

LEGISLATIVE SUMMARY

OCTOBER 2026



October 1, 2026

Letter from the Director



Each year's Legislative Session has defining moments, and the 2026 Legislative Session was no different from its predecessors. Elected officials from across the state grappled with the affordability crisis, health care and new housing development, all of which were compounded by the increasing effects of our changing weather patterns. The most contentious battles between Legislators and lobbyists this year rested between a need and desire for review and oversight across programs, and the recognition that the associated costs had a clear and undeniable economic impact for priority natural resources issues.

Governor Newsom's last session prior to his expected run for the 2028 Presidential Election threw another complex dynamic into the mix, as the Administration sought to deliver big on promises the Governor made throughout his two terms. This including the much-anticipated Sacramento-San Joaquin Bay Delta Plan Update and additional measures to increase California's preparedness for a changing climate in his Strategy for a Hotter, Drier Future. It also included a contentious battle over a wildfire package that resulted in tense back-and-forth with the Legislature and threats of a special session to tackle the growing challenges of wildfire response and preparedness.

Despite the many heightened issues the Legislature faced in the natural resources space, one thing was certain this year: the State is in critical need of solutions that contribute together to the affordable, economically powerful and climate-smart California that we all envision and work towards. Fortunately, the Sacramento Valley's greatest assets in these times are our leadership and drive to implement workable solutions, our efforts to enhance collaboration, and our unwavering commitment to care for our Valley for its future generations.

At Northern California Water this legislative session was about bringing our shared [Vision for a Vibrant Future in the Sacramento Valley](#) to the State-wide stage. In our advocacy on budget, water and agricultural policy, and even in our own co-sponsored bill AB 2026 (Aguiar-Curry), Northern California Water brought our Valley's spirit to the table and produced real thoughtful solutions to the State's most pressing natural resource problems. Our work connected the Legislature (and most importantly, their Capitol Staffers) to the work of our farmers, water managers, engineers and community leaders. As you will see below, we sponsored and supported bills helping our region, we opposed bills that are counter to our work, and we work with many partners to improve bills through the process. For all the bills, we showcased the incredible innovation of our region and established to the Capitol that when Sacramento needs solutions, our Valley has them in spades.

I have immense gratitude for our legislative delegation and for their work to advance our solutions and our requests forward with their colleagues, and to the many managers at Northern California Water who

contributed their time and resources to our Legislative Priorities. It was truly a pleasure this year to work with you on our shared Vision, and to represent you to the Legislators who are eager to see our Vision advance with us. It is these relationships that make our Valley unique, and this perspective that will see us into a bright and vibrant future in the Sacramento Valley.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized 'K' followed by a large, sweeping loop and a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Kam Bezdek
NCWA Legislative Affairs Director

PPIC Survey: Californians and the Environment

The Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC) released a survey in July of 2026 entitled Californians and their Environment, which detailed the results of a statewide poll regarding election results, the economy, energy policies and climate and natural resources policies. We always appreciate these surveys, as they help us better understand public sentiment in California's population centers on the many issues we face in California. The survey found a number of interesting data points regarding water resources and projects:

- “Most Californians choose either **wildfires (19%), global warming (16%), government overregulation (14%), or water supply (14%)** as the most important environmental issue facing California today.”
- “Seventy-three percent of California likely voters **say they would vote “yes” on a November ballot initiative to amend the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) to expedite environmental reviews for housing, transportation, water, health, and clean energy projects.** (Note: the Proposition 45 ballot title and label were not available at the time of the survey launch.)”
 - Additionally, “Ninety-one percent of likely voters say it is important **(64% very, 27% somewhat) to vote on ballot measures that will make laws and change public policies about environmental issues** in California.”
- “Majorities of adults (55%) and likely voters (57%) believe that stricter environmental regulations in California are worth the cost, while **43 percent of both adults and likely voters say these regulations cost too many jobs and hurt the economy.**”

The survey demonstrates that the public remains largely divided on the role of environmental review relative to its cost and mirrors a very similar discussion in the Legislature from this past session: while many Californians see value in strict environmental review, others across the State either cannot afford to or do not desire to pay for it. As we expect this dynamic to play out as voters cast their ballots this November, Northern California Water looks forward to working with the elected officials in the next session to develop cost-effective and smart water management solutions across the Sacramento Valley and statewide.

