



MEMORANDUM

TO: SAN LUIS & DELTA-MENDOTA WATER AUTHORITY BOARD
FROM: DAN KEPPEL, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
SUBJECT: UPDATE REPORT
DATE: FEBRUARY 3, 2025

This memo is intended to keep you apprised as to what is happening regarding policy issues the Family Farm Alliance (Alliance) is engaged in. In the past month, much of our efforts have focused on completing detailed recommendations for the incoming Trump administration, tracking last-minute executive actions and spending announcements driven by the Biden Administration, wrapping up our 2024 annual report, coordinating a regional response to the California State Water Board's Bay-Delta water quality plan, public speaking, and media/public outreach. These issues and other matters important to our members are further discussed in this memo.

OUTGOING ACTIONS OF THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION

Outgoing President Joe Biden [delivered a Farewell Address](#) to the nation on January 15. He reflected on his legacy and the challenges facing the country in the coming years. In the weeks before the Biden Administration headed out the door on January 20, agencies handed out money left and right.

1. Interior / Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) Funding Announcements

As you know, the Alliance was part of a five-organization steering committee that led over 220 water and agriculture organizations who played a critical role in securing the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) and Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) funding for Western water infrastructure and drought mitigation efforts. Reclamation has announced more than \$5.8 billion from the IIJA for more than 674 projects. The IRA includes \$550 million for Reclamation to implement domestic water supply projects and \$4 billion for water conservation and ecosystem

projects in the Colorado River Basin and other basins experiencing similar levels of long-term drought. Last month, Reclamation announced:

- More than \$3.2 billion from IRA for 229 drought mitigation projects, 40 domestic water supply projects, seven emergency relief projects for Tribal communities and four canal improvement projects.
- \$223 million for water recycling and desalination projects aimed at addressing the impacts of drought. The funding from the IJA and annual appropriations is being awarded to 18 projects in eight states through the Title XVI Water Reclamation and Reuse and Desalination Programs.
- A \$514 million investment intended to bring clean, reliable drinking water to communities across the West through five water storage and conveyance projects. As you know, this included \$125 million for the B.F. Sisk Dam Raise and Reservoir Expansion Project. Reclamation and SLDMWA also signed a related [cost share agreement](#) for the B.F. Sisk Dam Raise and Reservoir Expansion Project, advancing water supply reliability in the Central Valley by creating an additional 130,000 acre-feet of storage space in San Luis Reservoir.
- More than \$41 million investment from the IJA for 21 projects to bolster water resources, advance ecosystem health, and support resilience in communities facing drought and other climate change impacts. The projects will support instream and riparian restoration, canal lining and piping, fish habitat improvements and fish passage.
- A \$121 million investment from the Department of the Interior (DOI) to help Tribal communities prepare for the most severe climate-related environmental threats to their homelands.
- A \$50 million investment from the IRA for Reclamation and water users to fund drought resiliency projects in the Klamath Basin.

2. Revisions to NEPA Categorical Exclusions

Reclamation has finalized revisions to seven categorical exclusions (CEs) under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) to help streamline environmental reviews for certain water-related projects. These [updates](#) aim to enhance efficiency for contracting, use authorizations, financial assistance (including WaterSMART grants), loans, and funding activities. The revisions, published for public comment in June 2024, incorporated feedback from state governments, Tribal Nations, and various water organizations. According to Reclamation, this modernization effort updates CEs that have been in place for over 40 years, ensuring alignment with current regulations and policies while supporting priority water infrastructure needs across the West. Reclamation took public comments, many of them from our organization, and incorporated as many of the

comments as feasible. We also participated in Reclamation's [7/2/24 webinar](#) on this topic. See the [Federal Register](#) announcement for further information.

3. New pilot program to test farming practices use less water

Reclamation announced last month that it was launching the Sustainable Water for Agriculture Pilots (SWAP) Program that will test innovative crops and practices to significantly reduce agricultural water use at low to moderate costs. These projects will keep the farmland in production while conserving water. Reclamation has \$6.5 million available this year for this new program through the IRA. These demonstration projects are needed to show whether specific crops or practices are practicable in particular geographic areas. The SWAP Program would complement the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA's) Water-Saving Commodities Program, a program that the Alliance helped influence, working with representatives from the Secretary's office. At present the program is limited to water districts (more than half of them Family Farm Alliance members), Tribes, and acequias eligible to participate in the Water-Saving Commodities Program. USDA is coordinating with Reclamation to provide funding for innovative projects that demonstrate significant additional reductions in water use per-acre of irrigated land under continued production of agricultural commodities.

4. Colorado River.....On a "Path to Success"?

Reclamation last month released the next step in a "responsible path" to guide post-2026 operations for the Colorado River, which provides critical water resources for 40 million people across 7 states and 30 Tribes across the West. The [alternatives for consideration, previewed in November](#), represent a range of actions. The report provides additional detail on the alternatives from modeling and analysis performed by Reclamation, which they claim reflects ongoing conversations with all Basin stakeholders. Reclamation will now proceed with full analysis of these alternatives to develop a draft EIS. The Biden administration also emphasized its efforts over the past 2 years – bolstered by over \$4 billion in IRA funding – to work with Lower Basin water users to stave off a crisis in the short-term. Today, Lake Mead is replenished, up nearly 20 feet from two years ago, and Lake Powell has rebounded 50 feet. The lower Basin states and the Country of Mexico saved 1.6 million acre-feet by the end of 2024, an unprecedented level of conservation for the Colorado River Basin, supported by an unprecedented level of federal funding provided by Congress.

Reclamation last month announced initial selections under the Upper Colorado River Basin Environmental Program for a \$388.3 million investment from the IRA to improve wildlife and aquatic habitats, ecological stability and resilience against drought. Additionally, Reclamation announced approximately \$100 Million funding opportunity for the companion program in the Lower Basin, which seeks to fund projects that provide environmental benefits in Arizona, Nevada, and California. While all of this funding certainly has provided a short-term band-aid to the "bleeding" of Lakes Mead and Powell, it remains to be seen how the long-term solutions will be developed, given the harsh tension exhibited between Upper Basin and Lower Basin interests

292

at last month's Colorado Water Users Association Annual Conference in Las Vegas. The seven states that rely on the Colorado River for water have avoided court battles, but there's work to do with the lake at 34% full and uncertainty about whether snowpack levels will deliver normal runoff this year. Federal leadership on managing the river changed on January 20 when President Donald Trump returned to the White House.

