

December 29, 2023

Wade Crowfoot, Secretary  
California Natural Resources Agency  
715 P Street, 20th Floor  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Secretary Wade Crowfoot,

In accordance with the State Leadership Accountability Act (Leadership Accountability), the Department of Water Resources submits this report on the review of our internal control and monitoring systems for the biennial period ending December 31, 2023.

Should you have any questions please contact Stephanie Varrelman, Deputy Director, Business Operations, at (916) 882-2998, [stephanie.varrelman@water.ca.gov](mailto:stephanie.varrelman@water.ca.gov).

## **GOVERNANCE**

### **Mission and Strategic Plan**

**Mission: To sustainably manage the water resources of California, in cooperation with other agencies, to benefit the state's people and protect, restore, and enhance the natural and human environments.** To sustainably manage the water resources of California, in cooperation with other agencies, to benefit the state's people and protect, restore, and enhance the natural and human environments.

**Secure the functions of the State Water Project for future generations** – The State Water Project The State Water Project (SWP) has long been a centerpiece of the Department's functions, from water supply to flood protection to recreation and, in later years, environmental stewardship. The Oroville spillways emergency increased the Department's understanding of the dual realities of aging infrastructure and extreme hydrology. The Department reconstructed both spillways to their original design capacity and will continue to implement the findings of the comprehensive needs assessment using risk reduction to inform prioritization of actions for the safe operation of the dam and its appurtenances into the future; complete an asset management plan for all State Water Project facilities; and obtain permits for and begin implementation of a delta conveyance facility.

**Implement a comprehensive and system-wide approach to dam safety, flood protection, and emergency management** – The interrelated nature of upper watershed hydrology and downstream flood protection requires greater alignment of regulatory and emergency response functions pertaining to dam and levee safety, flood management operations, data sharing, and project delivery. The Department will complete a statewide roadmap to address lessons learned from the Oroville Independent Forensic Team report. The Department will explore opportunities to recharge groundwater basins with flood waters, and pursue strategic investment of levee maintenance dollars to reduce urban and rural flood risk, protect local water supplies, and decrease state liability. In addition, the Department will also work to

maintain its position as a respected state partner in emergency response and recovery.

**Improve and expand integrated watershed management and bring groundwater basins into balance** – California's water management success rests in large part on the public water agencies that are responsible for investing in a drought-proof and sustainable water supply that supports the economy and environment. To prepare California for climate change, the Department must take a comprehensive, multi-pronged approach to water management that aligns state and local planning efforts and statutory responsibilities to ensure wise and equitable use of water. The Department will complete the five-year update to the California Water Plan and implement new mandates to improve water use efficiency and sustainable groundwater management. The Department will also continue efforts to provide safe drinking water to all California communities and integrate local and state water management strategies.

**Make the Department an employer of choice for our field of expertise and practitioners of good government** – The Department is preparing for the workforce of tomorrow. With an expected wave of retirements in leadership positions, the Department is working to reorganize in ways that promote innovation and sustainability. This is an opportunity to thoughtfully promote the Department as a water industry leader, one that embraces new technologies, seeks new ideas from other sectors, and actively engages with the international engineering and safety communities. The Department will expand recruitment efforts, support pathways to leadership, and increase public and stakeholder awareness of priorities and accomplishments. The development of employees is critical to the future success of the Department and its ability to deliver water to Californians.

**The California Water Commission (CWC)** consists of nine members appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the State Senate. Seven members are chosen for their general expertise related to the control, storage, and beneficial use of water. The other two are chosen for their knowledge of the environment. The CWC provides a public forum for discussing water issues, advises DWR, and takes appropriate statutory actions to further the development of policies that support integrated and sustainable water resource management and a healthy environment. Statutory duties include advising the Director of DWR, approving rules and regulations, and monitoring and reporting on the construction and operation of the SWP.