For access to the entire survey, please click [here](#).

AB 2026 (Aguiar-Curry): Groundwater Recharge Permitting

At Northern California Water, we invest in every opportunity to bring our Valley's knowledge and priorities to the center stage. This year, we were pleased to work with the Regional Water Authority (RWA) and with Majority Leader Aguiar-Curry (D-Winters) on AB 2026, a proposal that would have provided the State with the tools to scale up our groundwater recharge efforts while protecting downstream users, the State and Federal Projects, communities and the environment.

While our proposal did not ultimately move forward after it entered the Senate Committee on Appropriations, it was a pleasure to work with MBK Engineers and our many partners to develop solutions never-before discussed in the Legislature. We are incredibly grateful to Majority Leader Aguiar-Curry and her staff for their hard work advancing AB 2026, and to the Regional Water Authority for their incredible partnership on this effort. We are also grateful to Kristin Sicke (General Manager, Yolo County Flood Control and Water Conservation District) and Lewis Bair (General Manager, Reclamation District 108) for their expert witness testimony to the many Assembly and Senate Committees for this bill.

See [here](#) for our Groundwater Recharge Packet, developed with MBK Engineers and Communications Director Joy Rust (NCWA) for this Legislative effort.

See [here](#) for our blog post in Maven's Notebook, Recharge the Valley, co-authored by Jim Mayer (YCFCWCD) and Michael Saunders (RWA).

PRIORITY LEGISLATION

Each year, Northern California Water analyzes introduced legislation and develops positions in alignment with our vision and organizational goals. This year, the development of our Vision for a Vibrant Future in the Sacramento Valley guided our advocacy efforts and position development across multiple issue areas within the Legislature.

Funding and Proposition 4

While Proposition 4 saw allocations from the last two fiscal years, it was originally passed without the standard exemption from the Administrative Procedures Act for bond funding, which meant that funding allocated in 2025 would not be available until 2028 and beyond for many agencies. Advocates in the climate space took action to ensure the timely dispersion of those funds to important programs across the climate sector.

AB 35 (Alvarez) – This measure would provide the necessary APA exemption to Proposition 4 funding for faster implementation. Northern California Water joined a broad, statewide coalition in support of this measure, as many of our members benefit from Proposition 4 funding. The Legislature passed this bill to the Governor's desk as an urgency measure, which was signed by Governor Newsom in July. As an urgency measure, this bill took effect immediately upon signature. For a copy of the coalition letter, please see [here](#).

Mutual Water Companies

SB 1417 (Perez) – This measure would prohibit a mutual water company from charging, issuing a bill, or otherwise seeking to hold tenants of shareholders responsible for the costs of water or its delivery. With our mutual water companies functioning differently than in other parts of the state, Northern California Water worked with our mutual water companies and others engaged with the author's office to ensure an adequate exemption for mutual water companies in the Sacramento Valley with agricultural deliveries. **The bill was signed by the Governor on September 30.**

Groundwater

Outside of AB 2026, there was limited groundwater legislation acted upon this session. In lieu of additional bills, advocates from across the groundwater space engaged with Northern California Water on our proposal, leading to intense discussion, more conversation and new partnerships with many interested organizations who wanted to advance recharge efforts across the state.

AB 1413 (Papan) – This bill would require a groundwater sustainability agency to, at least once every 7 years, review, and potentially update its sustainable yield and to solicit public input within that process. While this bill

continues to be highly divisive among the broader water and agriculture community, Northern California Water maintains a watch position and has worked with diverse parties on these important issues. The bill underwent significant amendment last year in the Senate Appropriations Committee and was made a two-year measure by the Author, who did not wish to pursue this bill any further in 2026.

Water Quality

With the coming update to the Sacramento-San Joaquin Bay Delta Water Quality Control Plan, water quality was also a contested issue in the Legislature this year. Northern California Water was pleased to work with other parties to support regional water quality initiatives and investments into the Safe and Affordable Funding for Equity and Resilience (SAFER) Program.