TRUMP ADMINISTRATION

5. President Trump Inaugurated – New Executive Orders Follow

On January 20, 2025, President Donald J. Trump was sworn in as the 47th President of the United States. Like all presidents before him, President Trump signed numerous executive actions on Inauguration Day and throughout the first week of his presidency. Of the 59 total executive actions taken by the Trump administration, there are 34 Executive Orders (EOs), 14 Presidential Memorandums, 5 Administrative Orders, 3 Presidential Proclamations, and many pardons or commutations. These actions significantly alter U.S. policies on energy, water, and the environment (*see Family Farm Alliance Activities, below, for more on this*).

6. President Trump Issues EO on California Water

President Trump in his first week in office issued an [executive order](#) aimed at seizing greater federal control over California's water management. Framing the directive as necessary to combat wildfires, President Trump proposed new federal policies, including those related to endangered species protections, to prioritize water deliveries to Southern California. The order targets water from the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta and directs federal agencies to identify regulatory barriers to water projects within 30 days. Critics, including California officials, conservation groups, and Democratic lawmakers, argued the order misrepresents the relationship between water management and wildfire prevention. They claim it prioritizes agricultural and urban water interests over environmental and local community needs while disregarding scientific and legal frameworks. Supporters, including many agricultural water districts, welcome the move as a step toward addressing longstanding water supply challenges in the region.

President Trump last Monday night raised the bar with California over water policy with a tweet suggesting U.S. military troops had arrived in the state to turn on pumps and send more water flowing — something state officials quickly denied. A firestorm of controversy erupted on social media and in the legacy media as scientists, water managers, state leaders, and various “experts” throughout the state called out the Trump administration's “misinformation” campaign on water management in California.

Things went from strange to stranger as the week went on. The *Los Angeles Times* reported Friday that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers — acting on President Trump's orders — released water from the Terminus Dam at Lake Kaweah and the Schafer Dam at Lake Success, which are both in Tulare County in the San Joaquin Valley. In a post to his official X account, Trump tweeted a

"photo of beautiful water flow that I just opened in California," writing: "Today, 1.6 billion gallons and, in 3 days, it will be 5.2 billion gallons.... Everybody should be happy about this long-fought Victory!.... I only wish they listened to me six years ago – There would have been no fire!"

An Army Corps spokesperson confirmed that the release of water from the dams was done "to ensure California has water available to respond to the wildfires." He added that the water release was "consistent with the direction" of the president's January 24 EO announcing "emergency measures to provide water resources in California." However, water managers in Tulare County told *SJV Water* — which covers water issues in the San Joaquin Valley — that there are multiple physical and legal barriers that prevent the valley's water from getting to Southern California. U.S. Senator Alex Padilla (D-CALIFORNIA), a member of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, [wrote a letter that questioned Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth](#) after the Army directed the unscheduled water releases.

Meanwhile, California Governor Gavin Newsom on January 31 [signed an executive order](#) that he says is intended to "maximize" the capture of water during winter storms. He ordered the state Department of Water Resources to "maximize diversions of excess flows" during winter storms to store more water in reservoirs such as San Luis, located south of the Delta. The [order](#) also calls for state agencies to "identify any obstacles that would hinder efforts to maximize diversions" and to promptly report on any "statutory or regulatory barriers that should be considered for suspension." Environmental and fishing groups ripped Governor Newsom's order, claiming his approach threatens to harm vulnerable fish species and the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta ecosystem. Others were pleased to see the order compliment similar priorities suggested by President Trump.

7. Confirmation of Trump Cabinet Nominees

Senate Republicans have made good progress pushing for quick confirmation of President Donald Trump's nominees for cabinet positions. Confirmed nominees of interest to Western water users:

- Lee Zeldin, the former Republican congressman, was confirmed by the Senate to be the 17th administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency by a 56-42 vote. Mr. Zeldin has a mandate from President Trump to carry out an aggressive deregulatory agenda aimed at boosting domestic energy production and bolstering the increasingly power-hungry data center and artificial intelligence sectors (POLITICO).
- The Senate on January 30 confirmed the nomination of Doug Burgum to lead DOI with broad bipartisan support. Lawmakers voted 79-18 for the former North Dakota governor, including 26 Democrats joining every Republican. The Energy and Natural Resources Committee vote was similarly bipartisan.
- The Senate on January 25 confirmed Kristi Noem as Secretary for Homeland Security by a vote of 59-34, with six Democrats voting to confirm. In her role, she will oversee 22 agencies.

Other cabinet nominees confirmed by the Senate include Sen. Marco Rubio (R-FL) as Secretary of State, John Ratcliffe as Central Intelligence Agency Director, Pete Hegseth as Secretary of Defense, Scott Bessent as Treasury Secretary, and Sean Duffy as Transportation Secretary. Nominees who oversee departments important to Western water users who have yet to be voted upon by the full Senate include:

- Chris Wright, the founder and CEO of Liberty Energy. Mr. Wright is President Trump's controversial pick to lead the Energy Department. The Senate's Energy and Natural Resources Committee voted 15-5 to advance him. If confirmed to the post, Wright will also serve on a newly formed "Council of National Energy" led by Secretary Burgum.
- Brooke Rollins, a former White House aide in Trump's first administration, appeared before the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry. Senators' top questions for Rollins included how she would support U.S. agriculture as Trump rolls out his tariff and mass deportation plans. Republicans continue to point to Rollins' relationship with Trump as a crucial strength that will help her defend the needs of the agriculture industry in the administration and during Cabinet talks. A vote on whether to advance her as the next Secretary of Agriculture is expected tonight.
- Robert F. Kennedy Jr. is on tap to helm the Health and Human Services Department. Democrats grilled him during two hearings — before the Senate Finance Committee and the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee — on his stances on vaccines, abortion access and more.

Other nominees who have not yet been voted upon by the full Senate include:

- Tulsi Gabbard (nominee for Director of National Intelligence), who appeared before the Senate Intelligence Committee for a confirmation hearing on Jan. 30 and faced tough questions from both sides of the aisle.
- Howard Lutnick, chair and CEO of Cantor Fitzgerald, President Trump's pick for Commerce Secretary. He appeared before the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee on Jan. 29.
- Russell Vought, President Donald Trump's pick to lead the Office of Management and Budget, who the Senate Budget Committee voted on Thursday to advance for a floor vote.
- Pam Bondi, Florida's former attorney general, is Trump's second choice to lead the Department of Justice after his initial pick, former Rep. Matt Gaetz (R-Fla.) withdrew from consideration amid controversy. She appeared earlier in January before the Senate Judiciary Committee, but she advanced from the panel on a party-line vote.

