



Meeting Minutes

Meeting of the California Water Commission
Wednesday, August 19, 2026
California Natural Resources Building
715 P Street, First Floor Auditorium
Sacramento, California 95814

1. Call to Order

Commission Chair Fern Steiner called the meeting to order at 9:31 a.m.

2. Roll Call

Commissioners Curtin, Gallagher, Hurt, Matsumoto, and Steiner were present, constituting a quorum. Commissioner Solorio joined the meeting during item 3.

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.

Tübatulabal tribal Leader Donna Miranda-Begay introduced herself and expressed her gratitude to Commission Executive Officer Laura Jensen for her work on the Commission's 2025 Strategic Plan and to the Department of Water Resources (DWR) for their support and funding of the California Native American Tribal GIS Summit and the Tribal Water Summit. Tribal Leader Miranda-Begay also commented on the importance of the San Joaquin Valley and the Delta to California tribes. She noted her involvement in developing the Governor's Office of Land Use and Climate Innovation's fifth assessment on climate change and emphasized the importance of having clean and reliable water sources for tribes.

4. Approval of June 17, 2026, Meeting Minutes

Commissioner Hurt motioned to approve June 17, 2026, meeting minutes. Commissioner Curtin seconded the motion. All Commissioners present voted to approve the minutes.

5. Executive Officer's Report

Executive Officer Laura Jensen reported the June meeting was the Commission's third highest attended meeting of 2026, with 127 total participants. There were also 63 comments received for the June meeting, 43 of which were written comments. Executive Officer Jensen also announced the departure of the Commission's Executive Secretary Kimberly Muljat and thanked her for her nine years of service.

6. Commission Member Report

There was no Commission Member reports.

7. Public Testimony

There was no public comment.

8. State Water Project Briefing: Financial and Operations Update

DWR State Water Project (SWP) Deputy Director John Yarbrough provided a high-level overview of how the SWP's current operations and priorities relate to the SWP financial outlook. He emphasized the importance of transparency in budgeting, especially when faced with challenges such as aging infrastructure, the effects of subsidence and changing hydrology. SWP Financial Manager Hong Lin detailed the SWP budget process and the calendar year 2026-27 SWP budget. Ms. Lin outlined a shift toward multi-year planning to address volatile operational costs and infrastructure maintenance. She also explained how costs are distributed among the State Water Contractors (SWC) and touched on major cost drivers including the infestation of golden mussels at DWR facilities. SWP Water Operations Manager Tracy Hinojosa provided an update on current-year operations, including the current water year allocation, planning decisions made to date, current hydrology, and considerations for the future. SWC Financial Manager Erik Goodman provided the SWC's perspective on the annual SWP budget, cost pressures, and other budgetary considerations. SWC General Manager Jennifer Pierre emphasized rising infrastructure costs and commended DWR on using science based adaptive management activities in their work. Ms. Pierre shared frustration with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) stating that CDFW is ignoring those scientific and adaptive management methods and activities resulting in costs of hundreds of millions of dollars.

Commissioner Hurt asked what water dependent industries the State needs to support in the next fifty years and how that demand is being incorporated into capital planning. Mr. Yarbrough said the SWP is committed to delivering water to their partners in accordance with their contracts, and the goal is to deliver that water reliably. Ms. Pierre said none of the contractors within the SWC are 100 percent reliant on the SWP and their job is to deliver water to retail, at which point the locals are making decisions regarding industry demand and climate adaptation.

Commissioner Gallagher asked for clarification on the operations of the SWP as it relates to energy consumption. Mr. Yarbrough clarified that energy consumption is dependent on how much water is being moved each year. Ms. Pierre added that costs will continue to rise, which will put pressure on the SWP. Commissioner Gallagher asked how CDFW's requirements for public benefits are integrated into long-term budget forecasting. Mr. Yarbrough listed a few examples of areas where the SWP is tasked with developing public benefit projects, but does not have a clear revenue stream to fund those projects.

Commissioner Curtin commented on issues affecting the SWP and California's water outlook including the disappearing snowpack, the latest news from the Colorado River, and the effects of subsidence and asked if there are other largescale infrastructure needs to address these issues. Mr. Yarbrough said the State needs to figure out how to use the water in the Feather River and mentioned the Delta Conveyance Project as a necessary piece of the puzzle to address the aforementioned issues. Commissioner Curtin asked if the SWC is carrying the financial burden for subsidence mitigation. Ms. Pierre said the SWC is hopeful that there will be a cost share between the State and federal government.

