

LEGISLATOR SPOTLIGHT

ASSEMBLYMEMBER CECILIA AGUIAR-CURRY

**Serving the following counties in
Northern California: Colusa, Lake,
Napa, Yolo, Sonoma**

In this Q&A, Assemblymember Cecilia Aguiar-Curry reflects on the water challenges and opportunities facing Northern California, grounded in her lifelong connection to agriculture, her role as Majority Leader, and her commitment to education and collaboration. She highlights priorities such as resilient infrastructure, water quality, and local engagement that are shaping the region and the state's water future.

Q: You represent California's 4th Assembly District, covering Napa, Lake, Yolo, Colusa, and part of Sonoma counties. What are the most pressing water-related challenges you hear from your constituents?



Aguiar-Curry:

Infrastructure, without question. Our canals are getting old, our levees and dams need attention, and we continue to face water supply issues. Whether it's aging conveyance systems, storage, or flood control, infrastructure is the number-one challenge across my district.

Q: You're co-owner of your family's walnut farm in Yolo County and grew up in western Yolo County. How has your agricultural background shaped your approach to water policy?

Aguiar-Curry:

I've been working in the fields since I was six years old. Agriculture has always been part of my life. My father was a high school agriculture teacher, and he taught me early on about the importance of soil—how it differs across California and how that affects water and crops.

Here in Northern California, we used to have beautiful loam soil, but over time it's become more clay-based, which holds water differently. That affects how water seeps into the ground and how crops grow. People often overlook that connection—soil health is central to how we manage water.

My family has always focused on rotating crops. We recently replaced older walnut trees with almonds, and that shift has been costly. Modern irrigation systems are far more advanced and expensive than the old days when we moved sprinkler pipes by hand. Now everything is automated and run through computers. Agriculture has changed dramatically, and adapting to that change

has shaped how I look at water policy—practical, science-based, and forward-looking.

Q: As Majority Leader since late 2023, you have responsibilities beyond your district—balancing statewide and caucus priorities. How do you thread the needle between local water needs and statewide water equity?

Aguiar-Curry:

Education is the key. What's good for rural California—my farmers and small towns—is often very different from what Los Angeles, San Diego, or even the Central Valley needs. You have to understand those differences, and the only way to do that is through education and experience.

That means getting colleagues out on tours—seeing projects firsthand, visiting farms, and talking with local agencies. Every time we bring new legislators into office, we have to start over. Last year, we had 20 new members. Many have never seen where water comes from. They think it just comes out of a hose.

That's why I host tours, to help my colleagues see what's really happening on the ground. Most people don't know agriculture. They don't understand there are big differences between each region's agricultural products, processes, and workforce. We've taken groups to Clear Lake, Sites Reservoir, and through the Yolo Bypass. Many of these tours are organized with Northern California Water Association (NCWA) members, including partners like Montna Farms, who do an incredible job



Asm. Cecilia Aguiar-Curry and Asm. James Gallagher holding Resolution ACR-207 establishing Sacramento Valley Ecosystem Awareness Week

helping people understand the connection between agriculture, habitat, and floodplain management.

When legislators see the Pacific Flyway, the rice fields, and the salmon habitat firsthand, it clicks. They realize how interconnected everything is. The visual makes all the difference. The Rice Commission and local farming families have been tremendous in supporting these tours, helping my colleagues see that California's water story is one of balance and innovation.

Q: You co-authored the resolution establishing Sacramento Valley Ecosystem Awareness Week and have been a strong advocate for floodplain restoration. Can you share your perspective on the importance of this work and your role in advancing the Floodplain Forward MOU with Assemblymember Gallagher?

Aguiar-Curry:

I am proud to support the work of the Floodplain Forward Coalition—it is great to see such a broad coalition bringing people together. What the coalition is accomplishing throughout the Sacramento Valley will improve public safety and create a better relationship between fish and wildlife, communities, and farms. By hiring leading scientists with local knowledge, we'll better understand our invaluable water resources and be able to take actions to effectively integrate rivers and creeks with our landscapes and neighborhoods. I look forward to seeing the entire region come to life.

Q: You've also been an early supporter of the Healthy Rivers and Landscapes (HRL) program. What stands out to you about this approach, and how do you see it shaping California's water future?

Aguiar-Curry:

This approach is practical and collaborative, and it has bipartisan support from many legislators. HRL represents more than five years of collaboration between state agencies, public water agencies throughout California, and other stakeholders to develop a modern approach to protecting all beneficial uses of water in the Bay-Delta watershed. It's a complicated and long proposal, but there are no easy answers when it comes to water.

Q: It was great working with you and your staff on AB 59. How did you find that experience?

Aguiar-Curry:

It was a wonderful experience. I've worked closely with the Yolo County Flood Control and Water Conservation District for years and knew many of the people at Reclamation District 108. When they approached me about the bill, they did it early, last October or November, which gave us time to get it right.

That early collaboration made all the difference. We spent the year educating people about what the bill actually did and why it mattered for hydropower and Northern California's energy reliability. The relationships and trust built through that process are what made AB 59 successful.

