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September 21, 2020

California Water Managers Need More Flexibility to Move Water When & Where It's Needed Most

By Jennifer Pierre, General Manager, State Water Contractors

The State Water Project is an indispensable lifeline to all of California, providing fresh, reliable water to 27 million residents, 750,000 acres of fertile agricultural land and dozens of industries – from retail to real estate – that form the backbone of our state's economy. Seven hundred miles of canals, pipelines, reservoirs and hydroelectric power facilities deliver water daily from high in the Sierra Nevada mountains to communities from Northern California, San Joaquin Valley, San Francisco Bay Area, Central Coast and Southern California.

Twenty-nine public water agencies across the state contract with the California Department of Water Resources (DWR) to receive State Water Project water. These contracts have historically restricted water transfers and exchanges between water agencies and limited the flexibility for water management opportunities.

Today, our changing climate is straining water supplies with prolonged periods of drought followed by intense and unpredictable storms. Water supply reliability is dependent upon operational flexibility, and California water managers need all the tools available to effectively manage limited supplies, especially during times of uncertainty.

For this reason, public water agencies and DWR have publicly negotiated amendments to their long-term water supply contracts in order to better plan the future of their local water supply portfolios. The amendments, which have undergone extensive environmental review and public comment, have been finalized and are now ready for adoption by public water agencies.

The State Water Contractors applaud this coordinated and collaborative effort, which provides flexibility for single and multi-year non-permanent water transfers and exchanges. The contract amendments are prudent, reasonable and include clear oversight and transparency measures to ensure the process includes government accountability. Importantly, the amendments provide transparency and do not change State Water Project operations. They do not include any financial provisions for the Delta Conveyance Project or construction of new water facilities, and they do not require any new financial commitments from DWR, the State of California or public water agencies.

Providing water agencies with the opportunity to better utilize regional water supply projects, when needed, by exchanging or transferring water amongst one another is one more step towards protecting our state's most valuable asset, the State Water Project.

The State Water Contractors is a statewide, non-profit association of 27 public agencies from Northern, Central and Southern California that purchase water under contract from the California State Water Project. Collectively the State Water Contractors deliver water to more than 27 million residents throughout the state and more than 750,000 acres of agricultural land. For more information on the State Water Contractors, please visit www.swc.org.