Meeting Summary
Oroville Dam Citizens Advisory Commission
Meeting #22: April 10, 2026
10:00 a.m.– Noon
Online via Zoom

This summary provides an overview of the April 10, 2026 Oroville Dam Citizens Advisory Commission (OCAC) meeting and focuses primarily on capturing the comments and questions posed by commissioners and members of the public. It is organized by agenda topic to assist readers in cross-referencing the meeting materials. This document is not intended to serve as minutes of the meeting or a transcript of the discussion. Related materials, including the slide deck and a video recording, are available on the OCAC Website.

Meeting Agenda

- Welcome and Opening Remarks
- Oroville Levee Report
- New Bullards Bar Operations & Coordination
- Water Control Manual Update
- Downstream Perspective on Water Control Manual
- Public Comment & Questions
- Adjournment

Action Items

- Include Water Control Manual Update on the agenda for the next OCAC meeting (after August release of draft manuals and NEPA documents)
- DWR to meet with interested parties to address questions outlined on slide 48 of Meeting 22 presentation; ensure all Commissioners receive an invitation to the meeting
- Post a link to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service issued concurrence on the Biological Opinion related to the license

Rollcall

As mandated by the requirements set forth in Senate Bill 955 (2018, Nielsen), the Commission comprises representatives from the following agencies and public bodies. Attendance at Meeting 22 on April 10, 2026, is noted in the table below. Meeting 22 did not reach a quorum with only nine commissioners in attendance at the time of the roll call; as a result, Secretary Crowfoot proceeded with the meeting content as a public workshop rather than an official Commission meeting, and no formal votes were taken.

Agency or Public Body	Commissioner (or Alternate)	Attendance
California Natural Resources Agency	(Chair) Secretary Wade Crowfoot	Yes
California State Senate	Senator Brian Dahle (represented by Bruce Ross)	Yes
California State Assembly	(Vice Chair) Assemblymember James Gallagher (represented by Juleah Cordi)	Yes
Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR)	Director Armando Quintero (represented by District Superintendent Matthew Allen)	Yes
Department of Water Resources (DWR)	Director Karla Nemeth (represented by Lead Deputy Director Tom Gibson)	Yes

Agency or Public Body	Commissioner (or Alternate)	Attendance
California Governor's Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES)	Director Nancy Ward	No
Oroville City Council	Mayor David Pittman	Yes
Oroville City Council	Vice Mayor Eric Smith	No
Butte County Board of Supervisors	Supervisor Tod Kimmelshue	No
Butte County Board of Supervisors	Supervisor Bill Connelly	Yes
Representative on behalf of Butte County Board of Supervisors	Robert Bateman	Yes
Yuba County Board of Supervisors	Supervisor Seth Fuhrer	No
Yuba Office of Emergency Services	OES Manager Oscar Marin	No
Sutter County Board of Supervisors	Supervisor Jeff Boone	No
Sutter County Board of Supervisors	Supervisor Jeff Stevens	Yes
California Highway Patrol	Lieutenant Patrick Leach	No
Butte County Sheriff's Office	Lieutenant James Beller	No
Yuba County Sheriff's Office	Operations Captain Nathan Lybarger	No
Sutter County Sheriff's Office	Deputy Andre Licon	No

Welcome and Opening Remarks

Commission Chair California Natural Resources Agency (CNRA) Secretary Wade Crowfoot welcomed commissioners, presenters, and members of the public to the twenty-second meeting of the Oroville Dam Citizens Advisory Commission (OCAC).

As part of his opening statements, Secretary Crowfoot acknowledged the passing of Congressman Doug LaMalfa and his legacy of leadership for the state of California. He also highlighted the California Department of Water Resources (DWR) Feather River Floating Classroom experience that some commissioners and DWR staff were able to attend after the last Commission meeting to learn more about Chinook salmon and the work of the Feather River Fish Hatchery.

He thanked the Vice Chair of the Commission, Assemblymember James Gallagher, for his leadership role. Vice Chair Gallagher also offered some words in honor of the late Congressman Doug LaMalfa.