8. Temporary Leadership Team Named for DOI

Acting Interior Secretary Walter Cruickshank last month issued a secretarial order temporarily suspending the authority of DOI agencies to take significant actions, such as approving offshore wind leases and resource management plans. These decisions now require top leadership approval, with the order in effect for 60 days unless updated or revoked. This move is similar to a Biden-era order in 2021 and is aimed at ensuring alignment with President Donald Trump's policy priorities. Cruickshank also appointed more than a dozen acting leaders to key DOI roles under the Federal Vacancies Reform Act. Notable appointments include Karen Hawbecker as acting solicitor, Paul Souza as acting Fish and Wildlife Service director, Jon Raby as acting Bureau of Land Management (BLM) director, and David Palumbo as acting Commissioner of Reclamation. Scott Cameron will serve as a senior adviser to the secretary and fill multiple acting roles, including Assistant Secretary for Water and Science. Cruickshank, a 30-year veteran career official, acted as Secretary until Gov. Doug Burgum, Trump's pick for Interior Secretary, received Senate confirmation last week.

9. Recent Actions at USDA

President Donald Trump's plans for agriculture are coming together at USDA. President Trump has started undoing equity work and fired several inspectors general at the department. Democrats are criticizing the Trump administration's DEI rollback, saying they will impede the department's ability to help farmers. USDA staff have also been told to [remove climate change websites](#). The president is starting to roll out his use of tariffs as a negotiating tool — which could have significant impacts on U.S. agriculture and prices of imports. Ag representatives and lobbyists have been sounding the alarm for months about how Trump's sweeping tariff plans could have negative impacts on U.S. ag exports. However, just minutes ago, Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum said that her country had reached a series of agreements with President Trump and that tariffs will be put on hold for one month, starting now. The agreement calls for Mexico to immediately reinforce its northern border with 10,000 National Guard members to prevent drug trafficking from Mexico to the US, particularly fentanyl.

10. Leadership Changes at USDA

President Trump named his picks for senior posts at USDA last month as he moves to fill out his incoming administration. Richard Fordyce has been nominated as USDA Under Secretary for Farm Production and Conservation. He was formerly the Administrator of the Farm Service Agency during the first Trump administration and currently serves as Director of Ag Business for Osborn Barr Paramore. This position oversees the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and is one that the Alliance works closely with. Mr. Trump last month also appointed Michael Boren, the founder of Boise (IDAHO)-based company Clearwater Analytics, to serve as the Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment at the Department, another important post which oversees the U.S. Forest Service. Two other officials were announced for appointments as undersecretaries at USDA, both of whom served during the first Trump administration: Dudley

Hoskins as undersecretary for marketing and regulator programs and Luke Lindberg as undersecretary for trade and foreign agriculture affairs.

President Trump announced two new wildfire prevention appointments to USDA to lead the administration's "focus on forest management." Kristin Sleeper will be deputy undersecretary for natural resources and environment. She previously worked as professional staff for the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee and the House Ag Committee. She also directed policy for the National Alliance of Forest Owners, which represents companies that own private forests. Tom Schultz will be chief of staff at USDA for natural resources and environment. He previously was vice president of resources and government affairs, leading timber procurement, for the Idaho Forest Group. Our Idaho members have nothing but good things to say about him.

USDA recently announced the names of the following individuals who will hold senior staff positions in Washington, D.C. Kailee Tkacz Buller (USDA Chief of Staff), Preston Parry (USDA Deputy Chief of Staff), Jennifer Tiller (Chief of Staff to the Deputy Secretary and Senior Advisor to the Secretary for Food, Nutrition and Consumer Services), Ralph Linden (Principal Deputy General Counsel), Audra Weeks (Deputy Director of Communications) and Dominic Restuccia (White House Liaison) were all appointed. Many of these appointees served in the Trump 45 administration, as well.

11. Family Farm Alliance Activities

The Alliance board of directors in December approved the 2024 *Road Map for Western Water*, a report that details specific steps that the new Administration can take immediately upon assuming office. We also finalized a letter, signed by President Orme, outlining our initial round of recommended picks to feel potential appointed positions in the incoming administration. These documents have already been shared with some key contacts in the DOI and USDA transition teams.

The "shock and awe" associated with the rapid-fire release of President Trump's recent executive actions and the resulting federal policy shifts have created uncertainty for many of our members, particularly local governments and public agencies who have IJA - and IRA-funded construction projects ongoing or in the queue. For example, a federal judge last week halted President Trump's freeze on federal aid programs, ruling that the courts need more time to consider the potentially far-reaching ramifications of his order. Shortly thereafter, the Trump White House rescinded the original OMB memo order that would have broadly frozen federal assistance, including discretionary grants, loans, and earmarks.

Our representative in Washington, D.C. – The Ferguson Group (TFG) - has been closely monitoring and providing updates on executive actions taken by the Trump administration. As the administration announces key executive actions, TFG will provide regular updates. Last week, TFG released a new special report, titled "Impact of Executive Action on Federal Funding", which examines how the Trump administration's executive orders may affect federal funding.

Specifically, it discusses the temporary pause on certain project activities—primarily those focused on energy and equity-related initiatives—funded through the IRA and IIJA. Additionally, while the administration rescinded an OMB memorandum that would have broadly frozen federal assistance, including discretionary grants, loans, and earmarks, many of our members have raised concerns about how this directive was implemented and its potential impacts. This report provides answers to those questions to help members navigate the administration’s evolving policies. TFG will be providing a regular weekly update on the status of these issues and will be sharing additional resources.

DEVELOPMENTS IN THE 119TH CONGRESS

12. Congressional Appropriators Meet on FY 2025 Spending Bills

Mark Limbaugh of The Ferguson Group – the Alliance’s D.C. representative - reports that Congressional appropriators are resuming work on FY 2025 spending bills after months of delay, with a March 14 deadline when the current temporary continuing resolution (CR) funding the government expires. A deal on a top-line spending number is expected soon, allowing negotiators to allocate funding for federal programs, including energy, environment, and wildfire management initiatives. However, the process faces challenges due to partisan disagreements over policy riders, with a \$90 billion gap between House and Senate proposals for FY 2025. Key issues include funding for the Department of Energy (DOE), EPA, wildland firefighter pay, and tribal health programs. Republicans are pushing for cuts to clean energy and EPA budgets, emphasizing nuclear and fossil fuels, while Democrats vow to defend clean energy and environmental programs. House Republicans are also considering attaching conditions to disaster aid and the debt ceiling to the bill, which Democrats oppose. Despite partisan tensions, leaders in both chambers have emphasized bipartisan cooperation, particularly on shared priorities like wildland firefighter pay and infrastructure support. However, significant negotiations remain, and ideological divides could complicate efforts to finalize the 12 appropriations bills.