Commissioner Matsumoto asked for additional perspective on inflation costs and how current costs compare to historical costs. Ms. Lin said the SWP tracks inflation according to the industry standard and identified three buckets of looking at inflation: operations and maintenance, capital, and power costs. Commissioner Matsumoto also asked how SWP operations have been affected by the CVP operations in the last year. Mr. Yarbrough said in the last year SWP operations were not affected by CVP operations, but they could be in the future, which is why SWP is working closely with the United States Bureau of Reclamation (USBR). However, there have been staffing cuts at USBR which impacts how SWP staff is able to interact with USBR.

Commissioner Steiner noted that security is also a rising cost. Mr. Yarbrough said physical and cybersecurity are at the forefront of the SWP's work. Commissioner Steiner asked if the SWP uses power from the Hoover Dam. Mr. Yarbrough said the SWP has a small contract to use power from the Hoover Dam.

9. Vision for the San Joaquin Valley: An Overview and Local Perspectives

Commission Assistant Executive Officer Dr. Sarah Lesmeister introduced the item and provided context for the presentations.

DWR Deputy Director for Statewide Water Resources Planning and Enterprise Management Joel Metzger and DWR Supervising Engineer Eric Tsai summarized DWR's Vision for the San Joaquin Valley report, which integrated findings from three major studies. Key challenges include severe groundwater overdraft, subsidence, unreliable surface supply, stressed ecosystems, and worsening climate impacts. The vision outlines near- and long-term strategies such as FIRO-MAR pilots, addressing critical head groundwater levels, subsidence mitigation, permitting modernization, and long-term investments in Delta Conveyance and Sites. Mr. Tsai also touched on next steps, including announcing that a final draft of the Vision for the Valley document is anticipated in September, and discussed the Vision for the Valley's alignment with the California Water Plan.

Laura Ramos, Director, California Water Institute; Eddie Ocampo, Director, Self-Help Enterprises; Kyle Jones, Facilitator, San Joaquin Valley Water Collaborative Action Plan; and Geoff Vanden Heuvel, Director of Regulatory and Economic Affairs, Milk Producers Council also shared their perspectives on the development and implementation of the Vision. They

emphasized the need for a single plan to harmonize the different efforts taken to date, and provide a single, fundable vision.

Commissioner Matsumoto asked what critical head is and if DWR has modeled how long it would take to reach the goal outlined in the Vision. Mr. Tsai said critical head varies depending on local groundwater levels, and DWR will work with local Groundwater Sustainability Agencies (GSAs) to do those calculations. Commissioner Matsumoto asked if there is a plan to assist locals in identifying flood thresholds and if so, if there is a timeline for when that work would be complete. Mr. Tsai said there is ongoing work being done by DWR's Division of Flood Management but he was unaware of the exact timeline.

Commissioner Curtin emphasized the urgency of addressing water-management challenges and highlighted a gap regarding upper watershed management. He suggested exploring natural watershed recovery methods, such as beaver-supported hydrologic restoration to increase groundwater percolation. Commissioner Curtin said current infrastructure is insufficient for extreme weather such as the upcoming El Niño event. Mr. Metzger said DWR is actively examining upper watershed management actions and confirmed those actions will be incorporated in the California Water Plan. Mr. Metzger said DWR is evaluating both natural and built infrastructure options that could allow significant water capture during extremely wet winters. He also touched on Senate Bill (SB) 72 and its requirements regarding assessing the costs and benefits of such strategies.

Commissioner Gallagher asked what the next steps are, and if that includes the identification of short and long-term actions, emphasizing the urgency of the situation due to current opportunities for groundwater recharge. Mr. Tsai said several near-term strategies from the document are underway, although regulatory challenges persist including slow progress on Assembly Bill 2026. Mr. Vanden Heuvel said 2023 was a pivotal year and noted a shift in behavior among farmers due to the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA), where flood flows are now valuable to farmers for recharge. Mr. Metzger emphasized the need for statewide engagement in the Water Plan process and said the goal is to develop an assertive Water Plan that incorporates diverse feedback and addresses long-term challenges. Ms. Ramos added that one request will be coming from the President of Fresno State University to summarize outcomes and needs identified at the May San Joaquin Valley Water Resilience Summit, and another request centered on pilot testing new concepts is already underway.

