldo, will provide an overview of how improved scientific understanding allows DWR to adaptively manage water operations in real-time. Additionally, SWC Assistant General Manager for Water Policy Chandra Chilmakuri will highlight the partnership between DWR and SWC on informed water management.

Following their remarks, the Commission will hear Tribal and public comment on the information presented. Commissioners will then have an opportunity to ask questions and make comments.

This is an informational item.

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