On behalf of the California Department of Water Resources (DWR), Lead Deputy Director Tom Gibson welcomed participants and expressed appreciation for continued collaboration with regional partners, including the Yuba Water Agency and the City of Oroville. He highlighted the

City's levee screening report as an example of effective coordination among local, state, and federal agencies to proactively address flood management concerns.

Lead Deputy Director Gibson then introduced John Yarbrough, DWR's Deputy Director overseeing the State Water Project (SWP), to provide an update on the current water year and operations at Oroville Dam. Yarbrough noted that the state experienced highly variable conditions this year, with periods of intense precipitation followed by extended dry and unusually warm weather. While total precipitation levels were near average statewide, the snowpack was significantly below average. As a result, DWR does not anticipate Lake Oroville reaching full capacity this year and is implementing water conservation measures while continuing to meet downstream requirements. DWR is committed to public safety, and there was a recent multi-agency emergency preparedness exercise conducted in March with 24 partner organizations to strengthen coordination and communication during potential emergency events.

Lead Deputy Director Gibson also reported recent progress in the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) relicensing process, with US Fish and Wildlife issuing a concurrence on the biological opinion in February 2026.

CNRA's Deputy Secretary for Water, Samantha Arthur, stated that FERC was invited to present on the licensing process at today's Commission meeting but were unable to attend. The Commission will be updated on the relicensing process as further updates are available.

Terra Alpaugh, Commission support staff, then provided a brief update on the Commission's Triennial Legislative Report. The report will cover the past three years of Commission meetings, including information on planned and completed dam maintenance and improvements, flood management projects along the Feather River, and a comprehensive record of Commission communications. Commissioners are also encouraged to submit written reflections on their work over the past three years, and this reflection will be included as a dedicated section in the final report. The draft version of the report will be distributed to commissioners via email and posted publicly to allow for a three-week public comment period. Afterwards, staff will incorporate feedback and finalize the report for submission to the Legislature and posting online.

Oroville Levee Report

Michael Gonia, a geotechnical engineer with the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) Levee Safety Center, provided a presentation on the findings of a levee performance and risk assessment that was done on the City of Oroville's levee downstream of the Oroville Dam.

Mr. Gonia began with an overview of the levee review process and explained that it is a voluntary process in which the USACE conducts a field visit and screening-level risk assessment. The three main components of levee risk to be assessed are: flood hazards, expected levee performance, and consequences of a levee breach.

He emphasized the various audiences that might be interested in a levee performance risk assessment, including the levee owner/operator, the state government, emergency managers, community leaders, and individuals. In this case, the City of Oroville participated in the assessment because they were interested in better understanding the current condition of the city's levee system, identifying vulnerabilities, and prioritizing cost-effective risk reduction strategies. Other participating agencies include DWR, Sutter Butte Flood Control Agency (SBFCA), and some engineering firms.

The Assessment concluded that the City of Oroville's levee should be classified as a low life safety risk. Key factors contributing to this conclusion included strong emergency preparedness, effective historical evacuation efforts, and high community awareness of flood risks. Additionally, the presence of Oroville Dam upstream significantly reduces both the frequency and severity of potential flooding events impacting the levee. Mr. Gonia noted that, while the levee is expected to perform adequately based on the assessment, a critical levee reach is vulnerable to poor performance.

Mr. Gonia described findings from three main components of the assessment in more detail:

- **Major findings for the hazard component:** overtopping of the levee would require extremely high flows of more than 300,000 cubic feet per second (cfs), levels that have not been observed in over 100 years of record. The levee along Bedrock Park is vulnerable to overtopping due to its lower elevation.

- **Major findings for the levee performance component:** Many sections of the levee are overbuilt with dredge tailings, which makes it more porous, and seepage through the foundation and the embankment is probable. The critical levee section is at Bedrock Park. Additionally, vegetation in certain areas could contribute to erosion risks if not properly managed.

