



California Water Institute

NEWSLETTER



DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

As I reflect on this past quarter, I'm filled with gratitude for the incredible community that has made the California Water Institute's work possible over the past 25 years.

Our anniversary celebration in October was a testament to the power of collaboration. Standing alongside Rep. Jim Costa, President Jiménez-Sandoval, and so many of you who have been part of our journey reminded me that CWI's greatest strength has always been our partnerships. From our founding through the Proposition 13 water bond in 2000 to today's cutting-edge research, we've remained committed to bridging science, policy, and practice.

The work highlighted in this newsletter from our ICARP community workshops in Huron and Mendota to our Water Book Club discussions about the Colorado River demonstrates how we're putting that commitment into action. These initiatives reflect our belief that meaningful solutions emerge when we bring together diverse voices: researchers and residents, students and stakeholders, data and lived experience.

I'm particularly energized by our community engagement efforts. The workshops in Huron and Mendota show us that when we take the time to educate and listen, communities become empowered partners in shaping their water future. This is the kind of work that will define our next 25 years.

I also want to extend a warm welcome to Cathy Barnett, whose organizational excellence keeps our team running smoothly, and to thank each of you to our legacy sponsors, sustaining partners, and community supporters for believing in our mission.

As we look ahead, the challenges facing California's water systems are complex, but I'm confident that together, we can build a more resilient, equitable, and sustainable water future for our state.

Here's to the next chapter of collaboration and impact.

Laura Ramos

Director, California Water Institute

The California Water Institute celebrates 25 Years of Research, Education, and Collaboration

The California Water Institute's 25th anniversary celebrated a history of collaborative impact, bridging research, policy, and practice to find science-based solutions to California's most complex water problems. The open house event held on October 24th at the Jordan Agricultural Research Center at



Fresno State welcomed dozens of guests, including leaders from government, public organizations, and private industries.

Special guest speakers included Rep. Jim Costa and Fresno State President Saúl Jiménez-Sandoval. The president praised CWI's leadership team for its ability to connect students and faculty with community and industry partners.

"Over the past 25 years, CWI has been a pillar of regional problem solving," said Dr. Jiménez-Sandoval. "As goes the San Joaquin Valley, so goes the state. We are the future of California."

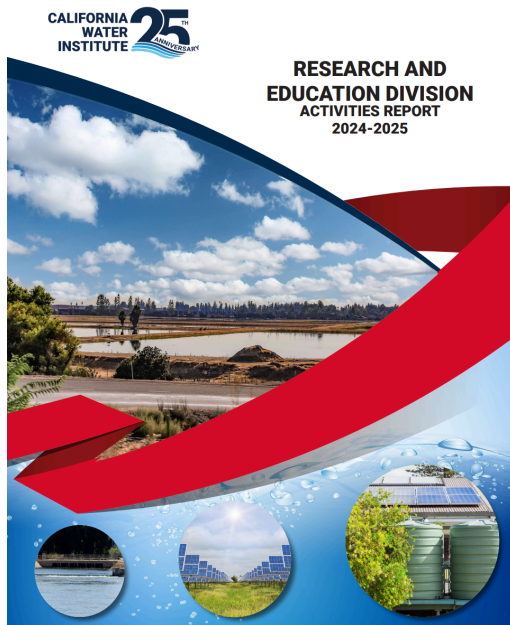
In March 2000, voters passed Proposition 13, a water bond that provided startup funding for the California Water Institute at Fresno State. Rep. Jim Costa co-authored the water bond that first established CWI. In honor of CWI's 25th Anniversary, Costa presented CWI with a Congressional Proclamation recognizing its advances in innovation of water resource management.

CWI Director Laura Ramos thanked the dedication and work of past directors, whom she credited with strengthening CWI's foundation in academic and industry partnerships. Ramos also reflected on some of CWI's most innovative projects, including the Unified Water Plan, cover crop research, and regional recharge studies.

"The next 25 years require us to think even bigger," Ramos said. "Our vision is clear to ensure that science, policy, and partnerships emerge from Fresno State, and that they continue to strengthen California's water resilience to be equitable, sustainable, and grounded in collaboration."

The California Water Institute proudly recognizes legacy sponsors of its 25th Anniversary celebration: AO Legacy Foundation, Fagundes Dairy, Milk Producer's Council. A special thank you to sustaining sponsors, Water Blueprint for the San Joaquin Valley, and O'Neill Vintners & Distillers, and to community sponsors, Valley Water Consulting, California Fresh Fruit Association, and Westlands Water District.

