



Priorities for California's Water

Background

In October 2019, the Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC) released a report outlining California's water management challenges and their top priorities for addressing those challenges. "[Priorities for California's Water](#)" highlights actions to prepare California's water systems and natural environment for our changing climate.

Key elements include:

“Modernizing the water grid: addressing infrastructure weaknesses and gaps—coupled with more flexible management—is essential for reducing the costs of future droughts and floods;

Preparing for changing supply and demand: Developing a portfolio of cost-effective supply and demand tools can help California weather droughts, accommodate population growth, and bring groundwater basins into balance;

Providing safe drinking water: More stable funding has been secured to improve quality and reliability in small, mainly rural poor communities, but more work is needed to tackle this challenge.

Reducing fire risk in headwater forests: The state's mountain forests—a major source of water—are in poor health. Active management can reduce the risk of extreme wildfire and maintain the benefits that forests provide;

Improving the health of freshwater ecosystems: a new approach to managing water for freshwater ecosystems and species can help them adapt to a warming climate.”

(Source: PPIC “Priorities for California's Water,” Introduction)

In January 2020, Governor Newsom released the draft Water Resilience Portfolio. The Portfolio included more than 100 separate actions for state, regional, and local entities to help ensure that water systems will be able to support the State in a warming climate. The Portfolio uses a four-prong approach to achieving resilience: maintain and diversify water supplies; protect and enhance natural systems; build connections; and be prepared. Resilience will be achieved not by state directives, but by regions addressing their unique challenges. A final Portfolio is expected soon.

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The draft Resilience Portfolio tasked the Commission with assessing the role of the State in financing regional conveyance infrastructure. Several recommendations within the PPIC report address conveyance and will be of interest to the Commission. In addition, the Commission's Strategic Plan includes goals and objectives related to improving regional water management to achieve resiliency. The PPIC report recommends investing in conveyance for repairs and upgrades to manage floodwaters. It also calls for integrated regional infrastructure operations (e.g., forecast-informed reservoir operations) and connecting water and land-use planning. This briefing will provide the Commission with an opportunity to discuss prioritizing the work, and how the State could support regions as they take on these significant challenges.

Alvar Escriva-Bou is a research fellow at PPIC's Water Policy Center, and one of the authors of the Priorities report. He will present PPIC's findings and address whether and how their recommendations align with the actions included in the draft Water Resilience Portfolio.

This is an information item.

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