- **Major findings for the consequences component:** Modeling looked at possible breach scenarios and people's behavior, with inputs such as historic emergency planning, experience, and community risk perception. Modeling results indicated that flood inundation depths in the area would generally be between zero to six feet with a maximum of 14 feet in some places and an expected low loss of life (<1) due to anticipated successful evacuations. However, potential economic damages could exceed $100 million and key infrastructure could be impacted.

Mr. Gonia noted several limitations of the analysis, including that it did not fully account for other flood risks such as interior drainage issues or seepage beneath the levee, which may warrant further study.

Mr. Gonia concluded with a series of prioritized recommendations to reduce risk, including updating the assessment following revisions to Oroville Dam's Water Control Manual, enhancing local flood response training, developing formal operations and maintenance and emergency action plans, conducting additional geotechnical investigations in critical areas, improving inventory and monitoring of levee infrastructure such as pipes, and further evaluating additional flood risks. He closed by emphasizing the importance of continued coordination among local, state, and federal partners in managing flood risk and protecting the Oroville community.

Commissioners provided comments and asked questions following the presentation.

Mayor David Pittman thanked Mr. Gonia and reflected on the historical importance of flood control efforts in the region. He acknowledged the importance of the City of Oroville's role in focusing on levee maintenance and integrity moving forward, including Bedrock Park and the surface rain drainage system.

Michael Bessette, Executive Director of SBFCA, discussed his agency's efforts to assist the City of Oroville on some of the recommendations laid out by Mr. Gonia. He highlighted one area of concern related to the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP): FEMA will eventually remap the City of Oroville and could potentially designate large portions of Oroville within the

floodplain. In light of that, Mr. Bessette emphasized the importance of moving forward with the USACE recommendations to reduce flood risk, particularly geotechnical analysis of the levee; he asked for continued collaboration and funding support from the State.

Bruce Ross from the Office of Senator Brian Dahle asked for clarification on the owner of the Oroville levee. Mayor Pittman explained that the City of Oroville owns about a one-mile section of levee along the river corridor near downtown. However, the overall system includes additional protections provided by CA Highway 70. He pointed out that the City is not responsible for inspecting or maintaining CA Highway 70.

To hear the complete presentation and discussion, please refer to the meeting recording online.

New Bullards Bar Operations and Coordination

Willie Whittlesey, General Manager at Yuba Water Agency, provided a presentation on the operation of the New Bullards Bar facility on the Yuba River and cross-agency coordination of operational decisions at New Bullards Bar and Oroville, since they both release water to the Feather River. USACE is currently updating the New Bullards Bar Water Control Manual in parallel with the Water Control Manual update at Oroville Dam.

Mr. Whittlesey provided an overview of the Yuba Water Agency's core missions which include flood risk reduction, sustainable water supply, hydropower generation, fisheries protection and enhancement, and recreation at the reservoir.

Mr. Whittlesey explained that New Bullards Bar Dam and reservoir is a critical flood control facility, with nearly one million acre-feet of storage and 170,000 acre-feet of dedicated flood storage capacity. As the fifth tallest dam in the United States, it provides water supply to Yuba County farmers and ranchers. Mr. Whittlesey emphasized that New Bullards Bar and its ability to provide flood protection was not impacted by the recent penstock rupture (discussed in more detail below); the penstock incident location is five miles downstream from the reservoir.

He highlighted the historical context of flood risk in the region, noting that legacy impacts from hydraulic mining elevated riverbeds and contributed to flooding challenges, particularly in areas like Marysville. Levees were built by early settlers to deal with the challenges, but exacerbated flooding and sediment build-up. New Bullards Bar was built on the North Yuba River, the only flood control reservoir on the three Yuba River branches (North, Middle, South). It contributes to flood risk reduction at the confluence of the Yuba and Feather Rivers.

Mr. Whittlesey reviewed the history of major flood events in Yuba County both before and after the construction of Oroville Dam and New Bullards Bar, with major flood events occurring approximately every 10 to 15 years. The impacts on the Yuba County communities of Linda and Arboga from two separate flood events in 1986 and in 1997, respectively, resulted from foundational deficiencies in levees rather than overtopping. Since then, significant effort and investment have been dedicated to reconstructing the levees to reach a greater than 200-year level of protection for much of the urbanized areas in Yuba County.