## **Control Environment**

DWR's financial health, processes, activities, programs, and internal controls are continuously monitored by DWR management. This is accomplished through various management meetings at all levels of the organization, including the Directorate. DWR management advocates for and supports open communication throughout the Department so as concerns are identified, they can be elevated and appropriately addressed at any time. Continuous monitoring also occurs through constant reporting and analysis of data. DWR's internal and external auditors also provide monitoring and feedback to DWR management. DWR's financial health, processes, activities, programs, and internal controls are continuously monitored by DWR management. This is accomplished through various management meetings at all levels of the organization, including the Directorate. DWR management advocates for and supports

open communication throughout the Department so as concerns are identified, they can be elevated and appropriately addressed at any time. Continuous monitoring also occurs through constant reporting and analysis of data. DWR's internal and external auditors also provide monitoring and feedback to DWR management.

DWR's core values and codes of conduct are clearly established and presented in many forms to Department staff and the public. For example, they appear in DWR's Strategic Plan. Additionally, DWR annually distributes and reiterates key policies such as Incompatible Activities Policy and Standards of Conduct Policy to all employees. Similarly, DWR has a robust policy and procedure manual system comprised of the Department Administrative Manual (DAM) and Enterprise Process Guides (EPGs) which include all DWR's policies and procedures related to ethics and codes of conduct. The DAM and EPGs also contain direction for employees on how to report ethical and code of conduct concerns to DWR authorities such as the Office of Workforce Equality, the Internal Audit Office, and the Labor Relations Office for investigation. Furthermore, DWR posts California Whistleblower Protection Act signage as required which provides employees instructions on how to report concerns to the California State Auditor. Lastly, DWR complies with conflict of interest statutes and requires staff to complete conflict of interest training and file Form 700s.

DWR resides organizationally under the California Natural Resources Agency (CNRA). CNRA and various control agencies including the Department of Finance, the Department of General Services, the State Controller's Office, the State Treasurer's Office, the Legislature, and DWR's stakeholders provide oversight of DWR's operations and policy decisions. These entities and many others use audits, inquiry, and policies and procedures to manage their oversight of DWR.

Internally, DWR has a Governance Board comprised of senior management and executive-level staff. The Board's charge is to set priorities, establish programmatic direction, and develop policies, and procedures. The Board also makes recommendations to the Director and Deputy Directors on various internal operational matters that involve policy implications.

DWR's DAM, EPGs, and Delegation Orders document DWR's internal controls and responsible parties. In short, the DAM is a policy manual and the EPGs are Departmental procedures. The DAM and EPGs are available to all staff via DWR's intranet. DWR has identified 14 Key Policies (such as the Drug-Free Workplace Policy and Nepotism Prevention Policy), which are distributed to all DWR staff on an annual basis. Similarly, when a policy is changed, Department-wide notification is provided. DWR's Management Analysis unit maintains the DAM and EPGs and DWR's Internal Audit Office also provides input when developing and or amending internal controls. DWR released a comprehensive workforce plan in 2019 and is currently developing a succession plan in consultation with CalHR. In July 2022, DWR transitioned from emergency work schedules to regular work schedules following the COVID -19 response. DWR refined its 'Future of Work' schedules in September 2023 to reflect its dedication to the Department's mission, commitment to operational efficiency, and continued investment in the employee experience.

DWR's strategic plan lists a top goal to be an Employer of Choice. By using a mix of traditional and contemporary recruitment methods, such as career fairs, talent management

technology, and social media, DWR is able to reach a broad nationwide candidate pool to attract quality talent. The conversion of in-person civil service exams to an online format also expands the pool of interested and eligible applicants for various positions. DWR also has identified hard to recruit and retain classifications such as those in the construction management field, and targets recruitment for these vacancies. DWR also provides a substantial training budget to staff so they may complete required and desired training to ensure competencies. DWR also operates a robust apprenticeship program for Utility Craftworkers to ensure an adequate workforce of skilled employees to maintain the State Water Project and California's flood protection levees. Annually, staff utilize Individual Development Plans to identify and request training to enhance their skills and abilities. DWR has robust management development and leadership programs to develop talent and prepare future managers to lead DWR. DWR's Division of Human Resources oversees and implements DWR's recruitment, training and succession planning activities.