13. Senate Committee Leadership

On December 20, Senate Republican Leader John Thune (R-SOUTH DAKOTA) announced the Senate Republican Conference committee assignments for the 119th Congress. On January 2, Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) announced committee assignments for the Democratic Caucus. John Boozman (R-AR) succeeded Debbie Stabenow (D-MI) as Chair of Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry. Boozman was succeeded as Ranking Member by Amy Klobuchar (D-MN). Ted Cruz (R-TX), now Chair, swapped positions with Maria Cantwell (D-WASHINGTON) to lead Commerce, Science, and Transportation (CST). Mike Lee succeeded Joe Manchin (I-WV) as the ENR Chair. Martin Heinrich (D-NEW MEXICO) succeeded John Barrasso (R-WY) as Ranking Member. Shelley Moore Capito (R-WV) succeeded Tom Carper (D-DE) as Chair of the EPW, and Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI) succeeded Capito as Ranking Member. Water-related committee assignments for new Senators from western States include Ruben Gallego (D-

ARIZONA) to ENR; Adam Schiff (D-CALIFORNIA) to EPW and Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry; Tim Sheehy (R-MONTANA) to CST; and John Curtis (R-UTAH) to CST and EPW.

14. House Committee Leadership

Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries (D-NY) and the House Democratic Caucus approved Committee appointments for the 119th Congress. House Majority Leader Steve Scalise (R-LA) had announced the Republican Steering Committee's recommendations for committee Chairs in December. Rep. Glenn Thompson (R-PA) was selected to chair the Agriculture Committee with Rep. Angie Craig (D-MN) as Ranking Member. Rep. Brett Guthrie (R-KY) succeeded Rep. Cathay McMorris Rodger (R-WASHINGTON) to chair Energy and Commerce, with Rep. Frank Pallone (D-NJ) as Ranking Member. Leading Natural Resources, Rep. Bruce Westerman (R-AL) as Chair with Rep. Jared Huffman (D-CALIFORNIA) succeeding Rep. Raúl Grijalva (D-ARIZONA) as Ranking Member. Rep. Brian Babin (R-TX) was selected to chair Science, Space, and Technology, succeeding Rep. Frank Lucas (R-OK), with Rep. Zoe Lofgren (D-CALIFORNIA) as Ranking Member. Rep. Sam Graves (R-MO) was selected to lead Transportation and Infrastructure with Rep. Rick Larsen (D-WASHINGTON) as Ranking Member.

House Natural Resources Committee Chair Bruce Westerman (R-AR) has announced leadership for the panel's subcommittees in the 119th Congress. Rep. Rob Wittman (R-VA) will serve as vice chair of the full committee. Rep. Paul Gosar (R-ARIZONA) is returning as chair of the Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee. Rep. Tom Tiffany (R-WI) will continue to lead the Federal Lands Subcommittee. Rep. Pete Stauber (R-MN) remains chair of the Energy and Mineral Resources Subcommittee. Rep. Jeff Hurd (R-COLORADO), a first-term member, will lead the Indian and Insular Affairs Subcommittee. Rep. Harriet Hageman (R-WY) is taking over the Water, Wildlife, and Fisheries (WWF) Subcommittee, focusing on western water issues and wildlife conservation. Rep. Hageman, who replaced Liz Cheney in Congress, emphasized her commitment to reducing federal regulations and promoting local resource management. She takes over for former Chairman Cliff Bentz (R-OR) who remains on the committee but has also been assigned to the House Energy and Commerce Committee.

House Agriculture Chair Thompson announced new leadership picks with one change to last session's subcommittee chairs, who will play a key role in negotiating the trillion-dollar farm bill. Rep. Frank Lucas (R-Okla.), who oversaw talks on the 2014 farm bill as committee chair, replaced Rep. Jim Baird (R-Ind.) as Conservation, Research, and Biotechnology Subcommittee chair. Baird will serve as vice chair. Rep. Austin Scott (R-Ga.) retained his spot as vice chair of the full committee, and chair of the Subcommittee on General Farm Commodities, Risk Management, and Credit. Rep. Doug LaMalfa (R-CALIFORNIA), who leads the rural-focused Congressional Western Caucus, remains chair of the Forestry and Horticulture Subcommittee. House Agriculture Democrats have not yet announced their picks for subcommittee ranking members.

15. House Passes Wildfire Legislation

The House last month passed H.R. 471 - *Fix Our Forests Act 2025* (Rep. Westerman) with a strong, bipartisan vote of 279-141. Across the United States, 44 million homes are at risk of wildfires in the wildland-urban interface. The recent wildfires in California demonstrate the need to take immediate action to prevent future devastation. This comprehensive legislation increases resiliency to catastrophic wildfires by simplifying and expediting environmental reviews, coordinating resources for communities, and reducing frivolous lawsuits that delay forest management projects. The House Natural Resources Committee issued a [press release](#) that mentions the coalition letter that the Alliance signed on to in support of this bill. We also sent an e-mail blast out with a link to the coalition letter. The Alliance previously supported the *Fix Our Forests Act* in the 118th Congress, where it passed the House by a bipartisan vote of 268-151, but did not see action in the Senate. Rep. Tom Tiffany's (R-WI) bill, [H.R. 204](#), the *Accurately Counting Risk Elimination Solutions (ACRES) Act*, also passed the House. This legislation would mandate the Secretaries of USDA and DOI to submit an annual report detailing the number of acres treated for hazardous fuels during the previous year.

16. Subcommittee Considers Western Water Bills

The House Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife and Fisheries on January 23 held a legislative hearing on four bills including combatting the effects of drought in the West and reauthorizing an important conservation program. [H.R. 231](#), the Colorado River Basin System Conservation Extension Act of 2025, introduced by U.S. Rep. Harriet Hageman (R-Wyo.), will reauthorize the Colorado River Basin Conservation Pilot Program through FY 2026. This is legislation that the Alliance conditionally supported in the last Congress. [H.R. 331](#), introduced by U.S. Rep. Russ Fulcher (R-IDAHO) will amend the Aquifer Recharge Flexibility Act to clarify and streamline the process for transporting water for aquifer recharge projects across federal land. The Alliance supports this legislation. [H.R. 635](#), the WaterSMART Access for Tribes Act, introduced by U.S. Rep. Melanie Stansbury (D-N.M.), will allow the Secretary of the Interior to reduce or waive cost-share requirements for tribal governments under Reclamation's WaterSMART program. To learn more, [click here](#).

