

LEGISLATOR

SPOTLIGHT

SENATOR ANGELIQUE ASHBY

Representing Senate District 8 including Sacramento County and portions of Yolo, Placer, and El Dorado counties

In this Q&A, Senator Angelique Ashby reflects on the water challenges and opportunities facing Northern California, drawing on her experience representing the Sacramento region. Now serving as Senate Majority Leader, she highlights the importance of flood protection, smart land use, and investing in systems that support safe, sustainable community growth while also supporting the region's agricultural and environmental landscape.

Q: How has representing the Sacramento region influenced the way you think about California's water future?



Ashby:

Representing Sacramento—at the confluence of two major rivers—has deeply shaped my perspective on water. But even more formative was my time on the Sacramento City Council, representing Natomas, a community behind a levee that lost its flood protection designation after Hurricane Katrina.

For many years, residents couldn't rebuild their homes, and I spent a lot of time advocating in Washington, D.C. to secure federal support for levee improvements. That experience taught me more than I ever expected to know about flood control systems—from slurry walls to the Yolo Bypass—and how Sacramento fits into the broader system from Oroville to the Delta.

It really shaped how I think about water in California. Flood and drought are two sides of the same coin, and water ultimately determines where we can live, build, and support thriving communities.

Q: What water-related concerns come up most often from your constituents?**Ashby:**

In the Sacramento region, flood control is probably the biggest water-related concern for most residents—and rightfully so. Large portions of the region are in floodplains, and there's always more work to do to strengthen levees and improve protection.

Access to water also varies by community, but Sacramento's system is strong. The city is an excellent water provider. There's a lot of

innovation happening that makes the Capitol City a true leader in both water conservation and reliability.

Q: What is the most under-discussed water issue in California today?**Ashby:**

I'm not sure it's under-discussed, but one of the most important issues is how we store water in California.

People shouldn't have to think about where their water comes from. Projects like Sites Reservoir and the role of Shasta are incredibly important, especially for Northern California.

We need to do a better job capturing water during heavy rainfall and storing it for dry periods. At the same time, there are ongoing regional concerns—like the Delta Conveyance Project—that continue to be a major point of controversy, particularly in the Sacramento region.

Q: What does “water resilience” mean to you?**Ashby:**

To me, water resilience has two parts.

One is how we store water—snowmelt, rainfall, reservoirs—making sure we're being good stewards of what we have. The second is how we use water responsibly.

There are places doing this really well. I mentioned San Diego and their recycled

water systems, but we also see innovation in agriculture and local water agencies.

The government's role should be to set standards, provide resources, and give local agencies the flexibility to meet those goals in ways that work best for their communities. We should incentivize innovation and encourage the advancement of successful programs.

Q: What are the next big flood protection priorities for the Sacramento region? U with Assemblymember Gallagher?

Ashby:

It would be an understatement to say Sacramento has made progress. Major projects like the Folsom Dam and the Natomas Levee Improvement Project now protect hundreds of thousands of people, but there is still work to be done on these systems.

The other ongoing priority is continued work along the Sacramento Weir and maximizing the Yolo Bypass. The Yolo Bypass is really a model—it supports flood control, habitat, agriculture, and education all at once.

We're also benefiting from smart growth strategies, like parks designed with dual purposes, recreation and flood control. Communities are now engineered to take on water during storms, protecting homes, schools, and businesses. That's just smart planning, and it's something that can continue to be advanced and approved.

Q: Why do restored floodplains matter for California's future?

Ashby:

Floodplain restoration is about meeting multiple goals at once.

Restoration supports flood protection, habitat, agriculture, and community development. In places like Natomas and the Yolo Basin, we've seen how thoughtful planning can protect people while also supporting ecosystems and food production.

It also ties directly to affordability. Housing isn't just about building homes—it's about access to water, infrastructure, and safe places to live. None of that happens in a former floodplain without addressing restoration first.

Q: What excites you most about approaches like Healthy Rivers and Landscapes?

Ashby:

What excites me most is the recognition that everything is interconnected.

Every decision we make about water affects ecosystems, species, water quality, and even local economies. When we disrupt that balance, there are ripple effects.

So when we focus on restoring rivers, supporting species like salmon, and

improving habitat, we're also supporting broader environmental and economic systems. It's about being thoughtful and making sure we're not creating unintended consequences.

California has shown a real commitment to going back and fixing what needs to be fixed—and that's important for future generations. The work done on the Klamath is a good example of returning a habitat to its natural purpose, reconnecting it to both the community and the broader ecosystem.

Q: What does California need to do next to sustain groundwater supplies?

Ashby:

We need to continue the conversation.

Progress is possible if we focus on mechanisms for reliability and sustainability.

Q: What are the biggest barriers to moving water projects forward?

Ashby:

Right now, we're dealing with significant budget pressures. When you have 40 million people in California worried about whether their friends and family can afford to eat, access healthcare, or stay in their homes, it becomes much harder to prioritize large-scale infrastructure investments.

Even when funding is available, coordination is difficult. Water is so critical to every community that it's hard to get everyone pulling in the same direction. But through

organizations like NWCA, we can continue to build partnerships that will get us closer to the coordination we need to be successful.

Q: What should be the top water priority for the next governor or State Senate?

Ashby:

Statewide practices can change depending on what's happening—whether it's wildfires, floods, or drought—but when things are relatively stable, the focus should be on strengthening our systems.

Q: What gives you optimism about California's water future?

Ashby:

Water doesn't keep me up at night anymore—I used to represent a community without flood protection, and we fought our way to a much better place.

What gives me optimism is California's ability to innovate, collaborate, and keep improving. I believe we'll continue to get better at storage, stewardship, and making sure water is available where and when people need it, no matter which part of the Golden State they choose to call home.

That's the goal—reliable water for all Californians, both in emergencies and in everyday life.