

Ensuring Access to Safe Drinking Water for all California Communities

Northern California Water Association (NCWA) is steadfast in its commitment to ensuring that all Californians have access to safe, clean, affordable, and accessible water. Since the “human right to water” was established in state law in 2012, significant strides have been made toward this goal. NCWA will continue to support the development and implementation of a comprehensive policy approach to enable continued progress in this crucial area. Today, 98% of California communities are in good standing with safe, clean water, and ongoing efforts are successfully bringing more communities into compliance. Since the inception of this program, 41 communities have transitioned from failing to now meet the health-based standards of the state and federal Safe Drinking Water Acts, demonstrating the effectiveness of these collective efforts.



NCWA will continue to support the development and implementation of a comprehensive policy approach to enable continued progress toward ensuring that all communities have access to safe drinking water.

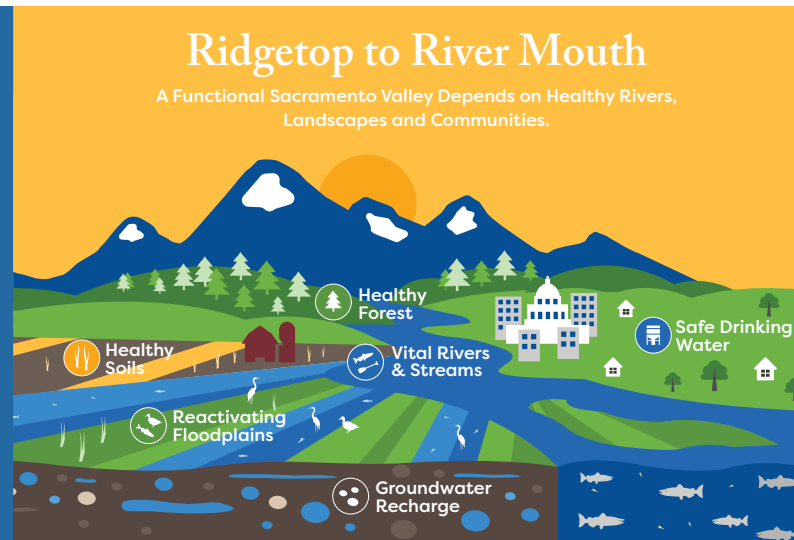
NCWA Chair Bryce Lundberg



NCWA
Northern California Water Association

NCWA's commitment to vitalizing healthy rivers, landscapes and communities in the Sacramento Valley:

- Ensures communities have access to Safe Drinking Water: The North State Drinking Water Solutions Network
- Energizes rivers and creeks
- Scales up the activation of our landscapes

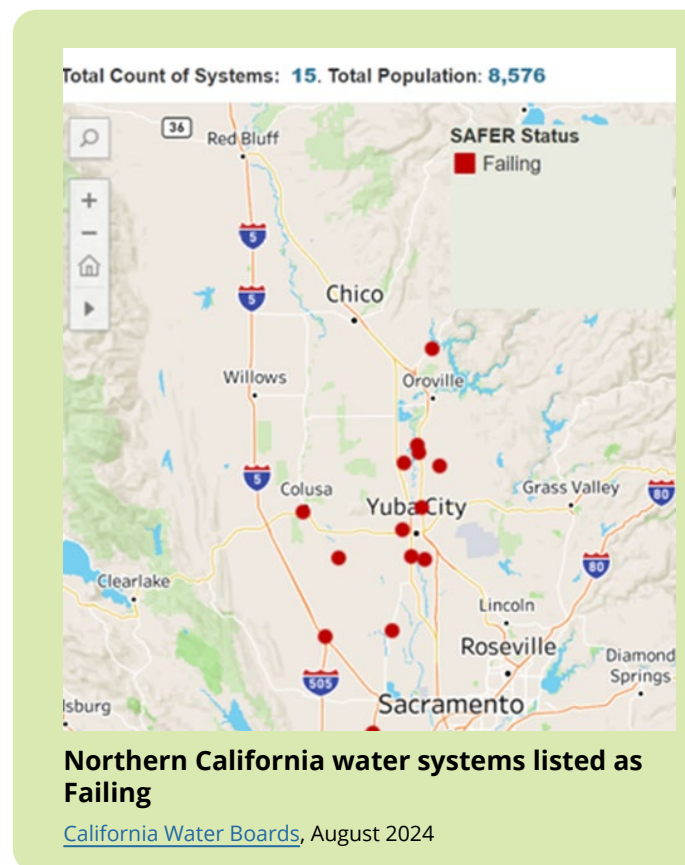


NCWA employs a comprehensive approach to address the diverse technical, managerial, and financial challenges that local communities face in providing safe and reliable drinking water throughout the Sacramento Valley and other parts of the state. Elements of this comprehensive approach include:

● Addressing Specific Community Needs through Local & State Partnerships and the North State Drinking Water Solutions Network

Through its Board of Directors, representing local water agencies, counties, and rural communities, NCWA is committed to ongoing efforts in the Sacramento Valley to help non-compliant water systems progress toward meeting all relevant state and federal standards. To further these efforts, NCWA established the North State Drinking Water Solutions Network (Network), which plays a pivotal role in ensuring safe drinking water access across the Sacramento River Basin. The Network serves as a collaborative forum where stakeholders share information, coordinate activities, and address the specific challenges of disadvantaged communities.