17. GOP Legislation Would Authorize Dam Protections

Lawmakers from the Pacific Northwest introduced the "Northwest Energy Security Act" ([H.R. 1762/S. 966](#)) to protect the four Lower Snake River dams amid debates over their future. Led by Rep. Dan Newhouse (R-WASHINGTON) and Sen. Jim Risch (R-IDAHO), the legislation seeks to ensure the continued operation of the dams—Ice Harbor, Lower Monumental, Little Goose, and Lower Granite—citing their importance for clean, affordable hydropower and important transportation routes in the region. The bill counters ongoing efforts to remove the dams to aid endangered salmon and steelhead populations, a key focus of the Biden Administration's "Resilient Columbia Basin Agreement" from 2023. That \$1 billion settlement prompted studies on

the ecological and economic impacts of dam removal. Nonetheless, Congress holds the ultimate authority to decide the fate of these federal dams.

18. Colorado River Basin Senators Call on Basin States to Reach Deal

Western Senators representing the Colorado River Basin are urging Basin state officials to reach a consensus on a new long-term operating plan for the river as existing agreements expire at the end of 2026. The bipartisan group emphasized the importance of a seven-state agreement to address the ongoing drought, which has reduced the river's flow by 20% since 2000. Despite over a year of negotiations involving states, the federal government, and other stakeholders, no broad consensus has been reached on how to manage the river system after 2026. The Biden Administration recently outlined five potential options for addressing the issue, but federal officials prefer a basin-wide agreement to avoid potential legal disputes. The Senators - led by Mark Kelly (D-ARIZONA) and Mike Lee (R-UTAH) - have requested a joint briefing from Basin state officials and negotiators to discuss the potential for an agreement and any legislative actions that may be needed to implement it. State officials in Colorado and Arizona have acknowledged the letter and plan to collaborate on any next steps.

ALLIANCE INITIATIVES

19. Executive Director Recruitment

The recruitment time frame for the Alliance executive director position closed at 5:00 p.m. (Mountain Time) on Friday, January 31, 2025. As you know, the Alliance board of directors announced last October that it had initiated a nationwide search for a new executive director. The Alliance board of directors' Search Committee will now begin the applicant screening and vetting process. The goal is to have a new ED on board by mid-to-late summer, so that I can work with that person together on our farmer lobbyist trip and fall conference. If all goes as planned, I'll pass the reins permanently on October 31, 2025.

20. Colorado River Coalition Letter to CA State Water Board on Bay-Delta Plan

As many of you know, the deadline for public comments to the California State Water Board on [California's water quality control plan for the Bay-Delta](#) was January 10. The impacts of imposing a 55% unimpaired flow on the Sacramento River and other tributaries to the Bay-Delta would have a massive impact on contractors from Redding all the way to San Diego. This will also have an impact on Southern California's interest in the Colorado River, since their State Water Project supplies out of the Delta would be significantly impacted. Additionally, the reoperation of California's reservoirs to accommodate minimum carryover storage targets has implications for West-wide power production. So, there is a connection to the Colorado River and others served by the Western Area Power Administration (WAPA) grid. Family Farm Alliance members in the Colorado River Basin have shown interest in engaging in this process. Per the direction of our board of directors, we prepared a letter for the State Board that was ultimately signed on to by 18

Basin organizations from four states. Many thanks to the Authority's Scott Petersen, who was instrumental in kick-starting this effort.


ADMINISTRATIVE & MISCELLANEOUS

- As the New Year progresses, the travel schedule picks up once again. Mark Limbaugh and I tag-teamed a federal affairs presentation at the Idaho Water Users Association annual conference in Boise on January 15. Last week, I spoke to the California Irrigation Institute annual conference in Sacramento on California water management and Klamath River dam removal. Later in the week, I moderated an "Inside DC" panel at the Mid-Pacific Water Users Conference in Reno, featuring Mr. Limbaugh, Garrett Durst (Natural Resource Results) and Annick Miller (House Water and Power Subcommittee). SLDMWA also had a strong presence at last week's conference, which drew a record-setting 450 attendees to Reno.
- From my hotel room in Reno, I delivered a virtual update to the Four States Irrigation Council annual conference in Fort Collins (COLORADO). When I wrapped up my presentation, I was surprised and humbled to receive the "Colorado Water Master" award.
- Kudos to our mutual friend Cannon Michael (CALIFORNIA) and his family's Bowles Farming Co. in Los Banos, who earned the [2024 Leopold Conservation Award](#), which honors farmers and ranchers who practice outstanding environmental stewardship. Past Alliance President Pat O'Toole (WYOMING) and his family won the Leopold award in 2014. Congrats to Cannon and Bowles Farming!
- The cost to California's lettuce growers of complying with the state's environmental, labor and food safety regulations has [surged](#) 63.7% over the past seven years, reaching \$1,600 per acre and accounting for more than 12% of their production costs, according to a [study](#) commissioned by the Monterey County Farm Bureau and prepared by two Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo, professors. Since 2006, compliance costs have risen by 1,366%. Despite this, lettuce growers saw just a 0.37% increase in market prices for their products from 2017 to 2024, highlighting the growing financial strain on the sector.
- Deven Upadhyay last week was named new Metropolitan Water District of Southern California general manager. Metropolitan's Board of Directors exercised its contractual right to terminate General Manager Adel Hagekhalil's employment under the terms of his employment contract. The change was effective immediately.

This is a quick summary of just a few of the issues the Alliance has been engaged in. Please do not hesitate to contact me at 541-892-6244 or dan@familyfarmalliance.org if you would like further information about what the Alliance is doing to protect water for Western irrigated agriculture.