Commissioner Hurt asked if any California tribes were consulted on the development of the Vision for the Valley document. Mr. Tsai said there was no separate tribal engagement associated with developing the document. Commissioner Hurt asked if there were community workshops held to get a more local perspective. Mr. Tsai said DWR worked closely with partners like the San Joaquin Valley Regional Blueprint and San Joaquin Valley Collaborative Action Program (CAP), but did not hold many public workshops, other than the Water Resilience Summit in May. Commissioner Hurt reiterated that involving tribes in this process and soliciting their feedback is of the utmost importance. She asked for clarification on the land

repurposing aspect of the document and what that means for agricultural land users. Mr. Metzger said those land use decisions will lie primarily with the locals, specifically GSAs, who will make decisions about what to do with land based on the amount of water available. Mr. Metzger emphasized that the State will provide technical assistance and funding when possible. Mr. Vanden Heuvel commented on the difficulty of making those decisions, and the need for more funding.

Commissioner Steiner thanked the panelists for participating in the discussion and said continued cooperation between the State and locals is necessary to address California's water problems.

The Commission broke for lunch. Commissioner Curtin left the meeting and did not return.

10. Water Storage Investment Program: Quarterly Update on Projects

Water Storage Investment Program Manager Amy Young provided an update on the progress of projects in the WSIP.

Public comment from Elizabeth Hurst, with the Inland Empire Utilities Agency (IEUA), who provided a brief update on the Chino Basin Program.

Commissioner Solorio asked if it was possible for the Commission to hear an update at a future meeting from the Governor's Office strike team on if anything can be done to streamline permitting for the WSIP projects.

Executive Officer Jensen said it will be a busy 18 months for the Commission and that all WSIP projects are scheduled to present to the Commission in that time frame, which will help pin down the project's timelines.

11. Water Storage Investment Program: Pulse Flow Water Types and Conveyance

DWR Program Engineer David Okita provided an overview of pulse flow water types and conveyance considerations for the pulse flow projects in the WSIP. Mr. Okita hit on topics such as the California Aqueduct, the SWP, the SWC, the differences between Table A water and Article 21 water and how the physical locations of the Kern Fan project and the Willow Springs project affect conveyance considerations.

Commissioner Matsumoto asked why Article 21 water allocation amounts differ from the volume of water that is actually delivered. Mr. Okita answered that when capacity is available, DWR delivers the full requested amount, but when the aqueduct does not have the capacity, the allocation follows the Table A proportions. Capacity constraints, physical outages and timing could affect aqueduct capacity.

Commissioner Hurt asked what the major constraint will be once the WSIP projects become operational. Mr. Okita said the main challenge will be conveying water to the new groundwater banks, which will require coordination between partner contractors and DWR.

Commissioner Gallagher asked for clarification on the shoulder season for the California Aqueduct. Mr. Okita explained that peak periods occur during Article 21 season and summer irrigation season when the farmers in the SWP are moving water. Commissioner Gallagher asked if there is water available in those 'off peak' times. Mr. Okita said many contractors have water stored in the San Luis Reservoir, which is available to move during the non-peak periods.

Commissioner Matsumoto asked whether Article 21 water can be stored in new WSIP facilities even though SWP reservoirs are full. Mr. Okita said yes, Article 21 cannot be stored in SWP facilities when reservoirs are full, but water can still be stored in local groundwater banks like the new WSIP projects.

Commissioner Solorio asked for clarification on pulse flow requirements, costs, and how the required pulse flow volumes are decided. Mr. Okita said all three pulse flow WSIP projects will have to do a pulse flow in the Feather River and will be delivered via an exchange process from groundwater banks with a project contractor. The WSIP project must pay any costs associated with that exchange, and will need to pay DWR for any hydropower losses at the Oroville facility. The required pulse-flow water volumes will be defined in CDFW's contracts for the administration of public benefits, and this requirement exists because Proposition 1 mandates that funding be tied to providing an ecosystem public benefit.

12. Water Storage Investment Program: Willow Springs Water Bank Conjunctive Use Project Progress Update

Southern California Water Bank Authority Managing Director of Government Affairs John Perez provided introductory remarks and expressed optimism that the project has made demonstrable progress since their last update.

First Vice President of Investments Kris Bale provided an overview of the Willow Springs project, including what public benefits the project will provide when completed. Mr. Bale also provided an update on operations and conveyance plans, progress towards completing their Environmental Impact Report (EIR), coordination with DWR on the California Aqueduct turnout, groundwater modeling, project participation and partners, and next steps.