Department-wide, DWR utilizes annual appraisals to evaluate staff performance which provides written and documented analysis of staff performance. Individual supervisors utilize various controls such as one-on-one meetings to discuss staff performance and to perform assignment oversight to ensure performance. Written status reports are commonly used to evaluate progress and performance, as well. Status reports are routinely forwarded up the chain of command culminating in reporting to Agency. DWR adheres to the State's progressive discipline model and utilizes counseling memos, corrective memos, and adverse actions.

### **Information and Communication**

The Director and Deputy Directors of DWR meet on a weekly basis. The Department also has a Governance Board which is made up of its Director, Deputy Directors, other Executive staff, and all Division/Office Managers. The Governance Board meets on a regular basis - typically twice a month. The risks identified in this report are often the subjects of both groups' meetings. Division/Office Managers are responsible for sharing the decisions of the Governance Board with their staff. DWR's Internal Auditor meets regularly with the Executive Monitoring Sponsor and reports any issues of concern that require action by DWR management.

DWR has countless processes to ensure effective and efficient communication with external interested parties and other external parties. Processes are derivative of a myriad controls, policies, procedures, and law. For example, as required, DWR annually produces and distributes Bulletin 132 "Management of the California State Water Project." The Bulletin provides fiscal, operational, construction, water supply, and environmental information for one of the nation's largest infrastructure projects to a world-wide audience.

DWR's internet site passively shares information on countless subjects such as the California Water Plan, Well Standards, department organization, and department contacts. In large part, the information is contained in reports and or publications which include facts, plans, and statistics about DWR programs. The site also informs external parties about other past and future communication opportunities such as upcoming public meetings and gatherings. The site is also the pathway for individuals to access public records. DWR's internet adheres to accessibility requirements as prescribed by law.

DWR constantly avails itself to its external interested parties/partners in person, as well. For example, DWR participates in a multitude of local working groups such as county advisory groups, holds and participates in town-hall meetings related to planned and ongoing projects, meets and confers with State Water Contractors, provides media updates, responds to media and governmental inquiries, and testifies before the Legislature.

## **MONITORING**

The information included here discusses the entity-wide, continuous process to ensure internal control systems are working as intended. The role of the executive monitoring sponsor includes facilitating and verifying that the Department of Water Resources monitoring practices are implemented and functioning. The responsibilities as the executive monitoring sponsor(s) have been given to: Stephanie Varrelman, Deputy Director, Business Operations.

DWR's Executive management team is notified when vulnerabilities are identified. A task force of Department subject matter experts is typically convened to assess the magnitude of the vulnerability on operations and identify solutions and resource costs (both financial and personnel) to address the issue. Vulnerabilities are validated and assessed using data this is available through DWR's enterprise resource planning (ERP) program, SAP, and business analytics and reporting. DWR also uses a document management system to house business records. These systems aid management in identifying gaps and possible solutions. Executive management, including DWR's Governance Board, is continually briefed so that informed policy decisions can be made in a timely manner. Issues and decisions are documented via formal memorandums, policy documents, water resources engineering memorandums, white papers, meeting minutes, reports, spreadsheets and forms, as appropriate. Once remedies are in place, DWR management monitors results to ensure the selected action is effective.

## **RISK ASSESSMENT PROCESS**

The following personnel were involved in the Department of Water Resources risk assessment process: executive management.

The following methods were used to identify risks: ongoing monitoring activities, audit/review results, other/prior risk assessments, questionnaires, and consideration of potential fraud.

The following criteria were used to rank risks: likelihood of occurrence, potential impact to mission/goals/objectives, timing of potential event, potential impact of remediation efforts, and tolerance level for the type of risk.

## **RISKS AND CONTROLS**

### **Risk: Aging Infrastructure**

The State's water infrastructure, including the aqueducts, canals, pipelines, dams, spillways, reservoirs, levees, and pumping plants is aging and needs to be modernized or reconstructed to dependably continue providing water to millions of Californians and hundreds of thousands of acres of farmland, along with ensuring public safety. The sheer scope, complexity and multi-billion dollar price tag associated with upgrading the infrastructure create extraordinary

and monumental challenges for the Department. There is significant risk with the age of the State's water infrastructure and facilities to meet water needs, which will also jeopardize efforts to improve public safety, ecosystem conditions, and economic stability.