CWI's Activities Report Includes Retrospective 25th Anniversary Timeline



To honor CWI's 25th anniversary, this year's activity report features a special retrospective timeline showcasing key research, partnerships, publications, and educational initiatives that have defined CWI's impact since 2000.

The [2024-2025 Activities Report](#) is an annual publication from the California Water Institute's Research and Education Division that details the accomplishments we're proud of over the past year.

The report outlines the most current research studies and facilitation projects we're focusing

on, lists the numerous ways we've engaged students at Fresno State, and describes the public presentations and appearances.

It also celebrates the expanded number of education and outreach events we've been involved with and tracks a series of regional and national media reports featuring the work of CWI as a leader in water education, research, and policy.

The report was released ahead of CWI's 25th anniversary celebration in October. It reflects our strengthened role as facilitators and thought partners in regional water planning.

Integrated Climate Adaptation and Resiliency Program (ICARP) Kicks Off Free Community Workshops in the Communities of Huron and Mendota

The California Water Institute completed the first two in a series of free workshops designed to educate community members about groundwater recharge basins and how they can impact water quality and land use.

CWI partnered with Self-Help

Enterprises to hold the first workshop in the city of Huron, located in western Fresno County. Dozens of community members participated in a presentation on water education, which included a game of *lotería* and a raffle prize.



Huron was selected as the first site because of its suitability for recharge basins, including its soil quality and land availability. Because Huron gets some of its water from groundwater, groundwater basins affect every resident.

CWI's goal for the workshops was to raise awareness about groundwater recharge basins, which could result in higher up-front costs to build the infrastructure, but lead to long-term benefits in water quality and cost. To help measure the workshop's educational impact, the same survey questions were given to attendees both before and after the presentation. The post-presentation survey showed improvement in scores.

The second workshop was held in Mendota in November. Starting in January 2026, CWI plans to hold eight additional free workshops as part of the Integrated Climate Adaptation and Resiliency Program (ICARP) grant from the Governor's Office of Planning and Research.

Fall 2025: Water Book Club



The fall 2025 Water Book Club wrapped up its latest reading of this year's featured book, *Science Be Dammed: How Ignoring Inconvenient Science Drained the Colorado River* by Eric Kuhn and John Fleck.

The book examines the planning decisions that led to the long-term mismanagement of the Colorado River. The authors argue that

historical and scientific evidence were often overlooked, creating challenges that continue to affect water systems today.

Fresno State faculty, staff, and students met virtually once a week to discuss how the Colorado River's history offers lessons for California's water future. In the age of climate change and limited water supplies, *Science Be Dammed* underscored the importance of using sound science to guide decision-making and avoid repeating the mistakes of the past.

"The book wasn't shocking because I already knew the systems were flawed," said one participant, "but the way it explained things made the roots of those flaws click in my mind. Seeing how those choices were made helps me approach today's water policy with more clarity and less naivety."

Another book club member reflected on the value of the group itself: "The Water Book Club offers a good space to talk through water-related themes with people who approach these topics from different backgrounds. The conversations are interesting and thoughtful, and it's fun to hear everyone's take on each chapter."

Through reading and dialogue, participants explored how ignoring inconvenient truths in the past can inform better, more resilient water management in the future, both for the Colorado River and for California.

Employee Spotlight: Catherine Barnett



For the past year at the California Water Institute, Cathy Barnett has known exactly where to find CWI director Laura Ramos on any given workday. As the director's assistant, Cathy keeps operations running smoothly by managing Laura's schedule and emails, coordinating appointments, special projects, and

arranging travel.

The position has been the perfect part-time role for Cathy, who was adjusting to post-retirement life after a 38-year career in banking. It allows her flexibility while putting her organizational and management skills to good use. Returning to the workforce has also expanded her technical skills from learning new computer programs to experimenting with AI.

"I love working for Laura," she said. "I've learned so much about water and the challenges California faces."

Cathy enjoys working, for the first time, outside the structured environment of the financial industry. She appreciates the opportunity to interact with diverse groups, including academics, government agencies, and students.

"I thought when I retired, that would be it," she said. "But I always had it in the back of my mind that I'd like to have something like this. It's so wonderful to have the best of both worlds."

In her free time, Cathy loves spending time with her family, especially her grandchildren.

Starting at CWI marked the first time Cathy had returned to the Fresno State campus regularly since graduating with a degree in marketing more than 40 years ago. The Fresno State legacy runs deep in her family – both of her sons are also Fresno State graduates.

"I've always taken great pride in Fresno State," Cathy said. "Being able to come back and work here has been wonderful."

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