

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF WATER RESOURCES



STRATEGIC PLAN

Updated September 2023

ADAPTING FOR THE FUTURE

This strategic plan serves as a roadmap for optimizing the wise and equitable use of water in a changing climate, with our commitment to restoring and enhancing the environment, and providing public safety and emergency response. Focused on the next five years, this plan identifies the goals and objectives essential for the Department's success. This is a living document that will continue to be adjusted as circumstances and priorities shift. Please note, this document is not inclusive of all Department objectives and functions. Each Division will continue to develop and implement their own plans to ensure all facets of the Department are aligned with the mission.



DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

Sixty-seven years ago, the California Legislature established the Department of Water Resources, following the devastating Christmas Floods of 1955. Public safety was a foundational function of the organization, and vitally remains so to this day. During that post-World War II era of economic expansion, DWR would initiate and complete the largest state-built water system, the State Water Project, an engineering feat rivaled by few others worldwide. If that wasn't enough, the Department's services include providing extensive local assistance, regulating dam safety, and educating the public about water. In recent years, DWR has often found itself in the role of the indispensable agency, called upon to stabilize both the state's aquifers and its energy grid.

Today, DWR maintains its expertise and ambition, but faces a far less certain future, in part because of the changing climate. Though past problems may have conveniently lent themselves to single-purpose solutions, the challenges ahead will nearly all demand integrated strategies. Just as we are eliminating silos internally, we must likewise approach resilience externally with the whole

community in mind, considering not only its built infrastructure but also its social infrastructure. As we are re-building our aging and failing water systems, we must seize the opportunity to make the services they provide more equitable, as well as take advantage of nature-based solutions, which can be more sustainable. While still indispensable, DWR cannot do any of this alone; we need a variety of partners with various capacities to collectively advance water management.

As you will read, this strategic plan commits DWR to many bold goals and objectives, but quite simply, without great people, we will fail to accomplish them. Indeed, a changing workforce and the intensifying competition for skilled labor may represent the greatest risk to California's water infrastructure. We therefore intentionally place our goal to "Be an Employer of Choice" first. In so doing, DWR will strive to be an inclusive and supportive workplace, that attracts top talent, invests in professional development, and fosters a thriving community of people who are well-equipped and motivated to tackle California's water challenges.

We ask that you join us—as an employee, a partner, or a member of the public—on this journey to integrate and transform California water management.





■ GOALS AND OBJECTIVES



GOAL 1: Be an Employer of Choice

DWR seeks to create a culture of excellence that is welcoming, challenging, rewarding, and fun. To create an environment where employees can thrive, DWR dedicates resources that empower employees to innovate, collaborate, and advance within and beyond the organization. In close collaboration with experts from academia, Tribes, non-governmental organizations, and local, state, and federal agencies, DWR will work to advance thought leadership across the water management sector.

Objective 1: Attract, Develop, and Support Employees

■ ACTIONS

1. By 2025, update DWR's succession plan to include strategies for employee development within a hybrid workplace.
2. By 2025, and annually thereafter, conduct employee engagement surveys to assess employee job satisfaction, career growth potential, and work-life balance.
3. By 2025, update the Department's employee recognition program to align with the Department's core values.
4. By 2025, adapt the employee wellness program to coordinate and promote wellness activities for both a hybrid and on-site workforce.
5. By 2025, establish partnerships with fellowship programs to embed 5 fellows into DWR programs annually.
6. By 2025, complete remaining DWR Code of Safe Work Practices, provide training to implement, and establish an annual risk assessment process.
7. By 2026, expand workforce pipeline opportunities by increasing outreach efforts for student assistant and scientific aide positions.

Objective 2: Foster a Culture of Excellence

■ ACTIONS

1. By 2024, implement DWR's Emerging Leaders Program to advance skills in building partnerships, fostering cross-division collaboration, managing relationships, and communicating effectively.
2. By 2025, develop and adopt policies and best practices for conducting research to support the growth of DWR science leaders and co-produce research with others.
3. By 2025, increase executive engagement and coordination with the Governance Board, Environmental Coordination

Committee (ECC), Wave of Hope and other intradepartmental groups.

