

## California Water Institute **NEWSLETTER**



### **DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE**

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

Over the past few months, I've been reflecting on what it truly takes to move water solutions forward in California. If there's one thing that continues to stand out, it's this: progress happens when we

work across boundaries, across disciplines, sectors, and communities with a shared commitment to solving complex challenges together.

That spirit of collaboration is at the heart of several exciting milestones for the California Water Institute.

We are proud to have launched our inaugural External Advisory Board, bringing together leaders from across state agencies, local government, nonprofits, and private industry. This group represents a wide range of expertise and perspectives, and more importantly, a shared commitment to ensuring that our work remains grounded in both science and community needs. Their guidance will help sharpen our strategic priorities and strengthen our ability to deliver meaningful, real-world impact.

At the same time, we continue to explore new ways of making water knowledge more accessible and actionable. Whether it's through creative partnerships like our watershed animation project with Fresno State students, or community-centered tools like our groundwater Lotería initiative, we are reminded that effective solutions depend not just on good science, but on shared understanding. When people can see themselves in the conversation, they are better equipped to be part of the solution.

Looking ahead, I am especially excited about the upcoming San Joaquin Valley Water Resilience Summit: From Reports to Results this May. This convening represents an important shift from understanding challenges to aligning around action. We have no shortage of studies, data, or plans. What we need now is coordination, clarity, and commitment. This summit is designed to bring together the right people to do exactly that: translate insights into priorities, partnerships, and tangible next steps for the region.

Our work on the Unified Water Plan reflects this same direction, integrating water, land, and ecosystems into a more coordinated and resilient future. But plans alone are not enough. It is through collaboration, through spaces where

diverse perspectives come together, that these ideas gain traction and ultimately lead to implementation.

At CWI, our role is to serve as that connector, linking research to practice, and bringing together those who are ready to engage in solution-driven work. The challenges ahead are significant, but so is the opportunity to shape a more sustainable and inclusive water future for California.

Thank you for being part of this work. I look forward to continuing to build these partnerships and to seeing many of you at the summit in May.

**Laura Ramos**

Director, California Water Institute

## **From Reports to Results: Advancing Water Resilience in the San Joaquin Valley**



The San Joaquin Valley is entering a new water era shaped by climate volatility, groundwater sustainability requirements, land subsidence, and

infrastructure constraints. As surface water, groundwater, and flood systems become increasingly interconnected, the need to align around shared insights, and what they mean for action, has never been more urgent. Three recent Department of Water Resources (DWR) studies, alongside the Unified Water Plan, provide critical system-level understanding that can help guide the region's next phase of water management.

The **San Joaquin Valley Water Resilience Summit: From Reports to Results, taking place May 20–21 at Fresno State**, is designed to turn that understanding into coordinated action. This two-day, commitment-focused convening will bring together water agencies, policymakers, researchers, practitioners, and community stakeholders to examine findings across the DWR studies collectively, identify key tradeoffs, and align local and state efforts. Day 1 will focus on synthesizing insights and building a shared understanding of the Valley as a connected system, while Day 2 will emphasize implementation, supporting participants in defining near-term priorities, identifying pilot projects, and contributing to a 2025–2030 action roadmap. The summit is intentionally structured as a working session to foster collaboration, establish partnerships, and build momentum toward tangible outcomes.

The summit reflects CWI's role as a connector between academic research and real-world application. By creating space for cross-sector dialogue and co-development, CWI helps ensure that research informs decisions and that solutions are grounded in both science and community needs. As California continues to navigate complex water challenges, this summit offers a timely opportunity to engage in solution-driven collaboration. The summit is supported by the California Department of Water Resources, the event's vision sponsor.

Learn more and register [here](#) to join the effort to move from reports to results.

## **Strengthening Partnerships: CWI Forms External Advisory Board**

The California Water Institute (CWI) continues to grow its network of partners working to advance practical water solutions. A major step in this effort is the

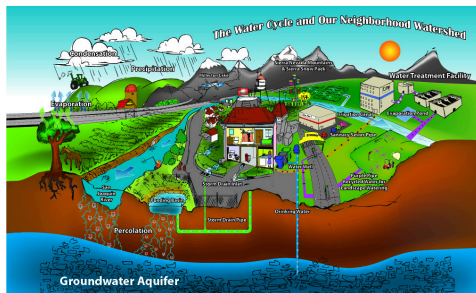
formation of CWI's inaugural External Advisory Board, which brings together leaders from across California's water, policy, nonprofit, and private sectors.

The advisory board will help guide CWI's strategic priorities, research activities, and partnerships while strengthening coordination with the agencies, organizations, and communities CWI works with every day. This advisory board brings exactly the kind of cross-sector expertise and perspective that will help CWI sharpen its strategic priorities and ensure its work is making a meaningful difference for the people and communities it serves.

The founding members of the External Advisory Board can be found on our [website](#).

Together, this group strengthens the collaboration that drives CWI's applied research, education, and outreach across the Central Valley and throughout California.

## Bringing Water to Life: Connecting Communities to Their Watershed Through Animation



As California continues to navigate complex water challenges including groundwater sustainability, climate variability, and the need for informed public engagement, effective communication is essential. In the San Joaquin Valley, where water systems are deeply

interconnected with community well-being and economic stability, helping residents understand how water moves through their local watershed is more important than ever.

The California Water Institute (CWI) partnered with Fresno State's Animation and Intermedia program to make these concepts more accessible through a 2D animated video, "The Water Cycle and Our Neighborhood Watershed." Designed for junior high audiences, the project transforms a detailed watershed graphic into an engaging, story-driven experience, following a water droplet as it travels through the region's water cycle. Developed in collaboration with faculty and students, the animation balances scientific accuracy with creativity, illustrating how water is captured, treated, reused, and locally managed.