After the 1997 floods, the Yuba Feather Forecast Coordinated Operations (FCO) Program was established to improve coordination between Oroville and New Bullards Bar and therefore flood protection along the Yuba-Feather River system. Through shared modeling and communication, reservoir operators and the USACE coordinate releases to ensure downstream river flows

remain within channel capacity. This has been a highly successful and foundational component of current flood management.

Building on this program, Yuba Water Agency and DWR started a new initiative called the Yuba-Feather Forecast-Informed Reservoir Operations (FIRO), a flexible water management approach that uses data from watershed monitoring and improved weather forecasting to help water managers strategically store or release water from reservoirs. He noted that both Yuba Water Agency and DWR are working with the USACE to update both Oroville Dam and New Bullard Bar's Water Control Manuals to formally integrate FIRO, with completion anticipated next year.

Mr. Whittlesey then discussed Yuba Water Agency's planned investment in the Atmospheric River Control (ARC) Spillway project at New Bullards Bar, which would enhance operational flexibility by allowing earlier, controlled releases ahead of major storm events in coordination with FIRO. He clarified that the ARC Spillway would not replace the primary spillway but would allow for earlier releases to increase available storage capacity and reduce peak downstream flows during large storm events and thereby, reduce flood risk and the pressure on downstream levees.

To conclude, Mr. Whittlesey discussed the significant financial investments made in flood risk reduction by the Yuba Water Agency since 2017: this included provision of over $96 million to local partner agencies to improve levees and related infrastructure, routine dam safety and improvement projects, and day-to-day operations, maintenance, and capital investments at New Bullards Bar. He emphasized how the agency continues to be committed to flood management and coordination with regional partners.

Commissioner Bill Connelly asked for clarification on whether the ARC Spillway would require Yuba Water Agency to trade off water supply deliveries for public safety. Mr. Whittlesey explained that during high-flow or flood-risk years, the system typically has an abundance of water, and the strategy involves making controlled, early releases to create additional storage capacity ahead of major storm events. The approach therefore allows them to store inflows and thereby reduce peak downstream flows, meaning it supports both water supply and public safety.

At Secretary Crowfoot's request, Mr. Whittlesey then provided a brief update on the February 13th penstock rupture at the New Colgate Powerhouse. Mr. Whittlesey first noted that the February penstock failure, while a catastrophic event, did not impact the safety or operations of New Bullards Bar. He explained that the rupture occurred near the top of the penstock, releasing approximately 400 acre-feet of water that had been stored in the tunnel. He emphasized there was no dam safety emergency, as the reservoir was not actively feeding the system at the time and operators quickly shut off additional inflow.

The sudden release caused significant erosion and sent sediment, debris, and some lubricating oil into the Yuba River and into the USACE' Englebright Reservoir. Cleanup efforts were conducted in coordination with DWR and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) Oil Spill Prevention and Response (OSPR) group, who successfully contained and removed the oil and debris. Recovery work is now focused on removing sediment deposits in coordination with FERC.

The event did not cause significant damage to Colgate Powerhouse, and it can return to service once the penstock is repaired. An independent forensic investigation is underway to determine the cause of the failure, which will guide repair efforts.

To hear the complete presentation and discussion, please refer to the meeting recording online.

Water Control Manual Updates

CNRA Deputy Secretary Samantha Arther conveyed updates from USACE about the National Environmental Quality Act (NEPA) process for the New Bullards Bar and Oroville Dam Water Control Manual updates. She reminded commissioners that the USACE will be holding public NEPA meetings, and more information can be found on the USACE website.

Deputy Secretary Arthur provided an overview of the NEPA schedule and key dates: the public scoping period for the Water Control Manual NEPA documents is over, held from February to March. In August, the Draft NEPA documents, the draft Water Control Manuals, and a Draft Engineering Report are expected to be released for public review. Approximately two weeks after the Draft document, manual and report are released, the USACE will hold a public meeting to take questions and public comment. The public comment period will be open for 30 days.

