



# *Regional Water Agencies* **Aim to Bolster Local, State Supply**

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**By Elizabeth Smilor**  
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**F**or local water managers, a sustainable water supply must also be an affordable one. That is one reason why they support a plethora of water investments in everything from State water infrastructure for conveyance and storage to recycling and conservation.

“The State needs to fund improving their backbone system, which hasn’t been improved in decades, to be able to move more water to where it’s needed, especially to disadvantaged communities. That’s the cheapest water available,” said Three Valleys Municipal Water District (Three Valleys) General Manager and Chief Engineer Matt Litchfield. “Developing more local supplies is a good thing, but it has to be a little bit of everything and that includes the infrastructure improvements to move water in big storm events to where it’s needed, or else it just gets lost.”

The “backbone” to which Litchfield refers is the State Water Project that carries water from Northern California through the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta to Southern California. In December 2023, the California Department of Water Resources (DWR) released and certified the Final Environmental Impact Report for the proposed Delta Conveyance Project (DCP).

“We’re very happy that the Delta Conveyance Project has reached this milestone. It’s a big step forward,” said Upper San Gabriel Valley Municipal Water District (Upper District) General Manager Tom Love. “The governor has indicated that before his term of office is finished, he’d like to see all the permits and approval done so the project can proceed to design and construction.”

Debate over Delta improvements has raged for decades and thus far no major project has made it past the permitting process. DWR’s next steps are numerous State and federal permits or authorizations, including those required by the State Water Resources Control Board, the Delta Stewardship Council, and compliance with State and federal Endangered Species acts. The Delta Construction Authority will provide a new cost estimate and a benefit-cost analysis in mid-2024.



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**Matt Litchfield, P.E.**  
General Manager and Chief Engineer, Three Valleys Municipal Water District



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**Tom Love**  
General Manager, Upper San Gabriel Valley Municipal Water District



*"Water and wastewater agencies are looking at huge future costs to develop large infrastructure projects that address water quality regulations. Without proactive investments by the State and federal governments, our ratepayers will feel the impact."*

**Shivaji Deshmukh, P.E.**  
General Manager, Inland Empire Utilities Agency



*"Our goal has always been to minimize ratepayers' burden as we work to ensure a clean, safe and reliable water supply from the San Gabriel Basin."*

**Randy Schoellerman, P.E.**  
Executive Director, San Gabriel Basin Water Quality Authority

"The alternative if we don't invest in this infrastructure is we will reach the point where we cannot provide a reliable water supply and the cost to disadvantaged communities will be much, much greater than the investments we make in improving the infrastructure," Love said. "Spending money on infrastructure is better than the alternative of not having a reliable water supply statewide."

Love added that on the affordability front, he's encouraged by U.S. Senator Alex Padilla of California's recent leadership in advocating to restore funding for the Low-Income Household Water Assistance Program (LIHWAP) for Fiscal Year 2024. Another statewide project local managers are tracking is Sites Reservoir, an off-stream reservoir in the Sacramento Valley. That project should begin construction this year with completion expected in 2030.

The other big piece of the water puzzle is local supply. Water agencies support a variety of local projects from stormwater capture to recycled water. The agencies are also tasked with helping users meet conservation goals.

"IEUA continues to make necessary investments in stormwater capture and storage projects to further expand local water supplies. Storms like the one California faced in early February serve as a reminder that we need to continue to pursue these creative projects that allow IEUA to capture and store stormwater during wet months, providing further reliability during dry months," said Inland Empire Utilities Agency (IEUA) General Manager Shivaji Deshmukh. "Investments in local infrastructure complement imported water supply demands, increasing reliability and helping to ensure that agencies continue to meet the ever evolving and continuously more stringent compliance requirements, as well as challenges posed by variable and severe weather changes."