### **Control: Active Infrastructure Improvement Projects**

The Department of Water Resources constructs, operates, and maintains several infrastructure projects as part of its mission to sustainably manage the water resources of California. Some of the larger infrastructure projects include, but are not limited to, the following: Lower Elkhorn Basin Levee Setback Project, Lookout Slough Tidal Habitat Restoration and Flood Improvement Project, Yolo Bypass Salmonid Habitat Restoration and Fish Passage Project, Oroville Dam River Valve Outlet Modernization, Subsidence Remediation, Castaic Dam Modernization, Perris Dam Remediation Program, and Improved Delta Conveyance.

### **Control: SWP Asset Management Program**

DWR is actively engaged in an ongoing effort to upgrade California's aging water delivery system. DWR has multiple programs which are tasked with addressing the state's aging infrastructure. One such program is DWR's SWP Division of Operations and Maintenance's Asset Management Program, which is responsible for providing a unified framework for the condition assessment, risk management, and strategic planning of capital investments in SWP electrical, mechanical, and civil infrastructure. Specifically, the Asset Management Program is charged with improving the plant and civil condition assessment programs, applying new analytical tools to prioritize long-term investments, and implementing maintenance management strategies to optimize the lifecycle of the SWP assets.

### **Control: Division of Safety of Dams**

The California Water Code (Water Code) entrusts dam safety regulatory power to DWR, who delegates the authority to the Division of Safety of Dams (DSOD). DSOD provides oversight to the design, construction, and maintenance of over 1,200 non-federally owned jurisdictional sized dams in California. DSOD ensures dam safety by reviewing and approving of new dam construction and the enlargement, repair, alteration, and removal of existing dams; performing independent analyses and risk studies to understand dam and appurtenant structures performance under varying loading conditions; overseeing construction to ensure work is being performed in accordance with the approved plans and specifications; inspecting each dam and cycling of its gates and valves in accordance with the frequency required in the Water Code to ensure they are performing as intended and are not developing issues; and reviewing and approving of dam owner's inundation maps for emergency preparedness for all dams except those related with a low downstream hazard potential.

### **Risk: Climate Change and Natural Hazard Impacts**

The impacts of climate change could contribute to more - or more severe - natural disasters, which could affect SWP and State Plan of Flood Control infrastructure. Increases in

temperature have already decreased the Sierra snowpack and in turn are changing runoff patterns. The mountain snowpack provides as much as a third of California's water supply by accumulating snow during our wet winters and releasing it slowly during dry springs and summers. Warmer temperatures will melt the snow faster and earlier, making it more challenging to store and use throughout the dry season.

Climate change is also expected to contribute to more variable weather patterns. More weather variability can lead to more prolonged and severe droughts and floods, which present challenges to California's water supply and public safety. As one example, rising sea level will bring more salt water into the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta. To repel the salinity, more freshwater may need to be released through the Delta, potentially decreasing the amount of water available for people, farms, and the environment.

### **Control: Climate Action Plan**

DWR is implementing a Climate Action Plan (CAP), which includes a Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Emissions Reduction Plan designed to reduce DWR's GHG emissions to 60 percent below 1990 levels by 2030, and achieve carbon neutrality by 2035. The large reduction in GHG emissions is due to changing power supplies to cleaner and renewable sources and increasing the energy efficiency of water pumps and generators. The CAP also includes a Vulnerability Assessment and Adaptation Plan, which addresses the climate changes already here and those that are projected.

### **Control: Modernizing SWP Facilities**

DWR is modernizing its SWP facilities across the State through a risk-informed strategic asset management approach. This effort consists of identifying and proactively addressing potential top risks that could impact the functionality of the SWP. To protect and preserve the long-term viability of the SWP, modernization actions may include improvements to existing facilities and potential infrastructure expansion. Some current modernization initiatives include, but are not limited to, Castaic Dam Modernization, California Aqueduct Subsidence Rehabilitation, Fire and Physical Security Modernization Projects, and Delta Conveyance. These efforts are at various stages of study, permitting, design, and construction.

