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Commission Briefings Address How to Prepare State Water Project for Climate Extremes

The California Water Commission will launch its 2022 State Water Project briefings at the February 16 meeting by introducing this year's theme: Preparing for climate extremes – ensuring a reliable State Water Project to meet the challenges of drought, flood, and wildfire.

The Commission will hear a high-level overview of how the Department of Water Resources (DWR) is preparing for drought, flooding, and wildfires, followed by three presentations: the continuing evolution of forecasting practices that DWR uses to understand the climate system and make decisions about water management; an update on the Delivery Capability Report, which provides information about the existing and future delivery capability of the State Water Project (SWP) under both average and drought conditions; and drought actions being taken in 2022, along with lessons learned from 2021's drought management.

Planned, constructed, and operated by DWR, the SWP is the largest state-built water and power generator and delivery infrastructure in the nation, providing a water supply for more than 27 million Californians and 750,000 acres of farmland, as well as flood control, power generation, fish and wildlife protection, and recreational opportunities. The role of the SWP is more critical than ever and will continue to be hugely important for supplying water for agriculture, urban areas, and ecosystems in a changing climate. It is generally accepted that, under a changing climate, California will experience bigger floods and more extreme droughts. At almost 60 years old, the SWP requires innovative solutions to meet the challenges of the 21st century, especially how it operates in these more extreme scenarios brought on by a changing climate.

“We are already seeing the impacts of climate change to our water supply system in the form of higher temperatures, more extreme precipitation, and changing runoff patterns, and we have to plan for that,” said Andrew Schwarz, DWR's Climate Action Coordinator for the SWP. “The State Water Project is planning several enhancements to our Delivery Capability Report that will provide additional clear, actionable information about how climate change is impacting SWP deliveries now and in the future.”

As required by the Water Code, the Commission conducts an annual review on the progress of the construction and operation of the SWP, focusing on how the SWP adapts and responds to hydrological extremes expected with climate change, restores critical ecosystems, and addresses aging infrastructure. The Commission reports its findings and recommendations to DWR and the Legislature. This briefing will serve to inform the Commission in preparation for the 2022 annual review.

“The State Water Project is the essential water backbone of our state,” said Commission Chair Teresa Alvarado. “In addition to maximizing its effectiveness and efficiency, we must also improve how the SWP infrastructure stores, moves, and shares water more flexibly in order to respond to climate extremes and operate a more resilient system.”

Future 2022 briefings will explore the financial and logistical challenges associated with a changing climate; the impacts of drought, flood, and wildfire to SWP beneficiaries; and an update on SWP construction projects in 2022.

The California Water Commission will conduct its February 16 meeting remotely. At the same time, the Commission remains committed to conducting its business in an open and transparent manner. To learn how you can comment, and to view the full agenda, visit cwc.ca.gov/meetings.

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The nine-member California Water Commission uses its public forum to explore water management issues from multiple perspectives and to formulate recommendations to advise the director of the California Department of Water Resources, and as appropriate, the California Natural Resources Agency, the Governor and Legislature on ways to improve water planning and management in response to California’s changing hydrology. As required by Water Code section 165, the Commission conducts an annual review of the construction and operation of the State Water Project. For more information regarding the California Water Commission visit cwc.ca.gov.