With a particular emphasis on disadvantaged communities—those that face unique socioeconomic challenges, as outlined [in this document](#)—the Network's sustained focus has significantly reduced the number of water systems listed by the State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board) as out of compliance. Since the Network began, 41 communities that were once on the failing list



have successfully addressed their issues and returned to compliance. The continued success of these initiatives, leveraging both state-level resources and local expertise, aims to ensure that all communities in the Sacramento Valley will be brought into full compliance in the coming years, with a long-term goal to ensure all communities have access to safe drinking water!

Leaders in the Sacramento Valley are committed to advancing a comprehensive approach to expand and ensure access to safe drinking water. A detailed list of available programs and resources can be found in this [Resources Available to Assist Local Communities with Water Shortages](#) document, which outlines state, non-profit, and federal programs, as well as coordinated local outreach efforts. These resources serve as critical tools for small communities working to secure safe drinking water, especially during dry years, in the Sacramento Valley. Additionally, the State Water Board's [2024 SAFER Drinking Water Needs Assessment Fact Sheet](#) provides an overview of the state's drinking water systems health and highlights ongoing efforts to address the challenges of providing safe drinking water to all Californians. These resources serve as critical tools for small communities working to secure safe drinking water, especially during dry years, in the Sacramento Valley.

● **Protecting Water Quality through Existing Regulatory Programs**

The Sacramento Valley, through its water quality coalitions, has been implementing waste discharge requirements through the Irrigated Lands Regulatory Program and Basin Plan Amendment with a goal of [Ensuring High Quality Water in the Sacramento River Basin for Communities, Ecosystems, and Farms](#). Elements such as on-farm drinking water well testing and development of Groundwater



Providing clean, dependable water supplies to communities, agriculture, and industry while restoring and maintaining the health of our watersheds is both necessary and possible..."

Governor Gavin Newsom



Quality Protection Targets, have helped advance the understanding of where to prioritize actions. These groundwater quality elements and others have and will continue to improve water quality in the region, including to help ensure that safe and clean water is fully protected in the future.

For a closer look at these efforts, [watch this video](#) about the state of water quality in the Sacramento River Basin. More details are available from the [Sacramento Valley Water Quality Coalition](#) and the [California Rice Commission](#).

In Yolo County, managing nitrate levels in groundwater is a key focus due to its impact on drinking water quality. The Woodland-Davis Clean Water Agency was formed in 2009 to construct and manage a Regional Water Treatment Facility (RWTF) that provides a sustainable, high-quality surface water supply for the Cities of Woodland and Davis, and UC Davis. Today, the Agency serves more than two-thirds of the urban population of Yolo County. Additionally, the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board has a Nitrate Control Program, which aims to reduce nitrate leaching to groundwater to ensure safe drinking water to those groundwater users, either domestic well owners, or state small systems. Through the CV-SALTS Basin Plan process, dischargers in areas with high nitrate levels work together to develop management zones and implement strategies to identify and provide drinking water to those impacted, as well as implement strategies that reduce nitrate loading so that ongoing discharges do not degrade groundwater quality. The Yolo County subbasin between Cache and Putah Creeks, was identified by the Basin Plan as a Priority 2 Groundwater Basin. Work has begun on development of a Management Zone. These strategies may include providing alternative water supplies, installing water treatment systems, and collaborating with local stakeholders to ensure that nitrate levels are kept within safe limits for all residents.

● Improving Access to Surface Water

For many communities, surface water provides an essential source of high-quality water supply, particularly in areas where groundwater resources are unreliable or of poor quality. In the Sacramento Valley, a number of communities have expanded their access to surface water as part of programs to provide better quality water to their residents. Preserving and enhancing the ability of communities of all sizes across the state to access surface water is key to expanding access to safe drinking water. NCWA will continue to aggressively protect surface water



supplies for local communities and we encourage regulatory agencies, such as the State Water Board, to recognize this important dynamic and help enhance local communities' access to surface water supplies through their various plans and authorities.

