



Heal the Bay



April 20, 2022

The Honorable Gavin Newsom
Governor, State of California

The Honorable Toni G. Atkins
President pro Tempore, State Senate

The Honorable Anthony Rendon
Speaker of the Assembly

The Honorable Nancy Skinner
Chair, Senate Budget Committee

The Honorable Phil Ting
Chair, Assembly Budget Committee

RE: Support \$1.5 Billion in Water Project Funds for Drought Resilience, Water Quality, Economic Stability

Dear Governor Newsom, Senate pro Tempore Atkins, Assembly Speaker Rendon, and Chairs Skinner and Ting:

We, the undersigned, represent diverse advocates with shared values for an equitable water future: the human right to clean, safe, and affordable water (especially for low-income communities); resilient water infrastructure; good jobs performed by a skilled and trained workforce; healthy waterways, coastlines, rivers and freshwater ecosystems; robust community and tribal engagement, and the health of all people.

To confront the ongoing drought crisis, we seek a \$1.5 billion allocation in this year's State Budget for long-term climate resilient water investments in Southern California for large-scale wastewater recycling, stormwater capture, groundwater remediation projects, and continued improvements in water efficiency. Together, these projects will reduce competition over dwindling resources – improving water access for all Californians – and create thousands of good jobs, if covered by enforceable labor standards. This allocation could go towards funding programs for these types of projects, or be appropriated towards specific projects, such as the Metropolitan Water District's much-needed Regional Recycled Water Program (which alone could provide water for 500,000 households). These investments can also help alleviate budget issues related to the Gann limit as exempt capital outlay expenditures.

This February and March were the driest on record, threatening people and ecosystems alike. Water agencies throughout the state are receiving only 5% of expected imported supplies from the State Water Project. To address this crisis, we must overhaul our water systems to reduce waste and capture and use local supplies. We have an abundance of opportunities to do this. For example, LA County imports about 60% of the 500 billion gallons of water used per year, yet flushes an estimated 300 billion gallons of stormwater, runoff, and wastewater into the ocean every year. The Pacific Institute's recent report emphasizes opportunities from wastewater recycling and stormwater capture as crucial for the South Coast Region, and shows California could reduce urban water use by 30%-48% through efficiency investments.¹

The solution is clear: invest in infrastructure projects that recycle water that we have used, capture stormwater for beneficial use, maximize efficient use, and make sure that our groundwater is safe to drink. Last year, local agencies proposed more than \$12 billion in projects to do just that, and received about 10% of the funding

¹ Pacific Institute, April 2022. *The Untapped Potential of California's Urban Water Supply: Water Efficiency, Water Reuse, and Stormwater Capture*. Accessed from <https://pacinst.org/publication/california-urban-water-supply-potential-2022/>.

needed from existing programs. Much more is needed to confront the scale of the problem than is currently outlined in this year's budget.² As CalEPA Secretary Blumenfeld said, "water scarcity is the new normal...and how we treat this precious resource has to be baked into everything that we do."

Investments in Southern California will relieve pressure on all of California and the Western United States by increasing the region's independence from increasingly scarce water sources upon which others depend. These investments can and should support other priorities, including equitable access to safe and affordable water for vulnerable communities; tribal-led restoration and conservation efforts, rights, and access to waterways; and urban, river, and ecosystem benefits from nature-based solutions. Investments can also support high-road construction careers if covered by enforceable labor standards, such as skilled and trained standards or Project Labor Agreements. A \$1.5 billion investment would create approximately 9,000 direct construction job-years, at a time when our communities need access to good jobs with benefits.

This commitment will help safeguard water supply and affordability; enjoy widespread support from jurisdictions, labor, community, and environmental advocates; reduce impacts on source areas for imported water supplies; and encourage a more climate-resilient Southern California that prioritizes equity, community and indigenous engagement and leadership, and good quality union jobs.

Thank you for your consideration and commitment to equitable water access and a better future! Please feel free to reach out to Lauren Ahkiam at lahkiam@laane.org with any questions or to discuss further.

Sincerely,

Lauren Ahkiam, Water Campaign Director
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² Funding is currently proposed for Water Conservation (\$200 million), Water Storage and Reliability (\$150 million), Lands Management and Habitat Enhancement (\$85 million), and a potential \$250 million in funding that is currently unallocated.

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Senator Ben Allen, Chair, Environmental Quality Committee

Senator Steven Bradford, Los Angeles County Delegation

Senator Maria Elena Durazo, Chair, Senate Budget Subcommittee 5

Senator Bob Hertzberg, Committee on Natural Resources and Water

Senator Sydney Kamlager, Chair, Los Angeles County Delegation

Senator Josh Newman, Senate Budget Subcommittee 5

Senator Anthony Portantino, Chair, Senate Appropriations

Senator Henry Stern, Chair, Senate Natural Resources and Water Committee

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Assemblymember Wendy Carrillo, Chair, Assembly Budget Subcommittee 4

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