



## **Meeting Minutes**

Meeting of the California Water Commission  
Wednesday, April 15, 2026  
California Natural Resources Building  
715 P Street, Second Floor Media Room  
Sacramento, California 95814

### **1. Call to Order**

Commission Chair Fern Steiner called the meeting to order at 9:30 a.m.

### **2. Roll Call**

Commissioners Bland, Curtin, Gallagher, Hurt, Matsumoto, Solorio and Steiner were present, constituting a quorum.

Commissioner Makler arrived during agenda item 8.

### **3. Acknowledgement of California Native American Tribal Governments**

This is an opportunity for elected Tribal leaders and formally designated Tribal representatives to identify themselves and to specify the agenda item(s) on which they will comment, as described in the Commission's California Native American Tribal Leadership Comment Policy. No Tribal leaders or representatives asked to comment.

### **4. Approval of February 18, 2026, Meeting Minutes**

Commissioner Gallagher motioned to approve the February 18, 2026, meeting minutes. Commissioner Hurt seconded the motion. All Commissioners present voted to approve the minutes.

### **5. Executive Officer's Report**

Executive Officer Laura Jensen reported significant increases in participation for January and February, exceeding the 2025 per-meeting average. A rise in total comments was also recorded, driven primarily by an increase in in-person feedback. The 2028 Water Plan update was formally launched by the Governor's Office on February 25. Recent outreach efforts were noted, including a press conference at the San Luis Reservoir and a panel presentation by Commissioner Matsumoto. Ms. Jensen highlighted final funding for the remaining four program projects is expected to be reviewed within the next 18 months.

### **6. Commission Member Report**

Commissioner Steiner reported on the letter sent February 24, 2026, to Chair Esquivel and members of the State Water Resources Control Board, to provide notification regarding the Commission's intended timelines for final Water Storage Investment Program (WSIP) funding. The correspondence was issued without prior collective deliberation among commissioners to

maintain compliance with state transparency laws that prohibit private group discussions. The primary objective of the letter was to facilitate inter-agency coordination by ensuring the Board was informed of a schedule that may not fully align with their own operational windows.

Commissioner Hurt reported she attended a meeting with Matthew Beeston, of the North Coast States Carpenters Union, where the dialogue was primarily focused on renewable energy and maritime decarbonization. Additionally, a brief discussion concerning one of the active projects was conducted toward the conclusion of the meeting.

Commissioner Solorio expressed appreciation for the leadership demonstrated in coordinating timelines with the external agency and recommended the Commission, staff, external agencies, and project applicants explore methods for accelerating current infrastructure processes to meet state demands more nimbly. Commissioner Solorio noted a need to address legislative inquiries regarding the accounting of endangered species to ensure specific fish populations and related tracking processes are not overlooked during ongoing project reviews.

Commissioner Steiner expressed interest in inviting representatives from the Department of Water Resources (DWR), the State Water Resources Control Board, and other involved agencies to discuss their respective roles within the Water Storage Investment Program.

Commissioner Curtin expressed concern regarding the potential for official letters to be misinterpreted as collectively approved positions, even when intended only to address timeline or process issues and suggested that such a distinction between process-oriented and substantive matters could prevent misunderstandings and unnecessary inter-agency friction within the administration.

## **7. Public Testimony**

There was no public comment.

## **8. Water Storage Investment Program Update**

Water Storage Investment Program Manager Amy Young provided an update on the progress of projects in the WSIP and highlighted progress on the Sites Reservoir Project, where a draft water right was released by the State Water Resources Control Board. The project's public comment window closes on May 22, 2026, with a secondary draft expected in July, a final order projected for September, and final funding targets set for the end of the year. Additionally, draft Contracts of the Administration of Public Benefits (CAPBs) and potential supplemental funding requests are slated for the June Commission meeting. For other regional initiatives, a recirculated program Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the Chino Basin Program is expected this month, a June meeting status update is planned for the Willow Springs Water Bank, an early funding agreement is nearing execution for the Kern Fan Project, and a supplemental funding award for the Harvest Water Program is scheduled as an immediate action item.

Public comment from Ben King expressed appreciation for the Commission's public engagement efforts and the inclusion of Tribes in the decision-making process. Mr. King discussed concerns regarding a representative of TNM King Farms, restricted water flows and potential water quality impacts associated with the Sites Reservoir Project. A formal request was made for the Water Commission to review these technical changes to ensure that environmental protections and historical water entitlements are maintained.

Commissioner Makler arrived.