4. By 2025, pilot new project management tools and resources and assess opportunities for their consistent use and integration across DWR.
5. By 2025, embed climate change experts in each Division to better inform planning, design, and project implementation.
6. By 2026, develop formal knowledge transfer opportunities to promote employee career growth and retain institutional knowledge in both a hybrid and on-site work environment.
7. By 2026, identify and pursue organizational memberships in professional associations that support employee leadership.
8. By 2026, expand training on relevant legislation and legal issues to increase awareness and facilitate opportunities.
9. Dispatch DWR emerging thought leaders to national and international gatherings that advance the Department's stature and influence in the water and energy sector.

GOAL 2: Build Community Capacity

DWR is entrusted to support safe and sustainable management of water for all Californians. Now and in the past, some communities have enjoyed fewer benefits and/or carried a larger burden of the impacts of water management decision making, including relatively greater risks of flooding and water shortages. Now with the accelerating pressures from climate change, it is even more critical to invest in and develop water strategies that address the needs of all Californians. The Department also seeks to build authentic and trusting relationships with the communities we serve through improved outreach and engagement and expanding technical and financial assistance.

Objective 1: Practice Authentic and Meaningful Outreach and Engagement

■ ACTIONS

1. By 2024, offer annual open house listening sessions for partners, industry, academia, and the public to provide feedback to the Department.

