

June 2020

FRESNO STATE

California Water Institute

Now Is the Time To Create A Shared-Vision for Water in the San Joaquin Valley

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Water.

Life as we know it cannot survive without water, and as we continue our exploration of space, scientists search for the presence of water on other planets. If there is water, there could be life, or maybe the planet could sustain life.

We search for usable water on other planets because we know it to be essential to sustaining life.

Despite the essential nature of water, in California, water management is so broken that every attempt to improve water management ends up in court. You would think that after more than 100 years of litigation, we would find a better – more lasting – approach to manage water for the world's fifth largest economy and most productive agricultural region.

Unfortunately, this is how we have conditioned ourselves to manage water in California – litigate first, litigate last, litigate always. While the judicial system is critical to the success of our form of government, we cannot continue to rely on the courts to manage our water – yet, we continue to do so.

Our litigation model for water management is placing stress on all economic, social, and environmental dimensions in the State, and all parties are suffering as a result.

What have we gained from our litigious approach to water management?

- Too many people lack access to safe drinking water.
- Endangered species populations continue to decline.
- Food security is threatened.
- Undesirable results from groundwater overdraft are pervasive.

Can we afford another 100 years of water litigation? How many endangered species will die, how many wells in low-income communities will go dry, and how many acres of farmland will we fallow before we recognize that litigation is not the solution, and it is time for change?

How did we get here? Failed leadership.

It is regrettable that we – all of us collectively – have resigned ourselves to believe that suffering through litigation is simpler than trying to resolve the underlying issues triggering litigation. We refuse to be in the same room with each other to discuss water without our lawyers. This is a symptom of failed leadership.

It is time for change; there must be a better way.

The needed change will require courage and leadership to bring diverse interests together to create a shared-vision for water management, rather than promoting extreme positions that only lead us to more unproductive lawsuits.

In the San Joaquin Valley – like all corners of the globe – water is essential to the fate, fortunes, and survival of communities. A shared-vision for water resource management in the San Joaquin Valley will require agricultural, disadvantaged community, environmental and urban interests to work together. These groups have not historically worked together across a large geographic area to develop a shared-vision for water resources management – another symptom of failed leadership. The path forward for managing the most essential resource for sustaining life – in this State, on this planet, and any other planet – requires collaboration, and that will require vision, courage, and leadership.

There have been one-on-one discussions with representatives from agriculture, disadvantaged community, environmental and urban interests regarding

the concept of creating a shared-vision for water resource management in the San Joaquin Valley. These have been difficult conversations – the wounds are deep, the scars are many, and the levels of mistrust are significant – but there is a recognition that a new spirit of collaboration is required.

There have been similar one-on-one discussions with State leaders about the concept of creating a shared-vision, and while some leaders see and embrace the need for a new spirit of collaboration, too many others remain blind to the need. They would rather let the courts decide the fate of water so they can continue to defer their responsibility and ownership of the issue. These leaders offer no vision, no courage, no leadership – no change.

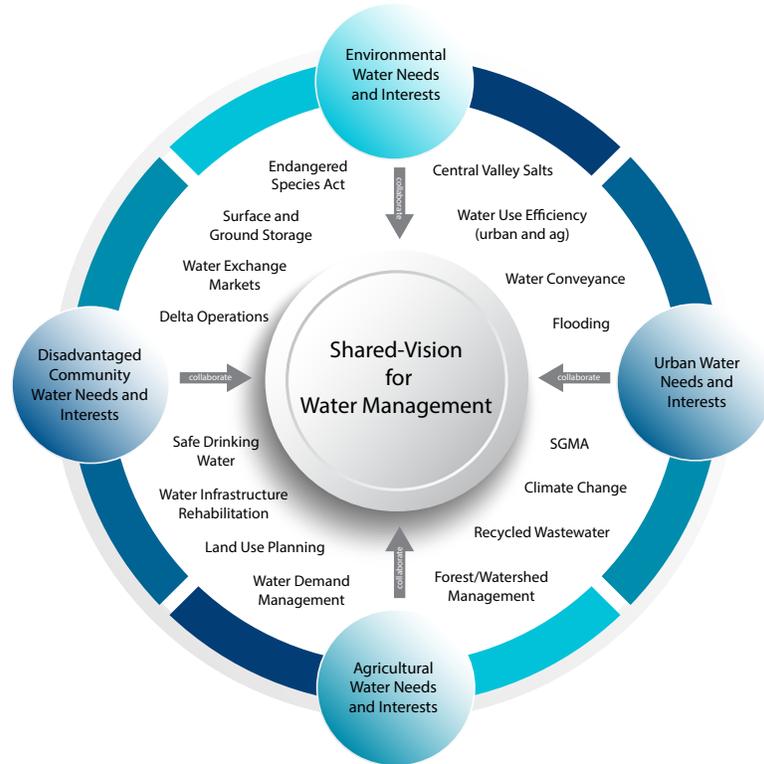
It is both ironic and frustrating that we continue to search for usable water on other planets, yet we cannot agree on how to share water on this planet. We absolutely need each other to manage water successfully, and we must find a way to build trust. This will require a leap of faith.

We must do this together. We must create a shared-vision for water management that delivers safe drinking water to low-income communities; adapts to climate change; protects and restores endangered species; preserves food security; builds new, and refurbishes existing water system infrastructure; and creates a financing strategy that equitably funds a better water future for California.

These must be the objectives for a shared vision.

Who will be the champions to break the cycle of litigate first, litigate last, litigate always for water – who will risk stepping forward to champion change? Make no mistake – there will be risk for those that champion change.

It will not be easy – the wounds are deep, the scars are many, and the levels of mistrust are significant – but what could be more important than working together on the most important resource required to sustain life on this planet – and every other planet we are exploring.





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