Deputy Secretary Arthur then invited DWR Lead Deputy Director Tom Gibson and SWP Deputy Director John Yarbrough to discuss DWR's engagement with the USACE on the Oroville Water Control Manual update process. Lead Deputy Director Gibson discussed how DWR has invested significant time and resources over the past few years in advancing FIRO, and is looking forward to seeing how the Army Corps incorporates FIRO into their draft Water Control Manual update.
SWP Deputy Director Yarbrough reinforced that point, noting that these advancements can improve both flood protection and water supply outcomes using existing infrastructure. He explained that while FIRO offers meaningful benefits, there are still limitations to forecasting accuracy that must be considered in operational decisions.

SWP Deputy Director Yarbrough also highlighted that the Corps is balancing multiple factors in its update, including existing flood storage requirements authorized by Congress, system-wide coordination with other reservoirs such as New Bullards Bar, and the evolving capabilities of forecasting technology. The Corps has been engaging with Commission members and the Oroville community, receiving a range of perspectives that are helping inform ongoing discussions. He reiterated DWR's commitment to transparency and safety and expressed interest in reviewing the Corps' draft once it is released.

To hear the complete presentation and discussion, please refer to the meeting recording online.

Downstream Perspective on Water Control Manual Update Process

Commissioners Robert Bateman and Bill Connelly provided a presentation of their perspectives and priorities on behalf of the commissioners and interested parties who have been participating in the Water Control Manual update process.

Commissioner Bateman, in his role as commissioner and as a member of the Feather River Recovery Alliance (FRRA), discussed how communities have faced repeated flood threats over the years and want stronger protections. The FRRA believes that all reasonable actions should be taken to minimize threats of inundation and evacuations. The FRRA, formed in 2017 after the Spillway Incident, has continued to raise concerns with FERC and has coordinated with

commissioners, concerned citizens, the USACE, DWR, and local agencies to better understand the Oroville Water Control Manual update.

Commissioner Bateman summarized information from the Yuba-Oroville FIRO Study completed last year, emphasizing his conclusion that improved forecasting enables more flexible operations and greater public safety. He summarized the different operational approaches (alternatives) evaluated by the FIRO study: Alternative 1 incorporates largely status quo flood control rules combined with improved forecasting. Mr. Bateman acknowledged this was already being implemented by DWR with positive results.

Mr. Bateman described FIRO Alternatives 3 and 4 as the alternatives relevant for consideration within the Water Control Manual update. Alternative 3 maintains many of the existing rules, including the current variable flood pool space and DWR's discretion of releases. Alternative 4, however, would use more dynamic, science-based reservoir management based on the advancements in FIRO. Bateman explained FRRA's concern that rigid study parameters established by DWR excluded operational approaches that might better prioritize public safety. FRRA is particularly concerned about the decisions to:

- Limit lowering the reservoir to 835 ft as opposed to the bottom of the gates at 813 ft, which approximately doubled the theoretical risk of damaging floods;
- Specify that only an additional 200,000 acre feet of flood pool would be offered in the study during years of heavy precipitation (while asking that the flood pool be reduced in drought years by 400,000 acre feet);
- Not set an "aspirational goal" for the amount of flood protection to be provided, such as 1 in 500 year protection (while having a numeric goal for the increase in the retention of water)

Mr. Bateman described his understanding that DWR wants to use FIRO to gain more flood management and water supply benefits from existing flood reservation space. He believes this precludes Plan 4 as a viable option, because it involves a variable flood pool, even though it would provide more protection to downstream communities.

Commissioner Bateman advocated that DWR should prioritize maximizing flood safety over water supply policies. He expressed concern for reduced safety of downstream communities, especially in light of climate change, as well as a need for transparency in policy-setting at DWR. He stated that better use of science could both reduce flood risk (potentially to a 500-year level), improve water storage, and save costs in the long run. Mr. Bateman made a series of requests for clearer justification of DWR's choices in the study, greater community input, and reconsideration of the current approach.

