



## Drought Strategies: Presentation of Draft White Paper

### Introduction

The California Water Commission has completed its investigation into strategies to protect communities and fish and wildlife in the event of drought and has produced a draft drought strategies white paper. To gather information about drought strategies, the Commission hosted expert panels at Commission meetings; conducted research by reviewing literature and speaking with drought and water management experts from California and other Western states, Australia, Israel, and Chile; hosted two series of Tribal small-group discussions; convened a drought working group and developed a set of preliminary drought strategies; conducted outreach and made presentations to diverse interest groups; hosted three public workshops; and worked closely with State agencies. All of the information and feedback received throughout this process has been considered during the drafting of the drought strategies white paper.

The Commission's drought work supports Water Resilience Portfolio Action 26.3. In December 2021, the Secretaries for Agriculture, Environmental Protection, and Natural Resources asked the Commission to use its public forum to investigate potential strategies to protect communities and fish and wildlife in the event of drought. The [Secretaries' letter to the Commission](#) was sent as State agencies were managing the impacts of two years of severe drought and preparing for a third. Starting in December 2022, a stream of atmospheric river storms ended the drought that had begun in 2020 – and triggered destructive floods. In the context of this weather whiplash, the Commission has fulfilled the Secretaries' request.

The Commission's work on drought is forward-looking. The Commission's focus is to anticipate and prepare for the next drought by building on work underway in California. The Commission's work intends to inform the Secretaries as they prepare for and navigate future droughts and to position the State to better protect fish and wildlife and communities.

Commission staff will present the draft drought strategies white paper at this meeting. Commission staff will incorporate feedback received from the Commission and the public to produce a final draft of the white paper that will be presented to the Commission at the January 2024 meeting.

### Background

On July 28, 2020, the California Natural Resources Agency, California Environmental Protection Agency, and the California Department of Food and Agriculture issued the final [Water Resilience Portfolio](#) (portfolio) in response to Governor Newsom's Executive Order N-10-19, which calls for a "set of actions to meet California water needs through the 21st century." The portfolio outlines a broad suite of actions designed to move the state toward water resilience. The portfolio includes Action 26.3: Develop strategies to protect communities and fish and

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wildlife in the event of drought lasting at least six years. Action 26.3 is assigned to the California Natural Resources Agency and the California Environmental Protection Agency; the State Water Resources Control Board, Department of Water Resources, Department of Fish and Wildlife, and Department of Food and Agriculture represent these agencies. Action 26.3 is embedded in a section of the portfolio that is focused on preparation for a changing climate, which includes actions designed to help regions prepare for inevitable drought.

In a letter dated December 14, 2021, the Secretaries for Natural Resources, Environmental Protection, and Food and Agriculture requested that the Commission assist with this action by educating itself about potential strategies for managing drought and delivering a proposed set of investments and policies that would better position the state to manage severely constrained water supplies. The Commission is accomplished this work by leading a thorough and inclusive public dialog, similar to the Commission's recent efforts to assess a state role in financing climate-resilient conveyance and in supporting locally driven, in-basin groundwater trading programs that protect natural resources, small- and medium-sized farms, and disadvantaged communities. The Commission coordinated with other agencies and developed a [framework](#) to advance its work without disrupting 2022 drought response efforts. The Commission's white paper is the culmination of its drought work and describes a set of strategies to protect communities and fish and wildlife in the event of drought that agency decision makers can draw on when considering future policies and financial investments.

The Commission's work on long-term drought will implement Goal One of the Strategic Plan, which calls on the Commission to "serve as a primary public forum for the discussion of improving water management policy to assist regions in achieving climate resiliency ... including those actions of the Water Resilience Portfolio assigned to the Commission."

### **Meeting Overview**

Assistant Executive Officer Laura Jensen will present the draft drought strategies white paper. The Commission will take comments from the public, and then have an opportunity to ask questions and share their thoughts on the draft document. This is an informational item.

### **Contact**

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