

Messaging Framework

California's Voluntary Agreements for Water Management

- A Transformational, Watershed-Wide Approach to Flows, Ecosystem Restoration and Water Supply Reliability
- An Unprecedented Suite of Innovative Financing and Collaboration for California's Environment and Economy
- Science-Based Governance, Adaptive Management and Early Implementation Actions
- The Time to Act is Now

A Transformational, Watershed-Wide Approach to Flows, Ecosystem Restoration and Water Supply Reliability

- For many years, the state of California has led the development of Voluntary Agreements (VAs) for adaptively managing flows in the Delta and its tributaries to balance beneficial uses of water.
- Public Water Agencies (PWAs) have been working diligently to build upon and finalize Governor Newsom's February 2020 VAs framework.
 - Today's VAs are a comprehensive, eight-year solution for science-based water management in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta and its tributaries, integrating flow and habitat actions to improve and protect the ecosystem while preserving adequate supplies for the 35 million Californians who also depend on this water.
- The advancement of the VAs – proposed through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed by a diverse set of PWA General Managers – enables California to begin a new and innovative path to improve the health of our rivers and provide reliable water supplies for years to come.
 - The VAs include flexible and adaptive operations based on real-time conditions, watershed-wide coordination of flow operations and habitat restoration and ensure reliable supplies for California homes, farms and businesses.



- The VAs represent a remarkable alternative to more limited regulatory approaches which will result in protracted litigation and no benefits to California's environment or economy.
- Inaction is no longer an option. Without the VAs, the state and federal government, public water agencies and non-governmental organizations will continue costly and decades-long disputes that will not improve conditions for the environment or water users – resulting in diminished water supplies and ongoing species decline.
 - The Water Board's proposal to manage environmental water as if reservoirs do not exist, via unimpaired flows, is an outdated approach that could cause devastating economic impacts, especially during dry periods, which are occurring with more frequency and severity.
 - California's economy and environment needs a holistic, functional flow water management strategy that applies the best science to meet real-time ecosystem needs while providing adequate water supplies for communities. The VAs provide this solution.

An Unprecedented Suite of Innovative Financing and Collaboration for California's Environment and Economy

- Through the VAs, significant, coordinated investments will be made to improve fish and wildlife habitat conditions throughout the watershed.
 - The VAs includes more than 45,000 acres of instream habitat, new spawning and rearing habitat, floodplain habitat and fish food production.
 - Many identified environmental improvement projects can be implemented in the next 12-18 months – injecting tens of millions of dollars into the state's economy through habitat restoration projects.
- Funding for the VAs will come from contributions from the federal government, state government and participating PWAs, totaling nearly \$3 billion.
 - At full participation:
 - The state will fund \$1.4 billion.
 - The federal government will fund \$740 million to assist with science and habitat restoration.
 - PWAs will fund \$522 million for an environmental water budget, science program and governance.
 - An additional \$168 million in funding will be secured from other sources, such as CVPIA.



- In dry, average and normal water year types, the VAs include 750,000-825,000 acre-feet of new environmental water annually that can be adaptively managed to restore native fish populations and habitats and can be dedicated to Delta outflow.
 - This is the biggest purchase of water for the environment in California's history.
 - Budget surpluses offer a new and rare source of funding that the state can use to purchase 65,000 acre-feet of this water, in perpetuity, to support environmental needs.
 - Much of this water can be flexibly managed based on timing and season to increase instream flows and Delta outflows, and test biological hypotheses while reasonably protecting water supplies.

Science-Based Governance, Adaptive Management and Early Implementation Actions

- The VAs program includes an all-hands-on-deck governance program that will direct flows and habitat restoration, conduct regular assessments, develop strategic plans and annual reports and implement a robust science program.
- The integrated science program will monitor outcomes and serve as the basis for adaptive management.
 - The governance program will address changing climate conditions and support research to improve management actions for native fish.
- The VAs flow and non-flow measures will be adaptively managed through structured decision making and informed by the science program.
 - In years three and six, the Water Board will evaluate the VAs for scientific, environmental and economic considerations.
 - In year eight, the Water Board will consider potential continuation, amendments or termination of the VAs, as informed by scientific analysis.

The Time to Act is Now

- Due to the ongoing drought and increased climate extremes, Californians cannot afford to take a decades-long regulatory or litigious approach – time is not on our side when it comes to securing California's water future for communities and the environment.
- Participating public water agencies will take the VAs term sheet to their Boards of Directors for approval.
- Once approved by key participating parties, the VAs proposal will be submitted to the Water Board for third-party scientific assessment, environmental review and appropriate public input.
 - The Water Board's environmental review will analyze the VAs plan as an alternative for the update to the Bay-Delta Water Quality Control Plan.



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- The VAs promise a meaningful path towards settling existing litigation over the biological opinions, incidental take permits and section 401 water quality certifications.
- If approved by the Water Board, the VAs will become the new Bay-Delta Water Quality Control Plan and will be implemented through binding agreements between the Water Board, the Department of Water Resources and participating water agencies to direct water, funding and habitat restoration efforts to improve the health of California's Bay-Delta ecosystem and its tributaries.
 - The Water Board will continue to seek additional contributions from non-VAs parties. Other organizations will have an opportunity to sign onto the VAs.
- With unprecedented commitments and momentum, the time for a watershed-wide approach to managing California's natural resources in the Delta and beyond is now.

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