

San Joaquin Valley Water Collaborative Action Program

The San Joaquin Valley (Valley) is ground zero for California's water management challenges. A significant gap exists between locally available water supplies and existing demands, which is being exacerbated by climate change, population growth, groundwater contamination and unsustainable pumping, and aging infrastructure. Over one million¹ Californians, principally in disadvantaged communities located in the Valley, lack access to safe and affordable drinking water. In addition, the Valley has experienced significant groundwater overdraft, with an estimated 2-3 million more acre-feet of groundwater extracted annually than is replenished. Ecosystems have continued to be degraded and many species are at risk. If proactive action is not taken to address these challenges, thousands more homes will lack adequate water to meet domestic needs, more than one million acres of Valley farmland will be haphazardly fallowed over the next two decades and ecosystems will collapse. Now more than ever, collaboration is necessary to improve the Valley's ability to maintain healthy communities, a vibrant economy, and a robust environment.



The San Joaquin Valley Water Collaborative Action Program (CAP), a coalition of over 70 leaders from agriculture, water agencies, environmental justice organizations, environmental organizations, academia, and state and federal agencies, is developing recommendations for more resilient water and land management. Multiple public and private organizations at the local, state, and federal levels are working to address the Valley's water challenges through on-the-ground actions and collective efforts to implement laws like the Sustainable

Groundwater Management Act (SGMA), which mandates groundwater sustainability by 2040 and the Multibenefit Land Repurposing Program (MLRP), which provides resources to manage the associated land use changes as SGMA is implemented. CAP aims to support the multiple efforts across the Valley by identifying ways to overcome barriers and accelerate action that benefits all interests.



Specifically, the CAP is focused on achieving the following:

- 1. Safe Drinking Water:** By 2035, all San Joaquin Valley (Valley) residents will have access in a timely manner to safe, reliable, and affordable drinking water, no matter the hydrologic conditions. This means prioritizing both interim and long-term water supply and water quality challenges for all residents, including those faced by small communities and domestic well users.
- 2. Sustainable Water Supplies:** Sustainable water supplies will be available to support a diverse economy, thriving ecosystems, access to safe, reliable, and affordable drinking water for all Valley residents, and a sustainable level of agricultural production.
- 3. Ecosystem Health:** The Valley landscape will increase its habitat areas to support an array of species and healthy aquatic ecosystems, including floodplain, riparian, wetland, on-farm, and upland habitat.
- 4. Sustainable Agriculture:** California will continue to provide reliable, safe, and secure food and fiber with industry-leading protections for workers, in-Valley communities, and the environment. The Valley will

¹ See Table 1, 2023 Drinking Water Needs Assessment Executive Summary, State Water Resources Control Board, located at https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/drinking_water/certlic/drinkingwater/documents/needs/2023naexecutivesummary.pdf

continue to be a major agricultural resource by preserving as many acres of sustainable farmland as possible while being a good neighbor to communities and ecosystems.

- 5. Public Investment:** Sufficient public funds will be invested to support a) the necessary natural and constructed infrastructure to increase supply, b) demand reduction strategies including land repurposing, and c) other investments to accomplish the desired outcomes.
- 6. Consistent Policies:** State and federal policies and funding will be aligned. Expedited permitting and regulatory review processes will be available for qualified multibenefit projects and other actions to achieve the desired outcomes.
- 7. Sound Science:** Decisions will be made using the best available and independent science possible. Adaptive management with monitoring, deployment of the best available technology and outcome accountability will be necessary to maximize the effectiveness of resource decisions.

The CAP participants are organized into five caucuses:

- 1.** Advocates and Technical Assistance providers for safe drinking water for disadvantaged communities (DACs)
- 2.** Local, city, and county governments
- 3.** Environmental Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO's)
- 4.** Farmers and agricultural industry representatives
- 5.** Valley water agency representatives

In Phase 1, CAP participants agreed on a problem statement, identified desired outcomes and an initial solution set necessary to achieve long-term sustainability. The CAP is premised on all caucus benefiting as the program moves forward and that no single caucus can advance its interests at the expense of others. In Phase 2, CAP will develop actions (e.g., policies, funding, projects) that result in more resilient water and land management for Valley communities, agriculture, and ecosystems.



To date, the CAP has received support from the David and Lucille Packard Foundation, Central Valley Community Foundation, California Wellness Foundation, RLF, the California Department of Water Resources, the Water Blueprint for the San Joaquin Valley, Sustainable Conservation, River Partners, and Environmental Defense Fund. CAP has been included in a Congressionally Directed Spending grant in the FY2023 federal budget.

Contact Information

Jim Kramer, jim@jkramer.co
Laura Ramos, lramos@mail.fresnostate.edu
Mara Guccione, MGuccione@resourceslegacyfund.org



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