Public comment from Joshua Golka, with Santa Clara Valley Water, who expressed support for the Willow Springs project and said groundwater banking is a key strategy for maintaining long-term reliability and flexibility. Mr. Golka reported that Valley Water is working with the project proponent to finalize a memorandum of interest and will continue evaluating participation as project details continue to be developed.

Public comment from Michael Plinski, Chief of Water Resources for the San Bernardino Valley Municipal Water District, who also expressed support for the Willow Springs project and highlighted the need for additional south of Delta water storage to increase the reliability and flexibility of SWP water supplies. Mr. Plinski also said the project could provide additional operational flexibility to capture and store Article 21 water during the periods when it is less available through the SWP. Mr. Plinski reported that his board has approved the memorandum

of intent for this project and believes the Willow Springs project can become an important component of a more resilient and integrated water system.

Public comment from Claudia Bolanos, Resource and Analytics Director for the Palmdale Water District, who also expressed her water agency's support of the Willow Springs project. She said her agency is a SWP contractor and reported that they also recently executed a memorandum of interest in the Willow Springs project.

Public comment from Peter Thompson, Executive Director for the Central Coast Water Authority, also a SWP contractor, who also expressed support for the Willow Springs project and stressed the statewide need for additional wet-year water storage opportunities, that can then be recovered in dry years. Mr. Thompson reported that his agency is evaluating the project and expects to bring a memorandum of interest to its participants for consideration.

Commissioner Gallagher asked for clarification on the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) initial study and mitigated negative declaration process. Bert Ferraps, environmental consultant for the Willow Springs project explained that the initial study evaluates potential impacts across CEQA resource areas, and if all impacts can be mitigated to less-than-significant levels, the lead agency may adopt a Mitigated Negative Declaration rather than require a full EIR.

Commissioner Hurt asked why only two project participants have executed MOIs when seven initially expressed interest in the project. Mr. Bale said summer scheduling and internal processes slowed the execution of the MOIs, but momentum is increasing and additional MOIs are expected to be executed. Commissioner Hurt asked about project risks and the challenges facing project completion. Mr. Bale said the delivery of the public benefits is the key focus of the project and not receiving a pro rata inflationary funding adjustment is a concern but expressed optimism that the project is making significant progress towards completing the WSIP requirements.

Commissioner Matsumoto asked about commitments contained in the MOIs, particularly regarding public benefit obligations of the project partners. Mr. Bale said the MOIs indicate that participants expect to share responsibility for delivering their pro rata portion of the public benefit, and fewer participants means each participant would be expected to deliver a larger portion of the public benefit. Commissioner Matsumoto asked how far along the project is collecting enough partners to provide the required public benefits. Mr. Bale said there is ample capacity among the project partners to cover the pulse flow benefit. Commissioner Matsumoto asked for clarification on the project size, since that will then dictate the ability to deliver the public benefits. Mr. Bale said if the project has all seven partners, there is roughly 160,000 acre feet of put and take water each year, and the public benefit is roughly 8,800 acre feet of ecological water, and with the current participants they would have around ten percent of the 160,000 acre feet.

Commissioner Gallagher asked for clarification on the project's expectations regarding garnering enough project partners to reach one-million-acre feet. Mr. Bale said the project

expects that they may have to start before that one-million-acre feet number is achieved, but they remain optimistic that they can expand to that figure in the future.

Commissioner Hurt asked how the WSIP pro rata inflationary funding adjustment would be applied to the Willow Springs project. Mr. Bale said the public benefit funding goes directly to infrastructure development, and reduces the funding need from project partners for overall storage.

Commissioner Solorio commented on the unique geographic challenges in the Tehachapi and Antelope Valley region and expressed his appreciation to the project for the continued progress. He also highlighted the novelty of the pulse flow benefits and the strong collaboration among project proponents and agencies.

13. Consideration of Items for Next California Water Commission Meeting

At the September meeting, the Commission will receive its regular WSIP update. The Commission will also hear presentations from Commission staff, representatives of the Chino Basin Program, and staff from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife on the draft Contracts for the Administration of Public Benefits for the Chino Basin Program. Finally, the Commission will hear briefings on groundwater recharge and an update on California Salmon Strategy for a Hotter, Drier Future.

Commissioner Solorio reiterated earlier comments regarding hearing an update from the WSIP strike team regarding their efforts on how to accelerate the process for WSIP projects and asked if the Commission could hear an update on the California Water Plan.

Executive Officer Jensen said there is a presentation on the California Water Plan scheduled for November.

14. Adjourn

The Commission adjourned at approximately 3:04 PM.