

January 29, 2021

Urban Water Agency and Environmental and Fishing Community Recommendations re. Stimulus and Infrastructure Investments

Principles: State and federal investments in water-related infrastructure should advance the following principles.

- Address equity issues – such as access to safe and affordable drinking water and vulnerability to climate impacts and floods
- Reduce conflict over water issues
- Create jobs that address income inequality
- Partner with communities, particularly economically disadvantaged communities, communities of color and tribes
- Improve water management, water quality and ecosystem health

Recommendations: These recommendations are organized under several broad categories. However, many of these recommendations will provide benefits in multiple areas. For example, many of the water supply tools mentioned below can also provide climate resiliency, water quality and ecosystem benefits.

Guaranteeing Environmental Justice and Drinking Water Quality

Access to clean drinking water: Up to a million Californians lack access to reliably clean drinking water. This problem is particularly acute in communities of color and disadvantaged communities. Addressing this unacceptable situation should be among our highest water-related priorities. In a June 22, 2020 letter, a large group of stakeholders and agencies outlined a suite of recommendations that offer a good starting point for investments in this area, including grants to disadvantaged communities from State clean water and drinking water revolving funds.

Treatment for emerging contaminants: New and emerging contaminants are being discovered that threaten public health and safety and that contaminate finite drinking water supplies. A comprehensive funding approach that addresses treatment and remediation needs for drinking water systems broadly, rather than on a case-by-case and piecemeal basis for emerging contaminants, is necessary to nurture – and in some communities restore – public confidence in California’s drinking water quality

Reducing Conflicts Over Water Supply

Water recycling, stormwater management, water use efficiency, smart water technologies, groundwater treatment, groundwater storage and conjunctive use: Funding in these categories is essential to advancing water supply opportunities that reflect least-regrets and low-conflict approaches, and yet provide multiple benefits beyond water supply reliability. Multi-benefit projects can offer a variety of benefits, including pollution prevention, coastal protection,

discharge reduction, improved groundwater sustainability and Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) compliance. For example, groundwater storage can facilitate surface water reoperation which, together, could provide many other benefits, including improved water supply reliability during extended droughts, improved temperature and flow conditions for anadromous fish and contributing to SGMA compliance.

Pipeline replacement and infrastructure resiliency: Local water system treatment and distribution infrastructure maintained by local, urban, suburban, and rural communities throughout California is aging, with many of the largest urban communities utilizing a water system and network that is approaching 100 years old and increasingly in need of system renewal and replacement to increase resilience to seismic events. Disadvantaged communities can be impacted disproportionately by aging local infrastructure systems and the associated repair and replacement costs. The American Society of Civil Engineering projects financial needs in the range of \$75 billion over the next 20 years to adequately address California's aging water and wastewater treatment infrastructure. In addition, many aging existing reservoir facilities throughout the state are in urgent need of dam safety upgrades and additional risk and resiliency investments to improve public safety. These investments can have an additional water supply benefit, because safety upgrades can allow reservoirs to be operated at full design storage capacity. For some communities, this can represent a prudent and financially preferable storage alternative, particularly in light of anticipated climate change impacts.

Regional resiliency – local system interconnections within regions: Funding in this area is important to allow local communities to integrate their local treated and untreated water facilities with other existing local and planned community systems. Such investments can improve redundancies, facilitate regional cooperation, protect local communities against natural disasters and climate change that may impact water supply reliability, and take advantage of economies of scale in advanced water reuse project distribution systems.

Emphasize regional partnerships, as well as water agency/NGO partnerships: Too often, water supply development and regional resiliency projects are planned, developed, and implemented in siloes that fail to recognize the importance and value of engaging with regional partners, including the NGO community, disadvantaged communities, tribes, and other stakeholders. Funding opportunities should emphasize and prioritize the importance of collaboration among local interests and stakeholders within regions, including consideration of reinvigorating the state's integrated regional water management program.

Improving Environmental Performance with Green Infrastructure

Multi benefit floodplain management: This approach has near universal broad support, because stakeholders, agencies and others recognize that expanding floodplains and flood bypasses can provide an extraordinarily broad range of cost-effective benefits, including public safety and flood damage reduction, groundwater recharge, agricultural preservation, recreation and quality of life improvements and fish and wildlife restoration. This approach is particularly important to reduce flood risks, particularly to disadvantaged communities, that are growing as a result of climate change.

Ecosystem restoration for key ecosystems - Bay-Delta, Salton Sea, rivers and wetlands important for listed species, Pacific fisheries, and commercial/recreational fishing:

California's aquatic ecosystems are some of the state's most threatened. In addition to ecosystem and fish and wildlife benefits, investments in these areas can provide additional benefits, including recreation, a stronger commercial and recreational fishing economy, support for Pacific fisheries, improved water quality, and reduced water-related conflicts.

Wildfire resiliency and watershed restoration: Destructive megafires do not discriminate what or where they burn. The impacts on our water, energy, environment, and economy are felt throughout the state, in rural and urban areas. Investments in watershed restoration, water treatment, and watershed stewardship are needed to protect critical water infrastructure and drinking water quality.

Coastal flooding/green infrastructure: Coastal flooding represents one of the most serious near-term and potentially damaging impacts of climate change. Coastal flooding threatens public safety, transportation, water and other infrastructure and more than \$100 billion in property value. Coastal flooding also impacts communities upstream of the immediate shore as flooding is pushed up the stream by the combined increase of precipitation and sea level rise that are caused by climate change. In many areas, disadvantaged communities are particularly at risk. Fortunately, investments in green infrastructure and collaborative planning offer the potential for an effective approach that can benefit communities, the economy and the aquatic environment. For example, in the Bay Area, extensive work is underway to restore Bay Area salt ponds and to build green levees that can improve public safety and ecosystem health. In addition, extensive collaborative efforts are underway to develop regional and sub-regional plans to adapt to the ongoing and accelerating impacts of rising seas.

Increasing Education and Job Training

Education programs, particularly benefitting disadvantaged communities: Clean and reliable water and healthy aquatic ecosystems are critical public needs. Education and partnership programs, particularly involving disadvantaged communities can provide multiple benefits including expanded appreciation of the natural environment, expanded water conservation programs and broader support for investments and other actions needed to ensure that we strengthen current efforts to meet public water needs while ensuring improved environmental stewardship.

Job training and recruitment programs: Water agencies already provide a broad range of well-paying careers that do not require advanced degrees, and in some cases, do not even require a college degree. Investments in further job training and recruitment programs can expand these opportunities, particularly for disadvantaged communities and communities of color. Investment in this area can support the efforts of California's water suppliers to expand their recruiting networks and create new pathways of opportunity to help their workforce reflect their communities.