For its part, IEUA continues to plan for the Chino Basin Program (CBP), a series of innovative water treatment and

storage projects that will provide an additional 15,000 acre-feet of advanced treated, purified recycled water for storage in the Chino Groundwater Basin each year. IEUA, a regional wastewater treatment agency and wholesale distributor of imported water that serves about 935,000 people in western San Bernardino County, is also maximizing other recycled water facilities. California's most recent storm event tasked IEUA with the challenge of capturing a substantial influx of stormwater while ensuring safety and compliance of current water supplies and facility operations. CBP storage projects will provide an opportunity to increase capacity limits, optimizing the capture and storage of water during future storm events.

IEUA along with Three Valleys, a water wholesaler with 13 members in the San Gabriel Valley, and Upper District that serves 18 cities and portions of unincorporated Los Angeles County, support Pure Water Southern California, a joint recycled water project by the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California and the Los Angeles County Sanitation Districts.

"Pure Water is a very important project for us. We will be receiving water from phase one of the project and we will be purchasing about one-third of the total capacity," said Love of Upper District. The first phase is estimated to be online in 2032. "That water we get from Pure Water will free up water from the State Water Project for other areas."

These wholesale agencies also assist their retail agencies in their efforts to keep rates affordable, especially in disadvantaged communities. Both Three Valleys and Upper District shared how they assist cities and agencies with loan and grant applications. Love said Upper District hopes to do a study to gauge how much local customers are paying for tap water in comparison to their total income.

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Photo courtesy of Steven Georges/Civic Publications, Inc.

Above, the Joint Water Pollution Control Plant (JWPCP) in Carson treats about 260 million gallons of wastewater per day, but most goes to the ocean. Pure Water Southern California, a joint project of the Los Angeles County Sanitation Districts and Metropolitan Water District of Southern California, would produce 150 million gallons per day (mgd) of purified water from the JWPCP for 15 million people upon completion in 2032. At right, the Sites Reservoir Project will be situated on the west side of the Sacramento Valley, approximately 10 miles west of Maxwell in Glenn and Colusa Counties.



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Conservation, they say, is necessary, but can also be costly.

“IEUA supports and promotes conservation within our service area, but we also want to ensure an appropriate balance with affordability. The State’s draft conservation regulations will pose some real affordability challenges as they are currently written. We are helping our retail agencies advocate for changes in the draft regulations to ensure realistic efforts can be made in reasonable timeframes,” said IEUA’s Deshmukh. “As originally drafted, the regulations show disproportionate impacts, heavily affecting inland areas like IEUA and, in addition, could cost our service area over \$1 billion to achieve compliance within the timeframe set out.”

Love shares concerns with the Making Water Conservation a California Way of Life framework because it doesn’t give enough credit for recycled water use and thus will not incentivize its development. Deshmukh points out that compliance with new and increasingly stringent clean water regulations will also come at a cost.

“Water and wastewater agencies are looking at huge future costs to develop large infrastructure projects that address water quality regulations,” said Deshmukh “Without proactive investments by the State and federal governments, our ratepayers will feel the impact. Protecting public health is a key priority and responsibility we do not take lightly, and access to safe drinking

water and sanitation services are fundamental human necessities. IEUA continues to be successful in receiving grants for resiliency and water quality projects to offset costs. Ratepayers should not have to be concerned about its affordability.”

Emerging contaminants such as PFAS (Per-and Polyfluorinated Substances), considered “forever” chemicals because they remain in the environment, are catalysts for the San Gabriel Basin Water Quality Authority to seek government funding as well as money from the responsible parties. The WQA joined a lawsuit last year against 3M, DuPont and other companies to recover cleanup costs. The WQA was established by the State Legislature in 1993 to develop, finance, and implement groundwater treatment programs in the San Gabriel Basin.

“Our goal has always been to minimize ratepayers’ burden as we work to ensure a clean, safe and reliable water supply from the San Gabriel Basin,” said WQA Executive Director Randy Schoellerman.

Finally, the water managers are always watching the weather.

“We’re seeing a lot of hydrologic variability from year to year and we have to plan for that in the future,” said Three Valleys’ Litchfield. “It’s a long winter, so I think we’ll be OK, but you just never know.” ■