



# Ensuring Access to Safe Drinking Water for All California Communities

All Californians have a right to safe, clean, affordable and accessible water under the “human right to water” established in state law in 2012 and the state has made considerable progress toward addressing the lack of safe drinking water in recent years. The enactment of SB 200 and the creation of the Safe and Affordable Drinking Water Fund in 2019 represents a significant milestone as it provides both a policy framework and significant financial resources to support activities that are otherwise cost prohibitive for impacted communities. Success in putting these tools to work, however, will require additional action by both the state and local entities to help ensure that all California communities have access to water that meets the health-based standards of the state and federal Safe Drinking Water Acts.

**“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, Executive Order E-10-19 (April 2019)

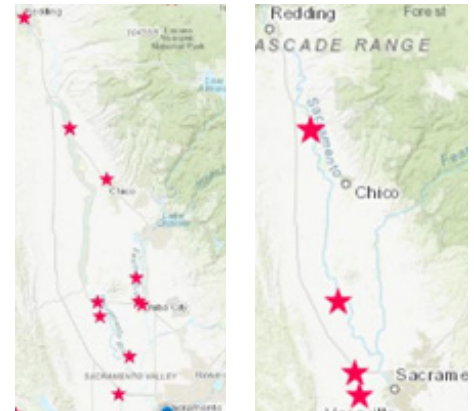


Leaders in the Sacramento Valley are committed to advancing a comprehensive approach to expand and ensure access to safe drinking water. As Governor Newsom has emphasized, solving this problem will “demand political will from each and every one of us.” The Northern California Water Association’s (NCWA) approach consists of a broad suite of actions that provide solutions for the various technical, managerial, and financial challenges that local communities face in serving safe and reliable drinking water in 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

NCWA, through its Board of Directors representing local water agencies and counties, is committed to continued work within the Sacramento Valley to help ensure that water systems currently out of compliance can make progress toward meeting all relevant state and federal standards. With a sustained focus on entities that were in violation of one or more primary drinking water standards, the number of water systems listed by the State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board) as out of compliance in the Sacramento Valley has been significantly reduced in the past several years (see inset maps). These efforts to return water systems to compliance through local actions under new and existing state programs will continue with a goal to have no communities on the list within the next several years.



Sacramento Valley water systems listed as out of compliance in February 2018 (left) and August 2018 (right).

May 15, 2019

NCWA is convening the North State Drinking Water Solutions Network to serve as a forum for all interested parties to share information and coordinate efforts related to ensuring that all communities in the Sacramento River Basin have access to safe drinking water. Successful implementation of sustainable drinking water solutions for communities will require utilization of both the policy tools and financial resources available to state agencies as well as the knowledge and expertise of local communities and water managers. By emphasizing partnerships with local agencies and administrators, the state will be best positioned to identify and help implement sustainable, locally-appropriate solutions.

## 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. These programs 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. More details are available from the [Sacramento Valley Water Quality Coalition](#) and the [California Rice Commission](#).

## Supporting Successful Implementation of SB 200 and the Safe and Affordable Drinking Water Fund

In a positive step forward, Governor Newsom signed SB 200 (Monning) in July 2019. SB 200 establishes a "Safe and Affordable Drinking Water Fund" and secures a long-term funding source that dedicates nearly \$1.5 billion in combined general and greenhouse gas reduction fund dollars to address the lack of safe drinking water in some communities across the state. SB 200 also establishes a policy framework to

ensure these funds can be efficiently allocated toward solving safe drinking water issues, including authorization for the State Water Board to appoint willing local agencies and others as administrators to provide administrative, technical, operational, legal, or managerial services when an existing water system is unable to discharge those functions.



Under SB 200, funding in the Safe and Affordable Drinking Water Fund will be available to the State Water Board for allocation as local assistance, grants, and contracts for purposes including water system operations and maintenance costs, consolidation costs, replacement water, and the provision of administrative and managerial services for the purpose of advancing long-term system sustainability. The State Water Board is required to develop a Fund Expenditure Plan to identify public water systems, community water systems, and state small water systems that fail, or are at risk of failing, to provide safe drinking water, and to determine the amount and type of funding necessary to address these failures. Implementation of this program will also be guided by SB 200's "high-risk area" mapping requirements and the State Water Board's ongoing safe drinking water needs analysis.

SB 200 was supported by NCWA and a broad coalition of water, agriculture, local government, environmental justice and community organizations. While the enactment of SB 200 represents an important milestone, successful implementation of the program will require the input and expertise of local and regional partners. NCWA is committed to supporting successful implementation of SB 200 in both the Sacramento Valley, as described above, as well as other parts of the state with impacted communities.

## Targeting Additional State Funding to Address Local and Regional Needs

In addition to the Safe and Affordable Drinking Water Fund, NCWA has also advocated for the development and deployment of effective funding sources to support access to safe drinking water. Water leaders in the Sacramento Valley actively supported the development and passage of recent bond measures including Proposition 68 (2018) and Proposition 1 (2014). These measures included a combined \$770 million for safe drinking water and wastewater projects, as well as significant funding for sustainable groundwater management.



In 2018, NCWA also supported the inclusion of \$23.5 million in the 2018-19 State Budget for key safe drinking water actions, including \$3 million for the State Water Board to conduct a statewide drinking water needs assessment and \$6.8 million for the State Water Board's "Safe Drinking Water for Schools" grant program. In February 2019, Governor Newsom signed AB 72, which included \$10 million in general fund for emergency water suppliers and \$10 million in general fund for technical assistance to help achieve compliance with current drinking water standards. These and other similar allocations of funding can serve as an important complement to the Safe and Affordable Drinking Water Fund.

## 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.

## Advancing Innovative New Policies that Empower Effective Local Agencies

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.

In 2019, NCWA supported SB 414 (Caballero), the Small Water System Authority Act of 2019. SB 414 would have created an innovative new option for water system governance by enabling multiple noncompliant drinking water systems to consolidate together form a larger "small system water authority." Under a responsible water authority, these systems would benefit from larger economies of scale, expanded ratepayer bases, operational efficiencies, and enhanced funding opportunities. While SB 414 was ultimately held in 2019, NCWA will continue to engage in the development of policies that empower local agencies.

In the past several years, new laws—including SB 88 (2015), AB 2501 (2018), and SB 200 (2019)—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.

Through all of our members' efforts to manage water in the Sacramento Valley for [multiple beneficial uses](#)—including water for cities and rural communities, farms, fish, birds, and recreation—NCWA has found that locally-developed collaborative solutions provide the most successful path to addressing water management challenges. Consistent with this experience, policy approaches like SB 414 can empower local entities to develop and implement solutions that are tailored to their specific needs.

**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.**

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 [arobin@norcalwater.org](mailto:arobin@norcalwater.org).



**NCWA**  
Northern California Water Association