### **Risk: Workforce Management**

DWR could be facing a lack of qualified staff resources to accomplish its mission. DWR, like all State agencies, is facing difficulties recruiting new employees, as well as the loss of years of experience and expertise as large numbers of Department employees reach retirement age. The State's lengthy and complicated hiring practices and compensation often makes it difficult for DWR to hire personnel in specialized fields, which presents a risk in carrying out critical operations. Also, the retirement eligibility for Department employees indicates that the Department is faced with a critical challenge to ensure the right staff with the right qualifications are prepared to assume leadership positions at the right time to achieve our mission. By January 2024, 10.5 percent of employees will be eligible to retire, and by 2029, 23.25 percent will be eligible. Additionally, DWR management continually monitors the

vacancy rate because it is one of the key indicators used to predict future gaps in the workforce. As of November 2023, DWR's current vacancy rate is 12.9 percent.

### **Control: Workforce Planning**

DWR continues to update a workforce plan, which details several strategies to attract, develop, and retain the quality workforce essential to accomplishing the goals and mission of the Department. The following are some strategies that are in progress:

1. Increasing recruitment efforts amongst students.
2. Enhancing the existing student assistant program for participants and supervisors.
3. Developing a DWR employment brand.
4. Enhancing a leadership skills training program for employees to prepare them for leadership positions.
5. Expanding the existing Mentor Program.
6. Continuing to offer hybrid work as an available work option where operationally feasible.

DWR continues to offer hybrid work as a work option (where operationally feasible) and provides ongoing resources to management to help support and engaging and fulfilling experience for employees when at the work site or working remotely.

DWR is continuing its Emerging Leaders Community and Emerging Leaders Cohort where emerging leaders can connect, share information, and received training. Participants also have the opportunity to engage with and learn from existing leaders. During November 2023, DWR hosted another Leadership Week series open to all Department employees. Additionally, in the past year, DWR attended multiple college, university, and high school career events, and created new recruitment materials.

### **Control: Resource Management**

DWR is currently taking the following steps to manage vacancies:

1. Provides monthly vacancy reports to DWR supervisors and managers for monitoring their Divisions and Offices conduct reviews of their vacancies to best align existing resources with organizational needs on a continuous basis.
2. Conducts regular Executive management review of vacancies to ensure program priorities are addressed with available positions. Executive management manages program resources in alignment with program and Department priorities.
3. Reconciles internal position database with the State Controller's Office (SCO) position roster
4. Reconciles Schedule 8 every year in coordination with the Department of Finance and
5. Continues to be an active participant on various civil service improvement task forces and working groups to improve recruitment and retention.

### **Control: Succession Planning**

DWR is in the process of updating its Succession Plan with the goal of implementing strategic actions to identify and develop potential leaders who can move into leadership roles when they become vacant. DWR has started the process of updating its Succession Plan and is also providing specific guidance to programs for development of individual program succession plans and strategies.

DWR launched its first official (non-pilot) cohort of the Mentor Program in October 2023. The program paired mentors and mentees based on skills and goals. DWR is continuing its Emerging Leaders Community and Emerging Leaders Cohort. The Emerging Leaders Community offers opportunities for all employees to learn more about leadership skills and competencies. Participants are provided various resources, learning prompts, and engagement opportunities throughout each month. The Emerging Leaders Cohort is a six-month program designed to provide opportunities for a small group of exceptional rank-and-file staff to develop their leadership skills, connect with other emerging leaders throughout the Department, and prepare to promote to their first leadership position.

### **CONCLUSION**

The Department of Water Resources strives to reduce the risks inherent in our work and accepts the responsibility to continuously improve by addressing newly recognized risks and revising risk mitigation strategies as appropriate. I certify our internal control and monitoring systems are adequate to identify and address current and potential risks facing the organization.

**Karla A. Nemeth, Director**

CC: California Legislature [Senate, Assembly]  
California State Auditor  
California State Library  
California State Controller  
Director of California Department of Finance  
Secretary of California Government Operations Agency