Public Comment from Liz Hurst, with the Inland Empire Utility Agency, reported several milestones, including the release of a recirculated programmatic Environmental Impact Report (EIR) and a Supplemental Environmental Impact Report (SEIR) focused on groundwater pulse flows. Efforts are being directed toward value engineering and inter-agency coordination to mitigate rising construction and maintenance costs. Ms. Hurst highlighted draft public benefit contracts were being prepared for summer submission, alongside ongoing collaborative reviews with economists to more accurately monetize the ecological value of pulse flow water.

Public comment from John Belpario, with North Coast Carpenters Union, expressed opposition regarding public funding for the Sites Reservoir Project, driven by concerns over the qualifications, capacity, and transparency surrounding the selection of Barnard Construction. Mr. Belpario believed the selection committee lacked true independence, and warnings were issued regarding potential project delays, cost overruns, or structural failures and requested the Commission thoroughly scrutinize these issues as public stewards prior to the upcoming June funding decisions and to maintain active dialogue with the Sites Project Authority.

Commissioner Curtin queried the State Water Resources Control Board's recent determination on water rights and its specific impact on the economic viability and river-diversion capabilities of the Sites Reservoir Project and requested an investigation of public testimony regarding environmental and infrastructure alterations, related to past project resizing, to ensure outstanding localized risks are evaluated prior to finalizing significant funding allocations.

Commissioner Gallagher requested clarification regarding the propriety of submitting an official comment during the active public comment window on behalf of the state to bolster public benefits and whether such action by a funding provider would be permissible or if it would fall into a legally ambiguous territory.

Commissioner Steiner commented on the submission of a comment during the active window to be outside the Commission's primary purview and technical capability, with concerns raised regarding the short notice provided and suggested that any potential correspondence be limited strictly to reaffirming the previously communicated project timeline, though the necessity and overall impact of doing so was questioned.

Commissioner Solorio recommended any prospective additions to the work plan must be evaluated based on whether they enhance operational efficiencies rather than prolonging the

project approval process and expressed in receiving a comprehensive status report on project labor agreements (PLAs) and local hiring practices across all regional project agencies, rather than focusing scrutiny on a single entity.

Executive Officer Jensen noted that ongoing discussions have been held with all project representatives, who are actively monitoring and learning from the developments surrounding the Sites Reservoir Project. Due to the significantly larger scale of the Sites project, labor and operational issues were deemed either not applicable or premature for the smaller initiatives at this stage. Ms. Jensen suggested that representatives from the Chino Basin Program could directly address these topics during their upcoming presentation, given the steady progress of their project.

Commissioner Solorio raised concerns that project issues often remain undetected until they actively surface, as demonstrated by the developments surrounding the Sites Reservoir Project and noted that reassurances from agency representatives regarding a lack of issues may conflict with the current or future perspectives of local labor organizations and a recommendation was made that any ongoing discussions regarding these matters be applied comprehensively to all projects and include all equal stakeholders rather than being conducted selectively.

#### **9. Water Storage Investment Program: Harvest Water Program Consideration of Supplemental Funding Determination (Action Item)**

Amy Young, WSIP Program Manager, informed the Commission on the annual update and request for a supplemental funding determination provided by the Sacramento Area Sewer District (SacSewer) to address inflationary increases for the Harvest Water Program. Background was detailed regarding the project's \$364.8 million funding history, noting that previous pro-rata adjustments under WSIP regulations failed to fully match actual water-project inflation. Ms. Young highlighted a transition from the Consumer Price Index to the Bureau of Reclamation's construction cost index was recommended by staff economists to more accurately calculate a proposed \$52.1 million funding increase. The project was reported as on track for a mid-2027 operational launch, with 56% of funds spent, all pipeline installed, and upcoming milestones set for monitoring wells in late 2026 and pumping station construction in 2027. Ms. Young noted a current uncommitted Water Storage Investment program balance of \$639.5 million and options presented to the Commission was presented to approve the full inflationary amount, award a partial amount, deny the request, or defer the decision.

Public comment from Jofil Borja, with Sacramento Area Sewer Project, who expressed support for the Commission staff's recommendation regarding the supplemental funding allocation and noted that an approval would honor over a decade of combined effort by staff, the Commission, and constituents spanning from Proposition 1 to Proposition 4. It was further stated that the requested adjustment uses only 8% of the uncommitted program funds, thereby preserving 92% for other initiatives while demonstrating California's resolve to bring large-scale water infrastructure projects to completion.

