

# Accelerating Multi-Benefit Groundwater Recharge in the Sacramento Valley

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## SUMMARY:

NCWA's member agencies have a strong interest in accelerating the pace and scale of multi-benefit groundwater recharge projects and want to partner more deeply with state agencies to achieve this goal.

## State and Local Leaders Have Worked Together to Develop Groundwater Sustainability Plans

- Local agencies with water managers and stakeholders have shaped a vision in the Sacramento Valley for the sustainable management of groundwater.
- State resource officials have worked with local managers and interested conversation groups on a shared vision to support the development of pragmatic and responsive plans that meet the letter and the intent of SGMA.
- The State, particularly the Department of Water Resources, provided essential financial support, technical assistance and thought partnership throughout the planning process.
- The State, particularly the SWRCB, has worked with districts interested in temporary diversion permits to experiment with using high flows for groundwater recharge.
- The State has issued Executive Orders, developed the Flood-MAR program and expedited permits – all to encourage multi-benefit recharge projects.
- In turn, NCWA's leaders have articulated and fostered a culture of [Ridgetop to River mouth water stewardship](#) that is predicated on slowing runoff to recapture the benefits of water on the landscape, including groundwater recharge.
- NCWA has incorporated groundwater management in drought planning and prioritized 1) safe drinking water for communities; 2) groundwater recharge; 3) surface water and groundwater interaction; 4) alignment of local, regional state and federal needs. (See: [A Pathway for the Future: Sustainable Groundwater Management in the Sacramento Valley.](#))

## The Sacramento Valley Can Show the Way Forward on Groundwater Recharge

- Multi-benefit recharge projects are essential to helping the Sacramento Valley adapt to climate change and avoid undesirable results, such as subsidence and groundwater dependent ecosystems.
- The Sacramento Valley has more groundwater dependent ecosystems and so habitat threats/benefits are greater in the Sacramento Valley.
- The increasing frequency and duration of droughts is already increasing subsidence, and leaders want to reverse that trend before damage is done to infrastructure and aquifers.
- Multi-benefit recharge will significantly improve the potential for Voluntary Agreements to improve the health and ecological value of streams and rivers while mitigating the impact on the farm economy and rural communities.
- The Sacramento Valley has the greatest potential to quickly recover from the drought – with proactive and effective management. Greater resiliency in the Sacramento Valley also increases resiliency for other regions dependent on Sacramento Valley water.
- By accelerating recharge projects in the Sacramento Valley, the State will develop the capacities to better support recharge projects in drier parts of California where projects are likely to be more difficult.
- According to the Department of Water Resources, the Sacramento region has 480,000 acre-feet of capacity for groundwater recharge and Yolo County has room to recharge 1 MAF (which would bring Yolo back to June 1998 groundwater levels (Yolo GSP 2-60). A preliminary review of potential recharge projects would advance or help implement 20 of the Water Resilience Portfolio's action items.

## The State and the Sacramento Valley Can Work Together to Achieve Pace and Scale



### Funding Coordination

Develop a mechanism for state departments to help local project proponents identify all of the state and federal funding streams that can support aspects of multi-benefit projects, and then coordinate state approvals for those projects.

- This process also will help to identify critical gaps in funding to inform the Newsom Administration's and Legislature's budget priorities.
- This process also would identify where changes in statute or regulations would enable local project proponents to pursue multi-benefit projects over single-benefit projects.
- The Administration may want to seek statutory authority similar to the [federal Performance Partnership Pilots](#), which gave federal agencies the authority to waive funding rules when doing so advanced the program's goals.
- The process would also help the State identify priorities for federal funding and secure those funds from the Infrastructure and Jobs Act and other federal sources.



## The State and the Sacramento Valley Can Work Together to Achieve Pace and Scale

Continued



### Water Rights

Accelerate and expand the interagency team working to review the SWRCB's water needs assessment process to re-engineer the permitting process. ([WRP Implementation Report Action 3-2](#))

#### [Report Action 3-2](#)

- Among the options: Issue a temporary permit for the length of the permanent water right review process.
- Consider conditional permits that allow for data gathering and learning prior to a final water right permit. This would unburden the water rights permit from estimating impacts and benefits to crafting permits based on documented impacts and benefits.



### Regulations

Apply the Cutting Green Tape initiative to recharge projects and evolve it to provide the same functionality of the [Federal Permitting Improvement Steering Council](#),

which coordinates federal agency review and approval of environmental approvals.

For more information, see [Groundwater beneath Sacramento Valley offers hope in dry times](#).



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