



**Long-term Drought: Expert Panel on Protecting Communities and Species**

**Introduction**

Water Resilience Portfolio Action 26.3 tasks the State with developing strategies to protect communities and fish and wildlife in the event of drought lasting at least six years. The California Water Commission will host a panel of experts to explore the impacts of droughts on communities and species to support Action 26.3.

Dr. Jay Lund, Professor of Civil and Environmental Engineering at UC Davis, will review prospects for community and environmental drought problems in California over the long term. These problems are often connected to larger regional and statewide agricultural, groundwater, and water system management issues. Climate change is magnifying many drought impacts. Some promising policy directions and needs will be discussed to prepare for drought impacts on communities and species.

Justine Massey, Policy Manager and Attorney at Community Water Center, will discuss drought impacts on communities and the urgency of upholding the Human Right to Water. She will also discuss how best to protect communities as drought continues, including via sustainable groundwater management, strategic land repurposing and improvements in drought emergency response.

Melissa M. Rohde, Principal of Rohde Environmental Consulting, LLC, will provide an overview of drought impacts on ecosystems and how California can ensure these ecosystems are drought resilient. She will discuss the importance of groundwater, drought refugia, and managed water to species during times of drought.

**Background**

On July 28, 2020, the California Natural Resources Agency, California Environmental Protection Agency, and the California Department of Food and Agriculture issued the final [Water Resilience Portfolio](#) (portfolio) in response to Governor Newsom’s Executive Order N-10-19, which calls for a “set of actions to meet California water needs through the 21st century.” The portfolio outlines a broad suite of actions designed to move the state toward water resilience. The portfolio includes Action 26.3: Develop strategies to protect communities and fish and wildlife in the event of drought lasting at least six years. Action 26.3 is assigned to the California Natural Resources Agency and the California Environmental Protection Agency; the State Water Resources Control Board, Department of Water Resources, Department of Fish and Wildlife, and Department of Food and Agriculture represent these agencies. Action 26.3 is embedded in a section of the portfolio that is focused on preparation for a changing climate, which includes actions designed to help regions prepare for inevitable drought.

In a letter dated December 14, 2021, the Secretaries for Natural Resources, Environmental Protection, and Food and Agriculture requested that the Commission assist with this action by educating itself about potential long-term strategies for managing sustained drought and delivering a proposed set of investments and policies that would better position the state to manage severely constrained water supplies for at least six consecutive years. The Commission proposes to accomplish this work by leading a thorough and inclusive public dialog, similar to the Commission’s recent efforts to assess a state role in

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financing climate-resilient conveyance and in supporting locally driven, in-basin groundwater trading programs that protect natural resources, small- and medium-sized farms, and disadvantaged communities. The Commission has coordinated with other agencies and developed a [framework](#) to advance its work without disrupting immediate drought response efforts. At the end of this process, the Commission will produce a paper that describes a set of strategies to protect communities and fish and wildlife in the event of long-term drought that agency policy makers can draw on when considering future policy and financial investment.

The Commission's work on long-term drought will implement Goal One of the Strategic Plan, which calls on the Commission to "serve as a primary public forum for the discussion of improving water management policy to assist regions in achieving climate resiliency ... including those actions of the Water Resilience Portfolio assigned to the Commission."

### **Meeting Overview**

Commissioners will hear from the panelists noted above, take questions from the public, and then engage in a discussion with the panelists.

This is an informational item.

### **Contact**

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