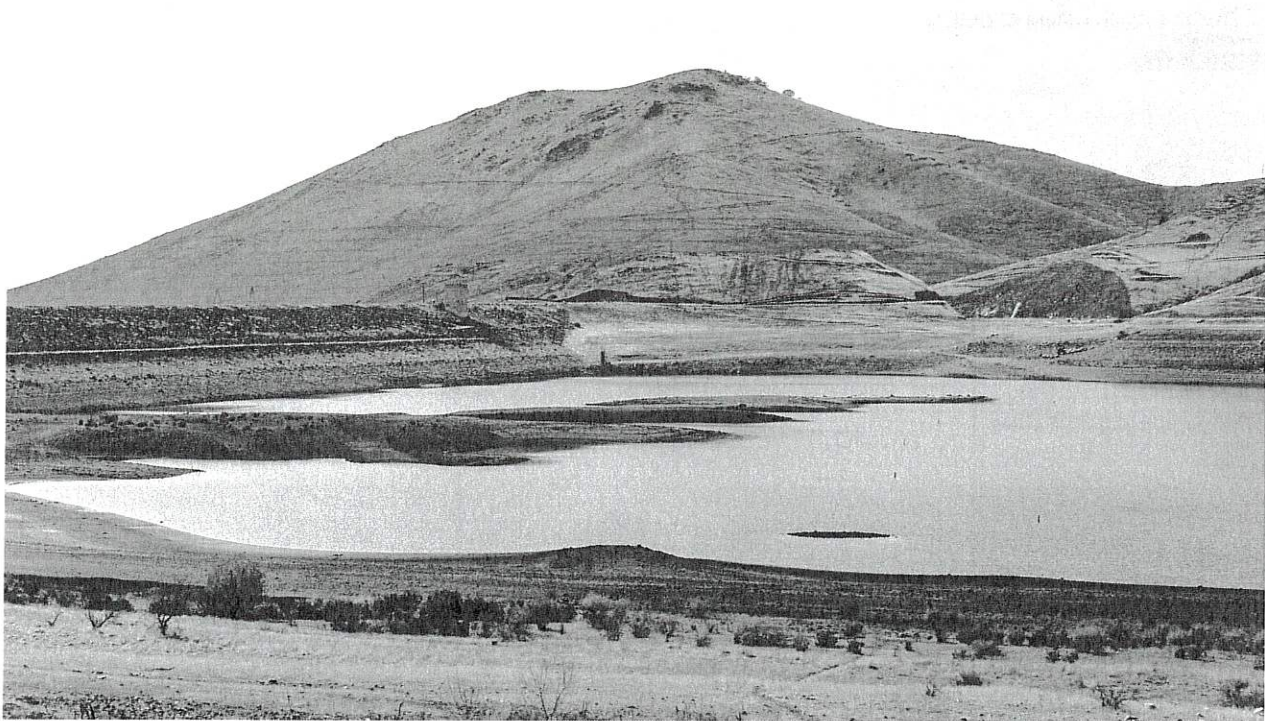
Blank

SJV WATER: Trump's emergency water order responsible for water dump from Tulare County lakes

 mavensnotebook.com/2025/02/01/sjv-water-trumps-emergency-water-order-responsible-for-water-dump-from-tulare-county-lakes/

SJV Water News February 1, 2025 3566

February 1, 2025



By Lois Henry, SJV Water



The sudden announcement Thursday by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers that Kaweah and Success lakes would immediately begin dumping water was in response to President Trump's Jan. 24 executive order mandating that federal officials exert all efforts to get more water to fight southern California wildfires, the Army Corps confirmed Friday.

“Consistent with the direction in the Executive Order on Emergency Measures to Provide Water Resources in California, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is releasing water from Terminus Dam at Lake Kaweah and Schafer Dam at Success Lake to ensure

California has water available to respond to the wildfires,” wrote Gene Pawlik, a supervising public affairs specialist in the Army Corps’ Washington, D.C. office.

Indeed, President Trump boasted about the releases on his X page Friday posting a photo of a river and writing: “Photo of beautiful water flow that I just opened in California. Today, 1.6 billion gallons and, in 3 days, it will be 5.2 billion gallons. Everybody should be happy about this long fought Victory! I only wish they listened to me six years ago – There would have been no fire!”



POST

Reply



Donald J. Trump ✓

@realDonaldTrump



Photo of beautiful water flow that I just opened in California. Today, 1.6 billion gallons and, in 3 days, it will be 5.2 billion gallons. Everybody should be happy about this long fought Victory! I only wish they listened to me six years ago – There would have been no fire!



Tulare County water managers were perplexed and frustrated, noting both physical and legal barriers that make it virtually impossible for Tulare County river water to be used for southern California fires.

First, it would have to be pumped at great expense across the San Joaquin Valley to get to the California Aqueduct and then travel hundreds of miles south.

hoc

Second, this isn't "loose" water free for the taking.

"Every drop belongs to someone," said Kaweah River Watermaster Victor Hernandez. "The reservoir may belong to the federal government, but the water is ours. If someone's playing political games with this water, it's wrong."

It was no game on Thursday when area water managers were given about an hour's notice that the Army Corps planned to release water up to "channel capacity," the top amount rivers can handle, immediately.

The Army Corps later agreed to more measured releases, alleviating a mad scramble to alert first responders and have crews on standby in case river banks were breached and levees overtopped, as happened during the 2023 floods.

"This decision was clearly made by someone with no understanding of the system or the impacts that come from knee-jerk political actions."

Dan Vink, longtime Tulare County water manager

Flows in the Tule River went from 55 cubic feet per second Thursday to a high of 987 cfs and dropped to 798 cfs by Friday afternoon. Kaweah flows went from 5 cfs to 1,545 cfs.

That's where flows are expected to stay, according to Tulare Irrigation District Aaron Fukuda.

How long those flows will last is another question left unanswered by the Army Corps.

The releases are from excess water that downstream districts are allowed to hold in reservoirs to hedge against dry years.

The Army Corps requires its reservoirs to be drawn down in fall to keep "flood control capacity," or space, available in anticipation of winter storms and spring snow melt.