Public comment from Chris Flores, Sacramento County Agricultural Commissioner, expressed support for continued infrastructure investment through the Harvest Water Project to preserve the county's resilient agricultural sector, which yielded a gross production value exceeding \$536 million in 2024 and the county's Department of Agriculture directly mitigates regulatory, pest, and market threats to support local trade across 60 countries, it lacks the mechanisms to provide a sustainable water supply independently. The Harvest Water Project was highlighted as a critical, forward-thinking initiative that reduces groundwater reliance, facilitates aquifer recharge, and ensures long-term operational viability for local farmers and ranchers during persistent conditions.

Public comment from Ken Oneta, a local farmer, expressed support for the Harvest Water Project inflationary funding request.

Public comment from Pat Hume, with the Sacramento Board of Supervisors, expressed strong support for the supplemental funding request and emphasized its contribution to California's regional self-reliance, resource conservation, and ecological benefits and urged the uncommitted program funds be approved, as the requested adjustment remains within the project's verified public benefit value and supports a critical, multi-benefit infrastructure investment.

Public comment from Peter VanDyke expressed support for the Harvest Water Project model, which was identified as a necessary blueprint for future national water management over 20th-century reservoir technologies and recommended the Commission to maximize its focus and funding direction toward these types of regenerative infrastructure initiatives.

Public comment from Rob Bernice, with Friends of Stone Lakes National Refuge, expressed support for the Harvest Water Program and its proposed inflationary funding adjustment and noted that these conservation efforts successfully advance a long-term regional goal by establishing an environmental corridor between the Stone Lakes National Wildlife Refuge and the Cosumnes River Preserve.

Commissioner Makler expressed appreciation regarding the overall success of the project, which was recognized as a remarkable achievement by a tremendous team but concerns were raised regarding the justification for providing subsequent funding allocations to a project that is already in construction and has previously secured its final investment decision. Clarification was sought on the balance between taxpayer-funded state incentives and ratepayer obligations, noting that remaining program funds are not legally required to be spent and could alternatively revert to the general fund.

Amy Young commented the Harvest Water Program was intended to be fully funded by the Commission at the time the original Maximum Conditional Eligible Determinations (MCEs) were established but because significant inflation has occurred since that initial allocation, the resulting cost increases have had to be absorbed by SacSewer and the proposed adjustment

was framed as a means to fulfill that original funding intent by accounting for subsequent macroeconomic pressures on the project budget.

Commissioner Makler inquired regarding the specific justification for applying a different cost index to determine the supplemental grant amount and requested on why the newly proposed index is considered a superior and more appropriate measure of inflation for this water infrastructure project compared to the metric previously used.

Steve Hatchett, the Water Commission's economic consultant, stated the programmatic regulations provide administrative flexibility, as they are not prescriptive regarding the exact indices required to calculate inflationary cost adjustments over time. The previous use of the Consumer Price Index (CPI) and USDA land values was attributed to historical funding constraints and the necessity of applying a uniform metric across all initiatives. Mr. Hatchett noted the transition to the Bureau of Reclamation's combined index was justified on the basis that it more accurately reflects the specific construction, land purchasing, and easement costs faced by major water infrastructure developments and that this refined analytical approach is intended to be recommended uniformly for all remaining projects facing future funding adjustments and final awards to ensure program-wide equity.

Commissioner Makler clarified that the Consumer Price Index (CPI) serves as a broad-based metric incorporating everyday consumer goods, whereas the Bureau of Reclamation's index is specifically designed for capital projects and the reclamation index was noted to exclude irrelevant consumer items, instead placing a significantly heavier weight on capital costs, construction materials, labor, and land acquisition.

Steve Hatchett commented the combined metric used for the evaluation is composed of the California Land Index, which has experienced accelerated growth relative to other states, and the Bureau of Reclamation's Composite Construction Cost Index for water projects, which aggregates internal data derived from Producer Price Indexes and Engineering News-Record trends.

Commissioner Solorio expressed an intention to vote against the decision, driven by concerns regarding whether the allocation represents the best use of available program funds and suggested that further discussion be deferred until later in the year to allow the Commission, staff, and other project representatives to thoroughly evaluate the request.

Commissioner Steiner noted that the WSIP regulations were intentionally modified by the Commission in 2025, alongside the passage of Proposition 4, to establish the necessary regulatory leeway for supplemental funding determinations. The primary objective of these adjustments was to create a mechanism to reward and support projects that have demonstrated due diligence and progressed ahead of schedule and emphasized that these rule changes ensure advanced initiatives remain eligible to receive the financial resources required to maintain their forward momentum.