This case study reflects CWI's role as a connector between academia and the water community, advancing practical solutions through education and collaboration. By making water science visual and relatable, projects like this support stronger water literacy and more informed decision-making. Watch the video here: <https://youtu.be/dC2dlrANdBk?si=bsWFZD3LQFSyTH1U>

## Making Groundwater Education Accessible, One Lotería Card at a Time

As California advances groundwater sustainability efforts, meaningful community engagement remains a

critical challenge, particularly in regions where water issues directly impact daily life. Technical concepts like groundwater recharge and basin management can be difficult to communicate, yet they



are essential for residents, water agencies, and policymakers working toward long-term solutions. This creates an opportunity to reimagine outreach strategies that are both accessible and culturally relevant.

The California Water Institute (CWI) is addressing this need through the development of a groundwater-themed Lotería game, designed to translate complex water concepts into an interactive, familiar format. Used at community workshops and events, the game introduces topics such as recharge basins, water quality, and groundwater sustainability through visuals and storytelling that resonate across generations. By pairing Lotería with bilingual materials and presentations, CWI ensures that residents not only receive information but can engage with it in meaningful ways.

Delivered in collaboration with partners including Self-Help Enterprises and local agencies, this approach reflects CWI's role as a connector between research, practice, and community insight. As California continues to navigate complex water challenges, tools like groundwater Lotería highlight the value of meeting people where they are.

## **Unified Water Plan: Integrating Water, Land, and Ecosystems for the San Joaquin Valley**

California's water future is being reshaped by climate uncertainty, groundwater sustainability requirements, and growing pressure on both communities and ecosystems. In the San Joaquin Valley, these challenges are especially acute, raising an urgent question for water agencies, policymakers, and practitioners: how can the region meet competing demands with fewer, less predictable water supplies? Increasingly, the answer points toward integration rather than tradeoffs.

The California Water Institute (CWI), in partnership with the Water Blueprint and supported by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, is advancing that approach through the Unified Water Plan for the San Joaquin Valley. This effort brings together researchers, agencies, and community stakeholders to develop a coordinated strategy that aligns water supply reliability, flood management, and ecosystem restoration. The Plan addresses land transitions driven by the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA), identifying opportunities to repurpose land strategically for groundwater recharge, habitat connectivity, and long-term resilience rather than leaving these changes to occur in a fragmented way.

As a connector between science and practice, CWI is working to ensure this Plan reflects both rigorous analysis and real-world needs. Draft chapters are now being shared for input, and feedback from across the water community will help strengthen the final framework. We invite water managers, policymakers, researchers, and community partners to engage, ask questions, and contribute

insights. To learn more, read the full blog: [The San Joaquin Valley's Bold New Vision: A Water Plan That Restores While It Protects](#)

## Capturing “Water in Your World”: CWI’s World Water Day Photo Contest

In celebration of World Water Day, a global observance that highlights the importance of freshwater, the California Water Institute (CWI) invited Fresno State students to participate in a photo contest centered on a simple but powerful theme: *Water in Your World*.

Students were encouraged to capture how water shows up in their routines, on campus, and across the Central Valley.



Entries reflected a wide range of perspectives. Some students highlighted the beauty of local water sources and the landscapes they sustain, while others focused on recognizable California landmarks such as nearby Millerton Lake. The winning photo captured a simple yet meaningful moment: a pet being bathed. The winning student was recognized during the World Water Day announcement at the Jordan Agricultural Research Center and received a gift card prize.

World Water Day reminds us that water connects our communities, environment, and future workforce. Initiatives like this photo contest help CWI engage students in creative and meaningful ways while building awareness of water’s role in everyday life. We invite you to follow along, participate in future events, and stay connected with CWI to see how knowledge continues to become solutions for community impact.

## Employee Spotlight: Thomas Holyoke



For Thomas Holyoke, water policy was not part of the original plan. After moving to Fresno and building a career as a political science professor at Fresno State, his work gradually expanded into teaching and researching the complex political systems that shape how water is managed in California. Today, that perspective guides his role as Assistant Director at the California Water Institute (CWI).

Thomas is one of two Assistant Directors at CWI, where he contributes to research development, grant proposals, conference planning, and support for the Faculty Fellows Program. His work focuses on helping connect academic research with the real-world policy landscape, while also introducing students

and professionals to the institutions and decision-making processes that influence water management across the state.

Teaching and knowledge-sharing remain the most rewarding parts of his work. He values seeing learners begin to think critically about water policy challenges and potential solutions, and he brings those conversations into both the classroom and professional training settings. Through CWI, Holyoke has also built strong relationships with faculty, practitioners, and partners across the water community, connections that have expanded his perspective and strengthened collaboration across disciplines.

He especially appreciates the Institute's growing emphasis on education and workforce development alongside research. Reflecting on his experience, Holyoke encourages others to get involved with CWI: "Go for it. It is a great environment and full of nice people. You will learn a lot."

Outside of his work with CWI, Thomas enjoys hiking in the mountains and spending time making and listening to music, interests that reflect the curiosity and openness that initially lead him into water policy.

## Upcoming Events

*Mark Your Calendar: Upcoming Water Event*

The **[San Joaquin Valley Water Summit: From Reports to Results](#)** will take place May 20–21 at Fresno State, convening state and regional leaders to align around key findings from recent Department of Water Resources studies and the Unified Water Plan.

Day 1 will focus on synthesizing insights and understanding system-wide tradeoffs, while Day 2 will center on defining priorities, identifying next steps, and building collaborative pathways for action. Learn more and register here: <https://cvent.me/Xawb1o>

If you would like to no longer receive CWI email updates, please [click here](#).