



Technical Support for Groundwater Recharge and AB 2026 in the Sacramento Valley

AB 2026 is part of a concerted and necessary strategy to improve water supply reliability during dry years by improving water management during wet periods, while protecting downstream water rights, and environmental and tribal interests. Each of the provisions in AB 2026 were carefully crafted with a strong technical basis developed through the SacRecharge Working Group (a partnership of the Department of Water Resources and Sacramento Valley water managers) over many years as shown below.



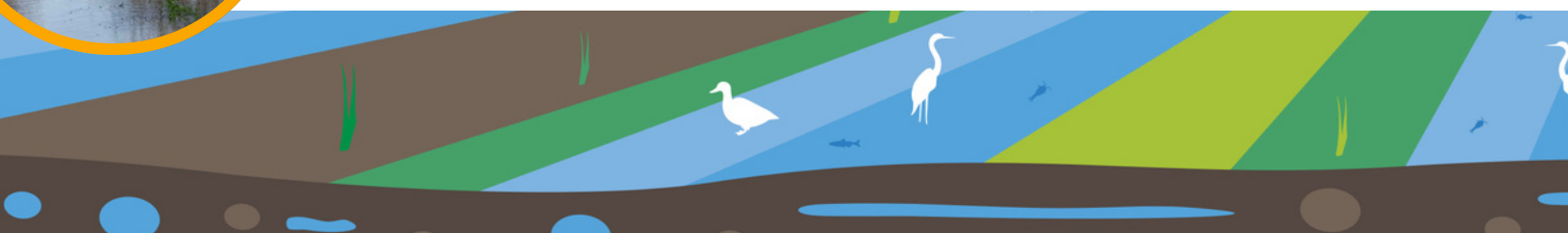
1 Substantial Water is Available for Recharge at Key Times

The Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC) has done analysis that shows substantial water is available for recharge. In 2023, approximately 11 million acre-feet of flow was potentially available during winter and spring storm events. See [Water Available for Recharge in the Sacramento Valley](#) and PPIC: [How Much Water Is Available for Groundwater Recharge in the Central Valley?](#)

2 Expanding When Water is Available for Recharge: Alternative Diversion Criteria

The State Water Board's existing 90/20 method provides a streamlined approach to diversion criteria for groundwater recharge projects. However, the 90/20 method provides infrequent diversion opportunities and has proven difficult for water users to implement and operate under the conditions when diversions are allowed. MBK Engineers, working with the SacRecharge Working Group, has developed an alternative "wet season/recharge diversion criteria" described in AB 2026 that would increase the number of days that water could be diverted for recharge, while specifically protecting downstream water rights, Delta operations, and ecosystems. The alternative diversion criteria provides many of the same protections as the 90/20 method, but are easier to operationalize and more flexible for water users to implement. For a more detailed summary, see [MBK's Alternative Diversion Criteria White Paper](#).

To ensure these protections, the criteria have operational triggers to start diversions when water year cumulative flow exceeds the 80th percentile and to stop diversions if water year cumulative flow falls below the 50th percentile. Additionally, the criteria will limit diversions to December–March; divert no more than 20% of daily flow; and protect site-specific ecosystem functions by incorporating flows elements from the California Environmental Flows Framework, a science-based approach developed through UC Davis that protects river ecosystems. See [Wet Season Recharge Diversion Criteria: AB 2026](#).



3 Protecting Delta Conditions While Creating Recharging Opportunities

AB 2026 includes Delta language that was developed jointly by water leaders in the Sacramento Valley working with the State and Federal water contractors to enhance flexibility for recharge in the Sacramento Valley, while protecting the State and Federal water projects. This language was developed with the support of collaborative technical analysis, where historical data indicate that we can increase diversions for recharge during certain Delta conditions without injury to the State and Federal projects. As an example, Sacramento Valley diversions can occur during Delta excess conditions and can frequently occur during Delta excess with restrictions conditions, together which comprise approximately 49% of winter days (November-March) without affecting CVP or SWP water supplies. See [Historical Delta Conditions and Potential Sacramento Valley Diversions](#).



4 Protecting Environmental Flows

AB 2026 and the wet season/recharge diversion criteria described above are specifically designed to enhance aquifers as natural infrastructure and protect wet-season base flows in rivers and streams as described in the California Environmental Flows Framework, see [The California Environmental Flows Framework](#). Enhanced groundwater recharge will also help improve functional streamflow conditions for the environment and groundwater dependent ecosystems. The alternative diversion criteria maintain functional flows, support groundwater recharge, and balance environmental and human water needs. See [Groundwater Recharge Benefits More Than Groundwater](#).



If you have any questions or would like further details on this technical work or the SacRecharge Working Group, please contact us at info@norcalwater.org.