AB 2447 (Bauer-Kahan) – This measure would require the State Water Resources Control Board to require the regional boards to update the Irrigated Lands Program to reduce nitrogen waste discharges from irrigated agricultural areas. Northern California Water is pleased to work closely with the Irrigated Lands Program and the North State Drinking Water Solutions Network (NSDWSN). Northern California Water joined a broad coalition of agricultural and water interests in fierce opposition to this bill, which did not advance from the suspense file in the Assembly Committee on Appropriations.

SB 601 (Allen) – This measure would require the State Water Resources Control Board to adopt water quality control plans for nexus waters. Introduced in the 2025 session, this bill was taken up again in the Senate Committee on Appropriations. The coalition in opposition, of which NCWA was a member, successfully stalled this bill in the Senate before it could advance from the suspense file.

Water Rights

This session saw water rights legislation that sought to change the regulations at the State Water Board, which led to many conversations about the importance of due process and the role of emergency regulations that stemmed from last year's AB 263 (Rogers). Northern California Water was pleased to advocate fiercely for the protection of our water rights, which serve many beneficial uses across the Sacramento Valley and are a cornerstone of our Valley's communities, wetlands, and farms.

AB 2260 (Connolly) – This measure would extend the ability to obtain a right to appropriate water to small restoration use. Northern California Water worked closely with several conservation partners and MBK Engineers in supporting this measure, which unfortunately did not advance from the suspense file in the Assembly Committee on Appropriations.

AB 2630 (Bennett) – This measure would require that further regulations, specifically for water diversions, be adopted by the state board pursuant to these provisions be adopted as emergency regulations and remain ineffect until revised by the State Water Board and would exempt them from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Northern California Water and other water interests built a strong coalition in opposition to this measure, which was successfully stalled in the Assembly Committee on Natural Resources.

Tribal Water Bills

This session saw the introduction of two tribal water rights bills, AB 2218 (Kalra) and AB 1881 (Ramos), which carried on the efforts of previous legislation over the last several years. These bills introduced expansive and overreaching policies that went far beyond increased consultation with tribes on water supply projects, as well as existing efforts to preserve tribal beneficial uses. Northern California Water joined broad coalitions in opposition to both measures, due to their potential negative impact on the regulatory processes for many priority projects and programs including **Sites Reservoir** and the **Healthy Rivers and Landscapes Program**.

The Governor vetoed both of these measures on September 30. Northern California Water supports and uplifts the existing process to develop guidance at the State Water Board on tribal beneficial uses. We are also working with various tribes to help them with their water supplies and we look forward to continuing this work with the State Water Board and other interested parties. To learn more about this process, please click [here](#).

AB 2218 (Kalra): This bill would require the state government to support California Native Americans to maintain cultural and linguistic traditions, practice ecosystem stewardship, and engage in good faith government-to-government consultations with all California Native American tribes regarding policies that may affect tribal communities. (For the coalition opposition letter, see [here](#). For NCWA's letter, see [here](#)). See the veto message [here](#).

AB 1881 (Ramos): This bill would prohibit a governmental agency from substantially burdening a California Indian or California Native American tribe's exercise of religious beliefs or spiritual practices on state lands, including their access to and use of sacred sites and objects, and their ability to perform religious ceremonies and rites, even if the burden results from a rule of general applicability, unless the governmental agency demonstrates that application of the burden is in furtherance of a compelling governmental interest and is in the least restrictive means of furthering that interest. (For the coalition opposition letter, see [here](#)). See the veto message [here](#).

Wildlife and Habitat

Golden mussels, wetlands and several funding programs were at the center of many bills this legislative session. Northern California Water was pleased to be involved and supportive of several key pieces of legislation that we believed would make a positive difference to our members and partners looking to care for the Sacramento Valley for its future generations.

AB 1169 (J. Gonzalez) – This measure would require (not authorize) the Department of Fish and Wildlife to grant to non-profit conservation organizations as part of the Shared Habitat Alliance for Recreational Enhancement (SHARE) Program. This two-year bill was not taken up by the author in its second session.

AB 1772 (Papan) – This bill would express the intent of the legislature to address the spread of invasive species, specifically golden mussels. Northern California Water participated in the ACWA Golden Mussel Working Group, along with other key interested organizations, to provide feedback to the author's office and improve the language throughout the process. This measure did not advance from the suspense file in the Senate Committee on Appropriations.

