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New Director Appointed at Department of Water Resources, Executive Team Restructured to Strengthen Dam and Flood Safety, Climate Resiliency

SACRAMENTO -- The California Department of Water Resources (DWR) today announced a new director has been appointed and its executive team restructured to further bolster dam and flood safety, emphasize climate resilience and incorporate lessons learned from recent impacts of extreme weather on the state's water system.

"In the past year alone, the most severe drought in California's recorded history was interrupted by one of the wettest seasons on record, putting extreme pressure on our flood control infrastructure and exposing vulnerabilities," Natural Resources Secretary John Laird said. "This new team will help the state better prepare for ever-greater challenges to our infrastructure and flood management systems, and ensure that California is doing everything possible to ensure dam and flood safety."

The changes announced today include the appointment of Karla Nemeth to serve as Director of DWR. Nemeth has been deputy secretary and senior advisor for water policy at the California Natural Resources Agency since 2014, was Bay-Delta Conservation Plan project manager at the California Natural Resources Agency from 2009 to 2014 and was environmental and public affairs director at the Alameda County Flood Control and Water Conservation District, Zone 7 from 2005 to 2009. She brings extensive knowledge of the state's water system, California Water Action Plan and California WaterFix to the position.

Nemeth succeeds Grant Davis, who is returning to Sonoma County Water Agency to serve as General Manager.

"I want to thank Grant Davis for his service to California," Secretary Laird said. "I also welcome Karla Nemeth to this important role and am confident she will do a great job at this critical time for the Department," Secretary Laird said.

DWR also announced the restructuring and elevation of a number of positions on its executive team to help improve long-term planning and day-to-day management of key water programs,

dam safety and flood control – functions that are increasingly critical in the face of climate change.

This includes replacing an existing executive position – Deputy Director for Integrated Water Management – with two positions tightly focused on priority areas. The first of these positions, Deputy Director for Flood Management and Dam Safety, will focus specifically on flood management, dam safety and the operation of DWR's dams, consistent with recommendations from the Independent Forensic Team tasked with examining the Oroville Dam spillways incident. Eric Koch, who has served in numerous leadership roles at DWR over the past decade, will serve in this new role effective today and will oversee the Division of Flood Management and the Division of Safety of Dams.

The second position, Deputy Director for Integrated Water Management and Multi-Benefit Programs, will focus on long-range planning and integrated water management, as well as local water supply sustainability and DWR's EcoRestore Program. This Deputy Director also will oversee programs that achieve multiple benefits in the areas of flood control, surface water, groundwater and ecosystem health.

Finally, DWR is consolidating responsibilities for management of the newly established Executive Sustainable Groundwater Management Program with Deputy Director for Special Initiatives Taryn Ravazzini. The move will help with the implementation of the landmark Sustainable Groundwater Management Act of 2014, a key priority of the administration. Ravazzini has served as Deputy Director since 2014.

Together these changes will help make California more safe and resilient in the face of future droughts and floods.

More information in the state's ongoing efforts to further boost dam safety can be found here. Information about the ongoing effort to strengthen infrastructure and prepare for and adapt to a changing climate can be found here.

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