A notable example is the Woodland-Davis Clean Water Agency project. Driven by the need for a sustainable, high-quality water supply, the Woodland-Davis Clean Water Agency project aimed to address deteriorating groundwater quality, which could no longer meet state drinking water and wastewater discharge regulations. Completed in 2016, the project involved constructing a Sacramento River intake, a regional water treatment facility, and pipelines to deliver treated water to Woodland, Davis, and UC Davis. This shift to treated surface water has improved drinking water quality, reduced appliance wear, and ensured compliance with wastewater regulations. Additionally, aquifer storage and recovery wells in Woodland now store treated surface water for use during dry periods, maximizing water availability throughout the year. In years when surface supplies are not available, other Sacramento Valley water suppliers transfer surface water to Woodland-Davis to ensure it has access to surface supplies.

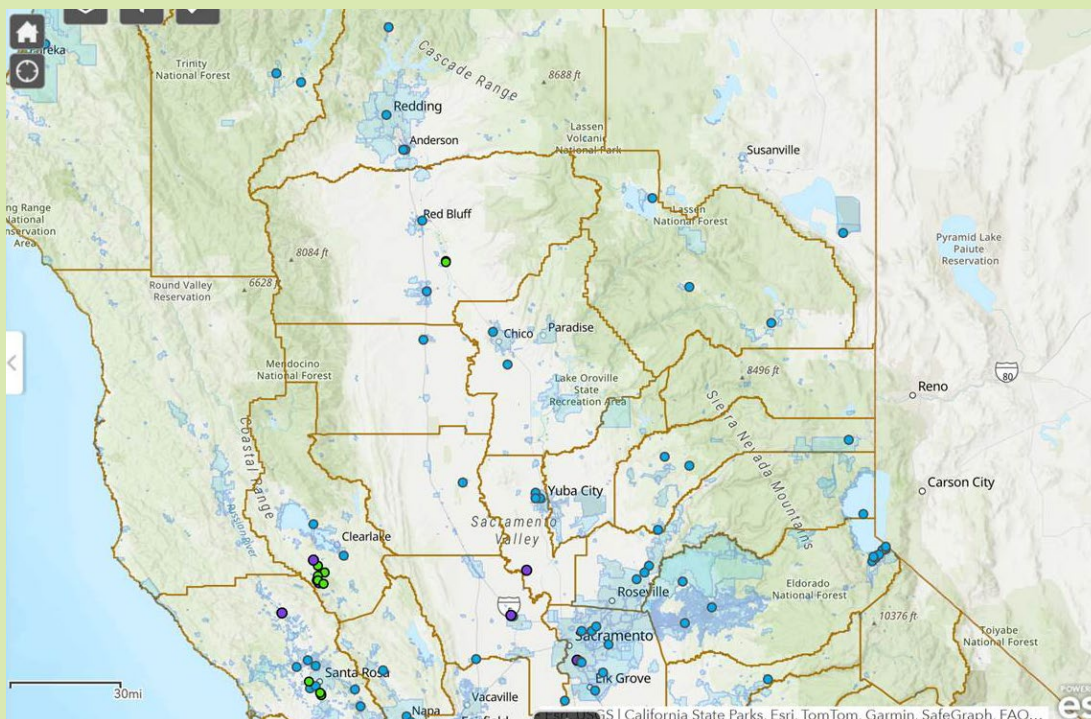


- **Advancing Innovative New Policies that Empower Effective Local Agencies (i.e., Consolidation)**

Effective local agencies are key to the development and implementation of sustainable drinking water solutions. California can make additional progress by empowering effective local agencies in the areas of the state that need assistance. Local agencies in several parts of Northern California continue efforts to consolidate water systems to provide more effective delivery of water through larger economies of scale, expanded ratepayer bases, operational efficiencies, and enhanced funding opportunities. In the past several years, new laws have also enhanced the state's authority to mandate the consolidation of systems serving disadvantaged communities that consistently fail to provide access to safe drinking water into adjacent water systems. The appropriate use of this authority can help deliver drinking water solutions to some impacted communities.

Placer County Water Agency's (PCWA) approach to consolidation demonstrates how local agencies can improve water service. Managing over 120 water systems, PCWA has used consolidation to enhance service delivery, supported by the Safe and Affordable Funding for Equity and Resilience program. A 2022 regional study highlighted the need for better interconnection among 19 small water systems along Interstate 80, including some disadvantaged communities. By linking these smaller systems to

larger, more reliable sources, PCWA is able to boost water quality, operational efficiency, and regulatory compliance. This effort not only benefits underserved areas but also helps existing customers by distributing costs and optimizing water service across the county. There are other consolidation efforts in the Sacramento Valley. See the consolidation map below, and visit the [State Water Board's web portal](#) to view all consolidation projects currently underway throughout the state.



Through all of our efforts to vitalize healthy rivers, landscapes and communities in the Sacramento Valley—NCWA has found that locally-developed collaborative solutions provide the most successful path to addressing water management challenges.



As we move forward, we would welcome any thoughts, suggestions or ideas that will help advance these important efforts to ensure access to safe drinking water for all communities. Please provide your thoughts to bruceh@norcalwater.org.