Commissioner Curtin expressed support for the full funding allocation, with the initiative characterized as a model 21st-century project that prioritizes groundwater storage over traditional surface reservoirs to mitigate snowpack loss and noted that delays exacerbate financial and operational difficulties for infrastructure developments, making the immediate deployment of available program funds essential to offset rising materials costs and potential tariff impacts. Given that the project is on track to be fully operational by mid-2027 and successfully meets all verified public benefit requirements, a formal call was made to support the request and call the question.

Commissioner Hurt expressed support for the funding request was echoed, with the assertion that the highest and best use of available program resources is ensuring advanced projects successfully cross the finish line and noted that initiatives progressing efficiently ahead of others should not be financially penalized for achieving their milestones earlier.

A motion was entertained to adopt the staff recommendation for the Harvest Water Program supplemental funding determination for additional funding amount of \$52,119,205. Commissioner Hurt moved the motion and Commissioner Matsumoto seconded the motion. Majority voted to approve the request.

#### **10. Consideration of Department of Water Resources' Dam Safety Regulations (Action Item)**

Shawn Jones, Division Manager for the Division of Safety of Dams at the Department of Water Resources, proposed a comprehensive dam safety regulation package, marking the fourth update since 2017 to modify existing articles and introduce new requirements, including aligning repair applications with Senate Bill 122 and streamlining enforcement processes. Mr. Jones highlighted key revisions, aimed for submission to the Office of Administrative Law in June, include new fee schedules, phased project approvals, and clarified procedures for remedial actions on unlawfully constructed dams.

Commissioner Curtin requested clarification regarding how the proposed regulatory modifications directly affect water development and infrastructure projects, noting that administrative processes like fee refunds and application timelines fall primarily under the review of the Office of Administrative Law (OAL) and inquired about the current number of unlawfully constructed dams in existence, specifically whether these structures are typically older, small earthen configurations or if such unauthorized construction continues to occur.

Mr. Jones clarified that most unlawfully constructed structures consist of smaller dams built many years ago, though recent instances continue to be discovered, including a failing structure identified by law enforcement in Modoc County. To remediate these unauthorized configurations, dam owners are provided with three regulatory options: implementing necessary safety fixes to bring the structure under formal jurisdiction, altering the dam to a sub-jurisdictional size, or executing a complete removal.

A motion to approve DWR's modifications to the dam safety regulations was moved by Commissioner Bland and seconded by Commissioner Curtin. All Commissioners voted to approve the request.

### **11. Outreach and Engagement Update**

Paul Cambra, Information Officer, provided an update on outreach, engagement, and equity efforts in support of Strategic Plan Goal 2 and presented data that average meeting attendance doubled and digital engagement showed a 32% year-over-year increase in social media followers across expanded platforms, alongside elevated first-quarter website traffic driven primarily by agenda downloads. Mr. Cambra highlighted public education efforts at upcoming events such as the California Natural Resources Agency (CNRA) Earth Day celebration, the Association of California Water Agencies (ACWA) conference, and Native American Day and the selection of an outreach consultant was announced to assist in drafting a comprehensive plan later this year aimed at targeting more diverse and representative demographic groups.

Commissioner Hurt expressed anticipation for the upcoming outreach plan from the consultant, with particular emphasis placed on the engagement of diverse stakeholders, including the unique voices of Tribes and inquired on the feasibility of developing methods to assess the qualitative strength of stakeholder relationships and the concrete outcomes resulting from those interactions.

Mr. Cambra noted that stakeholder interest and relationship quality are primarily assessed through the monitoring of public comments, as well as letters submitted in advance of scheduled meetings and believes interested parties will continue to use these communication channels to directly voice their perspectives during public proceedings.

Commissioner Solorio suggested a transition beyond quantitative participation tracking and instead use expert panels and specialized forums to generate more substantive, in-depth ideas on water infrastructure, best labor practices, and program acceleration and inviting experienced water agency executives and board members to participate in these panels would capture valuable, under used regional expertise while moving away from repetitive public comments. Commissioner Solorio requested clarification regarding the specific regulatory requirements that mandate the reporting of meeting attendance metrics, noting that lower attendance often signifies stable operations but that true engagement should be measured by the quality of strategic input received.

### **12. Consideration of Items for Next California Water Commission Meeting**

At the May meeting, the Commission will host the second State Water Project briefing for the year; hear about recent Sustainable Groundwater Management Act activities and new information on relevant legislation; and receive our quarterly update on the WSIP and a detailed update on the Chino Basin Program.

**13. Adjourn**

The Commission adjourned at approximately 12:00 PM.