AB 2032 (Ransom): Among other things, this measure would require the department's Invasive Species Program, through the Golden Mussel Task Force convened by the department, to develop and adopt, by April 1, 2027, best management practices for public and private agencies that operate water supply systems to control the spread of golden mussels, as specified, and would encourage those public and private agencies to comply with those best management practices. Northern California Water worked closely with water suppliers throughout California and was pleased to support this measure, **which was signed by Governor Newsom in late September.**

AB 1987 (Aguiar-Curry) – This measure would ensure that hunter-generated user fee revenues Waterfowl Management Areas are used solely for the operations and maintenance (O&M) of those lands by establishing a dedicated account and restricting the use of the revenues. Northern California Water was pleased to support this measure. **This measure was signed by Governor Newsom in late September.**

AB 2260 (Aguiar-Curry) – This measure would expand the territory of the Delta Conservancy to include counties in the Central Valley and Lake county. Northern California Water remained engaged with the author's office and sponsors throughout the legislative process, which ultimately saw this bill held in the Senate Committee on Appropriations.

AB 2045 (Connolly): This bill would repeal the January 2027 sunset date to extend the operation of the Habitat Restoration and Enhancement Act (HREA) indefinitely. Northern California Water was pleased to work with Sustainable Conservation and other to support this measure, **which was signed by the Governor in late September.**

AB 1551 (Krell): This measure was sponsored by the California Rice Commission and declared the commission to be necessary for maintaining a sufficient footprint of annual rice acreage to support the wildlife habitat objectives of the state. This measure affirmed years of hard work on the California Rice Footprint Report, and **was signed by Governor Newsom in late September.**

END OF SESSION BUDGET ALLOCATION

This year, Governor Newsom and the Legislature elected to defer its decisions on Proposition 4 and Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund (GGRF) funds to August amid tense budget negotiations in June. Northern California Water was among many advocates in the water space fighting for increased funding for our priority programs and projects, and was pleased to see Legislative Leadership prioritize funding that benefits our membership and partners.

Safe and Affordable Fund for Equity and Resilience

According to the State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB), the Safe and Affordable Fund for Equity and Resilience (SAFER) has provided \$50 million to 150 failing water systems, servicing a total of 9,456 households. Additionally, SAFER has provided over \$700 million in grants to address drinking water issues for small, disadvantaged communities throughout the state since its establishment in 2019. The SAFER Drinking Water Program has proven a critical resource for addressing the drinking water needs of areas in need of additional support and resources.

With the reauthorization of GGRF in 2025, SAFER was de-prioritized along with other programs to make room for additional discretionary funding that would be available to the state. Northern California Water was pleased to see the Legislature push back aggressively on the Administration's proposed funding cuts, resulting in a \$171M allocation to the program combined across Proposition 4, GGRF, and General Fund revenues. This funding is critical to our work in the North State Drinking Water Solutions Network. To read our Coalition's support letter, see [here](#). We reported on this progress at the North State Drinking Water Solutions Network at its meeting on September 10.

Proposition 4

Proposition 4 funds many key programs in the climate preparedness, water management and habitat restoration sectors. Northern California Water was pleased to see the following allocations in the FY 2026-2027 Budget which support our Vision for a Vibrant Future in the Sacramento Valley:

Surface Water and Flood Management

- Department of Water Resources
 - Dam Safety and Climate Resilience Local Assistance Program - \$12M
 - Flood Control Subventions Program - \$23.7M
 - State Plan of Flood Control - \$12.9M
 - Urban Flood Risk Reduction - \$109.1M
 - Systematic Flood Risk Reduction - \$24.1M

Groundwater

- Department of Water Resources
 - For the California Water Plan: groundwater recharge, storage and banking - \$78M
 - \$15.5M for recharge projects
 - \$50M for regional watershed and drought preparedness projects
 - \$8M for small farmers assistance for SGMA compliance

Habitat and Restoration

- Wildlife Conservation Board
 - Streamflow Enhancement - \$20M
 - To be allocated through WCB to CDFW: Fisheries Enhancement - \$39.1M
- Sacramento San Joaquin Delta Conservancy
 - Fish and wildlife resources - \$15.2M

Safe Drinking Water

- State Water Resources Control Board
 - Water Quality - \$263M
 - Water Recycling and Reuse - \$100M