



Drought Strategies: Presentation of Final White Paper (Action Item)

Introduction

The California Water Commission has completed its investigation into strategies to protect communities and fish and wildlife in the event of drought and has produced a final draft drought strategies white paper. The Commission’s drought work supports Water Resilience Portfolio Action 26.3 and comes at the request of the Secretaries for Food and Agriculture, Environmental Protection, and Natural Resources. The Commission’s work on drought is forward-looking, anticipating and preparing for the next drought by building on work underway in California. The intent of the Commission’s work is to inform the Secretaries as they prepare for and navigate future droughts and to position the State to better protect fish and wildlife and communities.

In November of 2023, Commission staff presented a draft white paper to the Commission and opened a public comment period. The public comment period closed on December 15, 2023. Staff has reviewed and considered all public comments received and has modified the white paper to produce a final draft. Staff will present the final draft drought strategies white paper at this meeting, noting where changes have been made to the document.

Commission Decision

The Commission is being asked to approve the white paper presented by staff. The Commission may: approve the white paper as written; approve the white paper with modifications; or send the paper back to staff for revisions. If the Commission approves the white paper as written or with modifications, staff will share the white paper with state policymakers and the public. If the Commission sends the paper back to staff for revisions, staff will make the requested revisions and bring the paper back before the Commission at a future meeting.

Staff recommends the Commission approve the white paper. This white paper has been vetted by the Commission, other State agencies, and the public, and is now ready to be used as guidance for shaping the State’s role in protecting communities and fish and wildlife in the event of drought. This paper is well-positioned to be immediately impactful by helping State decision-makers better prepare for 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 strategies for managing drought and delivering a proposed set of investments and policies that would better position the state to manage severely constrained water supplies. The [Secretaries' letter to the Commission](#) was sent as State agencies were managing the impacts of two years of severe drought and preparing for a third. Starting in December 2022, a stream of atmospheric river storms ended the drought that had begun in 2020 – and triggered destructive floods. In the context of this weather whiplash, the Commission has fulfilled the Secretaries' request.

The Commission accomplished this work by leading a thorough and inclusive public dialog, similar to the Commission's recent efforts to assess a state role in 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 coordinated with other agencies and developed a [framework](#) to advance its work without disrupting 2022 drought response efforts. To gather information about drought strategies, the Commission hosted expert panels at Commission meetings; conducted research by reviewing literature and speaking with drought and water management experts from California and other Western states, Australia, Israel, and Chile; hosted two series of Tribal small-group discussions; convened a drought working group and developed a set of preliminary drought strategies; conducted outreach and made presentations to diverse interest groups; hosted three public workshops; and worked closely with State agencies. All of the information and feedback received throughout this process has been considered during the drafting of the drought strategies white paper. The Commission's white paper is the culmination of its drought work and describes a set of strategies to protect communities and fish and wildlife in the event of drought that agency decision makers can draw on when considering future policies and financial investments.

The Commission's work on drought implements 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."

Agenda Item: 14

Meeting Date: January 17, 2024

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Meeting Overview

Assistant Executive Officer Laura Jensen will present the white paper to the Commission and seek approval to finalize the document.

This is an action item.

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