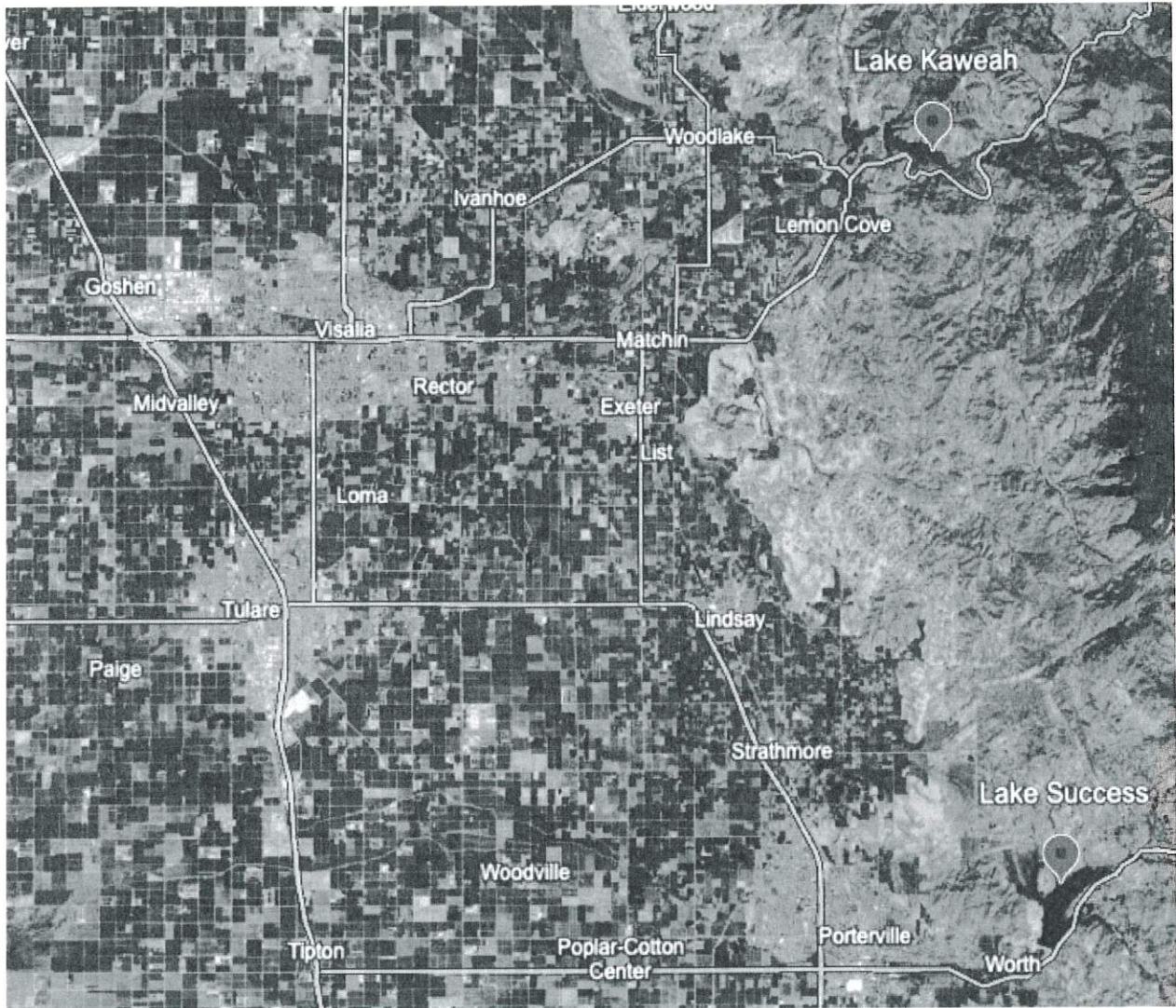
Typically, however, ag users can negotiate to hold a little extra water in the lakes, or "encroach" on that flood control capacity, depending on weather forecasts, climate models and snow surveys.

The winter flood control capacity limit for Lake Kaweah is 12,000 acre feet and it was holding about 39,000 acre feet Thursday morning, according to Hernandez.

He said that under the sort of dry conditions now being experienced in the region, Army Corps guidelines allow the lake to go up to 72,000 acre feet.

“We just had a snow survey 10 days ago that showed very little snow coverage, about 45,000 acre feet, and were talking almost daily with the Corps watching forecasts for these new storms that are expected to get us about an inch,” Hernandez said. “There was no risk of flood at this point.”

He was still stunned by the call he got Thursday ordering Kaweah to evacuate 27,000 acre feet immediately. Success was ordered to dump 4,923 acre feet to bring it down to 12,295 acre feet.



The Army Corps did not respond to questions about whether it will keep all its California reservoirs at flood control capacity going into the future. If so, that could have a major impact on how much is available for irrigation.

“A decision to take summer water from local farmers and dump it out of these reservoirs shows a complete lack of understanding of how the system works and sets a very dangerous precedent,” said Dan Vink, a longtime Tulare County water manager and principal partner at Six-33 Solutions, a water and natural resource firm in Visalia.

306

“This decision was clearly made by someone with no understanding of the system or the impacts that come from knee-jerk political actions.”

For now, water managers are capturing flows in recharge basins, Eric Limas, General Manager for the Lower Tule River and Pixley irrigation districts, wrote in a text.

“I have no idea if this is the new norm for operations or not. I certainly hope not.”

Other coverage ...

Acting on Trump’s order, federal officials opened up two California dams

“The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has dramatically increased the amount of water flowing from two dams in Tulare County, sending massive flows down river channels toward farmlands in the San Joaquin Valley. Federal records show that water releases from Terminus Dam at Lake Kaweah and Schafer Dam at Lake Success jumped early Friday morning. The sudden increase occurred four days after President Trump said on social media that the U.S. military had “entered” California and “TURNED ON THE WATER.” Trump also vowed during a visit to Los Angeles last week to “open up the valves and pumps” in California to deliver more water. According to federal data, the flow from Terminus Dam into the Kaweah River near Visalia increased from 57 cubic feet per second to more than 1,500 on Friday morning. The flow from Lake Success near Porterville into the Tule River increased from 105 cubic feet per second to 990. ... ” Read more from the LA Times.

Trump says he opened California’s water. Local officials say he nearly flooded them.

“President Donald Trump declared victory on Friday in his long-running water war with California, boasting he sent billions of gallons south — but local officials say they narrowly prevented him from possibly flooding farms. “Today, 1.6 billion gallons and, in 3 days, it will be 5.2 billion gallons. Everybody should be happy about this long fought Victory! I only wish they listened to me six years ago — There would have been no fire!” he said in a post on his social media site. Local officials had to talk the Army Corps of Engineers down after it abruptly alerted them Thursday afternoon it was about to increase flows from two reservoirs to maximum capacity — a move the agency said was in response to Trump directing the federal government to “maximize” water supplies. Before the Corps ratcheted down its plan, local authorities scrambled to move equipment and warn farms about possible flooding, said Victor Hernandez, who oversees water management on one of the rivers, the Kaweah in Tulare County. He said the Corps gave him one hour notice on Thursday. ... ” Read more from Politico.