Q: As droughts intensify, how do you see the role of groundwater regulation (SGMA) evolving? Are reforms needed to strengthen enforcement, coordination, or funding?

Aguiar-Curry:

Yolo County was one of the first regions to implement SGMA, and I think they did a great job. They started with strong public outreach so people could understand the goals, even if some farmers didn't love it. It was new territory, and education was essential.

Every basin is different, so what works in Yolo might not fit the Central Valley. But it was a solid start. Before SGMA, we didn't have any

kind of framework for groundwater management, and now we do. It'll evolve, and yes, there will be bumps along the way, but it's progress.

Q: What are your thoughts on new conveyance or storage infrastructure, and how should environmental and community interests be balanced?

Aguiar-Curry:

Water is always controversial, no matter what you do. But the reality is, we need more storage and better management. Projects like Sites Reservoir are critical. We need more storage to prepare for the dry years we know are coming, but we also need storage to improve environmental conditions.

I've worked for years on improving water quality at Clear Lake, which flows into Putah Creek and supports communities downstream. That's vital. We've invested millions in Clear Lake restoration, and while it may never be perfectly "clear," improving water quality across the region benefits everyone.

Q: California's politics often involve tension between urban, agricultural, and environmental water users. How do you foster coalition or compromise across those divides?

Aguiar-Curry:

Everybody eats. A lot of people need to be reminded that food doesn't come from a grocery store.

Again, education and listening are critical. The hardest part right now is navigating the federal process and the uncertainty that comes with it—delays in funding, shifting priorities, stalled projects, tariffs. That's frustrating for everyone.

My approach is to help people understand each other's perspectives and to focus on affordability. Whether you're a farmer worried about pumping costs or having a market if you plant this year's crop, or a city resident paying high water bills, everyone just wants reliability and fairness.

Q: The Legislative Women's Caucus recently elected you as its chair. How do you see women's leadership in the legislature influencing water or climate policy?

Aguiar-Curry:

Women are natural collaborators. We want to compromise, we want to learn, and we want solutions. When we sit down together, on any issue, we listen. If someone has concerns about a bill, I'll tell colleagues to go talk to them directly.

Women legislators are deeply invested in issues of affordability, children, and families, and that extends to water and climate resilience. They want to make sure communities have clean, affordable water, and a sustainable environment for future generations.

Q: In your view, what is the most under-discussed water issue in California today?

Aguiar-Curry:

Water quality, without a doubt. Even in small cities, we're constantly dealing with Chromium-6 and other contaminants. Every time I go to the League of California Cities, it's the same discussion: how can we afford to provide safe, affordable water?

It's not just an urban issue. In rural areas, farmers face well and pumping challenges too. Every piece—surface water, groundwater, infrastructure—has to work together if we want lasting solutions.

Q: Looking ahead to the next decade, what are your top water priorities for Northern California?

Aguiar-Curry:

Storage, infrastructure, and water quality projects. Those are the pillars. As I always tell my colleagues, you have to tell the story. We're not just "throwing rocks out there because we want to." There's a reason for every project, and we need to communicate that clearly.

Q: How do you see innovation, like smart water systems, real-time monitoring, or recycling, shaping California's water future?

Aguiar-Curry:

Technology and sustainable practices are already transforming water management. I wish more people understood how advanced agriculture has become. Years ago, farmers planted in furrows. Now, we have drip irrigation under the soil, no

evaporation, precise watering. Many farms can start and stop irrigation systems from a computer or even a phone. I remember carrying heavy sprinkler pipes on my hip as a kid, but that's not how it works anymore. These new systems are efficient, data-driven, and reduce labor. Farmers and the technology they use deserve more credit for how far they've come.

Q: If you could get the next governor or State Senate to prioritize one thing on water, what would it be?

Aguiar-Curry:

Visit Northern California. See the projects firsthand. It's easy to make assumptions from behind a desk, but you have to see it—the restoration work, the tribal partnerships, the progress on fish and water quality, the move to sustainable agricultural practices and organics.

When I bring reports to the budget committee, real data showing how every dollar is being used, it builds trust. That's how we secured continued funding for Sites Reservoir and so many other projects. Transparency and local engagement make all the difference.

Q: What's your most optimistic projection for how California will do better on water resilience by 2030?

Aguiar-Curry:

By 2030, I hope Sites Reservoir is complete. We need that storage, period. We've spent years on permitting, tribal coordination, and working with local families. The longer we

wait, the harder it gets. I want to make sure we're never in a position where California doesn't have enough water.

Q: What keeps you up at night when you think about water in California?

Aguiar-Curry:

Safety, broadly and specifically. Water safety, community safety, infrastructure safety.

When I worked on the Freeport Regional Water Project years ago, 9/11 had just happened, and we were suddenly thinking about terrorism and how to protect our water systems. That changed my perspective. I think about our dams, our pipelines, our treatment plants. People assume they'll always be safe, but we can't take that for granted. Protecting our water infrastructure, and the people who depend on it, keeps me up at night.



Asm. Cecilia Aguiar-Curry and Communications Director Gibson Martucci sit down for interview with NCWA's Legislative Affairs Director, Kam Bezdek