Supervisor Bill Connelly reinforced these points, emphasizing the need for a local-state partnership with DWR that prioritizes safety before water delivery. He stressed that artificial limits on reservoir drawdown are preventing operational approaches that would be most protective of public safety. He called for more flexibility, greater accountability, and clarity on who is making policy decisions that prioritize water supply over public safety, stating that reliance on outdated rules could leave downstream communities vulnerable in future major flood events.

In response, Secretary Crowfoot shared his experience that DWR leadership does not trade flood safety for water supply and deliveries, cautioning against any implication of hidden motives. He expressed support for the presentation and the continued use of the Commission as a venue for dialogue.

Mr. Yarbrough contributed to the discussion, reaffirming that safety is a top priority for DWR in reservoir operations and that flood space is managed for public protection. The FIRO Study has been transmitted to USACE for more detailed analysis and consideration as part of their alternatives development, which will incorporate modern forecasting and current science. Ultimately, DWR is not responsible for selecting the final alternative, but they are excited to see what the Corps will propose in terms of operations. More details on the preferred alternative are expected in August as part of the Water Control Manual update process.

Secretary Crowfoot suggested that this topic remain on the agenda for upcoming meetings, particularly once the Amry Corps has shared their alternative(s). Commissioner Bateman stated his understanding the DWR has set constraints on what USACE can consider in the Manual Update with respect to FIRO; he asked that DWR meet with interested Commissioners before August to discuss this topic. Secretary Crowfoot asked DWR to meet with interested parties to address the specific questions from the presentation and ensure all Commissioners receive an invitation to the meeting.

To hear the complete presentation and discussion, please refer to the meeting recording online.

Public Comment and Questions

Secretary Crowfoot opened the floor to public comment.

Comment One:

> Jonathan Young from the State Wate Contractors (SWC) made comments in response to the presentation from Commissioners Bateman and Connelly, emphasizing that downstream safety is a top priority for the contractors. He clarified that the SWC's do not, however, make decisions or recommendations on flood control operations or budgets which are handled by DWR, nor the Water Control Manual Update which is handled by the USACE.
>
> Mr. Young also stressed that the SWC advocate for increased flood control funding at state and federal levels, as well as FIRO as a way to improve safety and operations of dams and reservoirs throughout the state.

Comment Two:

> Matt Mentink requested a number of items to be added to the tracking log to be considered for future implementation[1], including:
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> 1. Members of the public are provided a link to the US Fish & Wildlife Service letter on FERC relicensing.
> 2. The Charter should be invoked to select a new representative from Yuba County to participate in the OCAC, as no representatives from Yuba County have attended a Commission meeting in over a year.
> 3. Non-Commission experts should be allowed to present given this is a Citizens Advisory Commission and because he primarily prepared the technical analysis presented by Commissioners Bateman and Connelly today.

[1] Note: Attendees do not have the authority to add items to the tracking log. These are requests for the Secretary, as Chair, to consider.

He provided further perspective on discussions with the USACE and DWR about the Water Control Manual Update, continuing from Commissioners Bateman and Connelly's presentation.

Mr. Mentink reinforced that current proposals rely on a rigid "hard bottom" for reservoir pool levels to protect water supply contracts, but this limits flood protection. Modern forecasting and decision tools like FIRO allow for more flexible operations, meaning the reservoir could be drawn down further before storms without sacrificing long-term water supply because the conservation pool can be recovered at the end of a large storm event.

Mr. Mentink argued that both objectives can be achieved: stronger flood protection, even up to 500-year events, and maintaining water deliveries. He discussed how DWR decisions and policy constraints prevent adoption of alternative and flexible approaches (for example FIRO Plan 4 that Commissioner Bateman discussed).

For more details on the public comment and the discussion that followed, please refer to the meeting recording online.

Adjournment

Secretary Crowfoot adjourned the meeting by thanking the public, the presenters, and commissioners for their engagement at OCAC Meeting 22.

The next Commission meeting will be held sometime in summer 2026; a calendar invitation will be sent to commissioners, and the website will be updated with the information when the exact date becomes available.

All meeting materials can be found on the Commission's website here.