California's top environmental official: federal and state water managers are working together closely, for now

"After President Donald Trump posted on social media earlier this week that the United States Military came into California and under emergency powers "turned on the water," California's top environmental official, Natural Resources Secretary Wade Crowfoot is speaking out. Crowfoot and the state's Department of Water Resources said the President may have been referring to the completion of routine maintenance at the Jones Pumping Plant in Tracy, which is part of the Central Valley water project. However, the federal government has yet to explain exactly what action it took. The Bureau of Reclamation, which oversees federal water infrastructure, has yet to respond to KCRA 3's repeated requests for comment. ... " Read more from KCRA.

SEE ALSO:

- Trump officials release water that experts say will serve little use, from the New York Times
- Here's what Trump's really up to with his response to L.A. fires, from Earth Justice
- Padilla Demands Answers from Trump Administration After Army Corps Orders Central Valley Dams Open to Dangerous Flood Levels, from Senator Padilla's office

SIGN UP
for daily email service



The latest water news by around 9am
Breaking news alerts too!

© 2013-2024 Maven's Notebook, et al. All Rights Reserved.

**57th Annual Mid-Pacific
Water Users' Conference**

January 29-31, 2025

Silver Legacy Resort Casino,

Reno, NV

57th ANNUAL MID-PACIFIC WATER USERS' CONFERENCE
January 29-31, 2025
Silver Legacy, Reno, NV
PRELIMINARY SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 29

7:30am-5:00pm **REGISTRATION**

8:00am **CONTINENTAL BREAKFAST**

8:30am-12:00pm **CALL TO ORDER/GENERAL SESSION**

Welcome Address
Anthea Hansen, Del Puerto Water District

KEYNOTE SPEAKER
David Palumbo, Deputy Commissioner, Bureau of Reclamation

Bureau of Reclamation Regional Director Address
Karl Stock, Regional Director, California Great Basin Region

Bureau of Reclamation Deputies and Area Managers
Moderated by Brooke White, CVP Water Association
Adam Nickels, Principal Deputy Regional Director
Kristin White, Deputy Regional Director of Operations
Lanie Paquin, Deputy Regional Director of Technical Services
Ed Young, Deputy Regional Director of Business Services
Alan Heck, Klamath Basin Area Manager
Elizabeth Hadley, Northern California Area Manager
Jack Worsley, Lahontan Basin Area Manager
Drew Lessard, Central California Area Manager
Michael Jackson, South Central California Area Manager

Reservoir(s) of Dreams: If you build it...?
Moderated by Jeff Sutton, Glenn-Colusa Irrigation District
Jerry Brown, Sites Project Authority
Anthea Hansen, Del Puerto Water District
Pablo Arroyave, San Luis & Delta-Mendota Water Authority
Adam Nickels, Bureau of Reclamation

12:15pm-2:20pm **LUNCHEON and PROGRAM**

50 Shades of Red: The Outlook for Trump 47 and the 118th Congress
Moderated by Dan Keppen, Family Farm Alliance
Mark Limbaugh, The Ferguson Group
Garrett Durst, Natural Resource Results

Klamath Project Report
Paul Simmons, Klamath Water Users Association

2:30pm-4:30pm **SEXUAL HARASSMENT TRAINING FOR DISTRICT DIRECTORS**

Presented by Laura Fowler, Best Best & Krieger LLC
This session will fulfill California state law requirements that all public officials receive sexual harassment training every two years. This workshop is offered at no charge and participants will receive a certificate of completion.

5:30pm-7:30pm

EXHIBITOR RECEPTION & SLOTS TOURNAMENT

THURSDAY, JANUARY 30

7:30am-4:00pm

REGISTRATION

8:00am-9:10am

BREAKFAST and PROGRAM

Unplugged!

Tom Philp, Pulitzer Prize Winning Columnist, Sacramento Bee

9:15am-12:15pm

GENERAL SESSION

The Future of the New BiOps: Do They Survive or Does the Cycle Continue?

Moderated by Brittany Johnson, Somach Simmons & Dunn

Jennifer Quan, National Marine Fisheries Service West Coast Region

Moss Driscoll, Klamath Water Users Association

Thad Bettner, Sacramento River Settlement Contractors

Allison Febbo, Westlands Water District

Jason Phillips, Friant Water Authority

Blueprint for the Future

Panel Presentation

12:15pm-2:20pm

LUNCHEON and PROGRAM

Regional Director's Water Conservation Award

Karl Stock, Regional Director, California Great Basin Region, Bureau of Reclamation

Deference to Administrative Agencies/Demise of the *Chevron* Doctrine: What Does it All Mean?

Moderated by Paul Simmons, Klamath Water Users Association

Steve Shropshire, Jordan Ramis

Dan O'Hanlon, Kronick, Moskowitz, Tiedemann & Girard

Meredith Nikkel, Downey Brand

Cachuma Project Report

Presented by Chris Dahlstrom, Santa Ynez River WCD ID #1 (ret.)

2:30pm-4:00pm

WORKSHOP: Dopplers for Districts – What's New, What Works, What has Challenges?

Presented by Stuart Styles, Cal Poly ITRC

This Flow Measurement Workshop is open to all interested parties. This will be a "hands on" workshop that will cover the FlowTracker2 (doppler on a stick), M9 (doppler on a boat), PT900 (doppler for a pipeline), and the RQ30 (doppler on a bridge). Districts that are using these devices are encouraged to attend to share their experiences. There will be demonstrations and examples of the different devices. The workshop is based on content developed through the USBR/ITRC Technical Services program. There will be handouts, and the workshop will provide critical information on new technologies/services that are available to MP districts.

6:00pm-9:00pm

Dinner and Bowling at the National Bowling Stadium

FRIDAY, JANUARY 31

8:30am-11:30am

BREAKFAST and PROGRAM

Bowling and Slot Tournament Awards

Meet the Cal Poly Scholarship Students

Newlands Project Report

Presented by Ben Shawcroft, Truckee-Carson Irrigation District

Revisiting the 2024 Water Year

David Mooney, Bureau of Reclamation Bay Delta Office

Levi Johnson, Bureau of Reclamation Central Valley Operations

2025 Water Supply Outlook

Levi Johnson, Bureau of Reclamation Central Valley Operations

Jason Cameron, Bureau of Reclamation Klamath Basin Area Office

Austin Balser, Bureau of Reclamation Lahontan Basin Area Office

Rufino Gonzales, Bureau of Reclamation South Central California Area Office