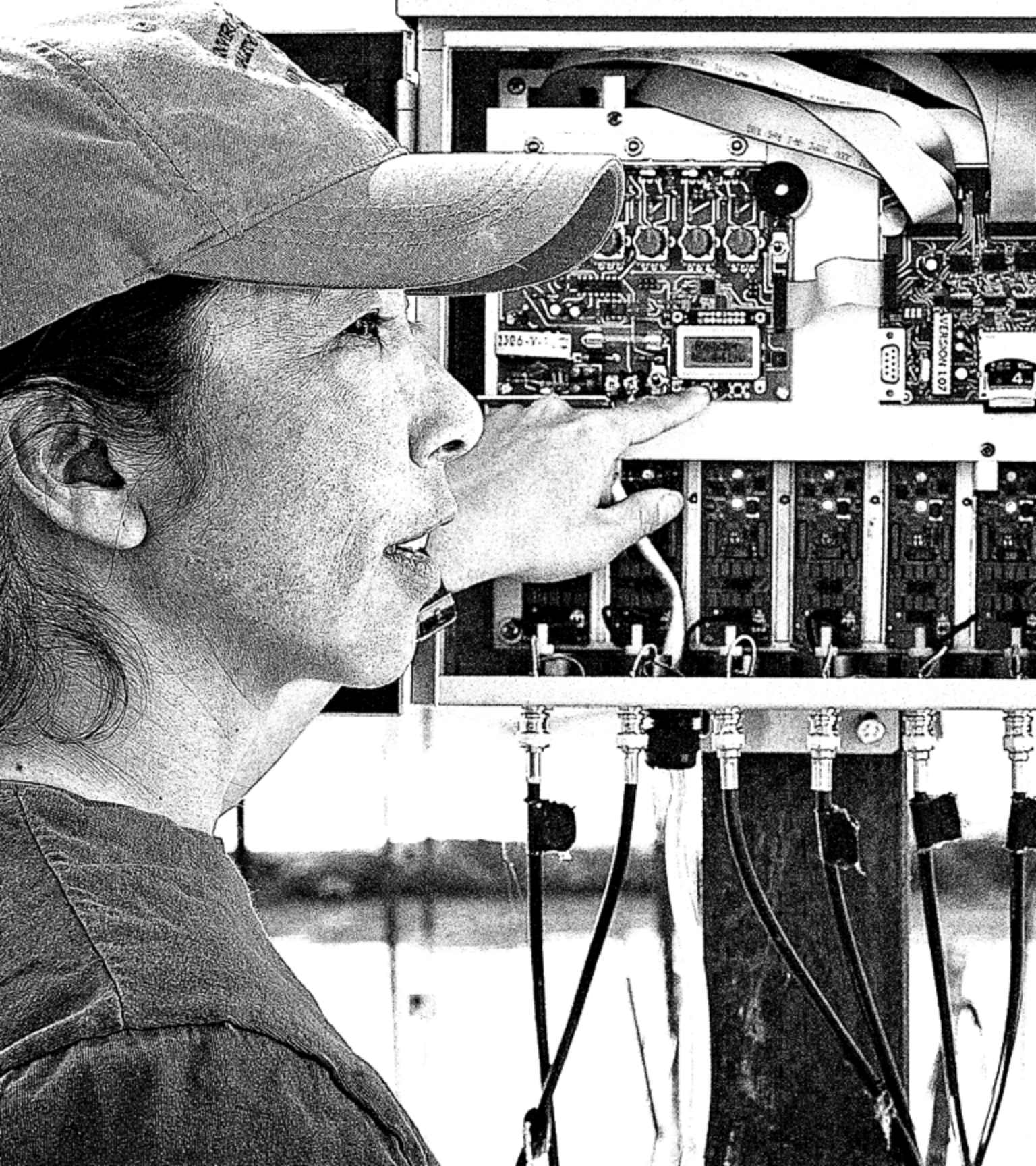


2. By 2025, develop and adopt best management practices for community engagement.
3. By 2025, develop and adopt best management practices for tribal engagement.
4. By 2025, develop and incorporate inclusive language guidelines in all Department communications.
5. By 2025, provide appropriate language services at all public events and workshops.
6. By 2025, create a consistent, user-friendly look and feel for all department communication tools.
7. By 2026, develop and implement “plain language summary” guidelines for all science and technical research communications.
8. By 2028, educate at least one million students on water resources and climate resilience.

Objective 2: Empower Communities with Technical and Financial Assistance

■ ACTIONS

1. By 2024, broaden support and direction to local entities to achieve groundwater sustainability.
2. By 2024, expand outreach to and engagement with domestic well users on groundwater, including well monitoring and maintenance.
3. By 2025, assess and inventory pre-consultation and technical services within DWR grant programs and where feasible implement process improvements.
4. By 2025, each Region Office will annually host a public “State of the Region” workshop that shares climate vulnerabilities, flood risk, water shortages, groundwater conditions and management, and grant opportunities.
5. By 2025, develop and implement updates to the Integrated Regional Water Management grant program, linking future local assistance support to the Update 2023 California Water Plan’s call for watershed-scale, inclusive, and climate science-driven regional planning.
6. By 2025, develop and provide guidance to local entities on aligning water shortage contingency and drought plans with long-term groundwater sustainability plans.





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7. By 2025, DWR will host an annual water resources science symposium, to showcase DWR research and facilitate the co-production of science to address critical knowledge gaps.
8. By 2025, expand California Water Watch to provide a comprehensive state of watersheds across California to help water managers and the public access up-to-date State data and information.
9. By 2026, improve outcomes for frontline communities by reducing barriers to DWR local assistance programs and by building local grant capacity through opportunities such as advance pay, waiver of local cost share requirements, and grant application assistance.
10. Annually expand targeted outreach to underserved communities for drought and flood emergencies, preserving ecosystems, and fulfilling the Human Right to Water.

GOAL 3: Pursue Innovative Infrastructure Solutions

Much of California’s water infrastructure is reaching the end of its lifecycle in an era that demands innovative infrastructure solutions. DWR must act boldly to adapt and modernize our infrastructure including use of nature-based solutions and by recognizing our watersheds as vital infrastructure. Acknowledging the interconnectedness of managing natural and built infrastructure, the Department will work with local, federal, and other partners to advance more integrated, flexible, and reliable water management systems.

Objective 1: Modernize Infrastructure and Integrate Nature-Based Solutions

■ ACTIONS

1. By 2024, all major infrastructure and investment decisions will be informed by formal findings regarding climate resilience, equity, and environmental stewardship.
2. By 2024, identify risk management strategies, including natural hazards, for consistent risk-informed planning and project prioritization.

3. By 2025, establish the Dam Safety and Enhancements Program and administer funding agreements with dam owners to rehabilitate dams for public safety and to regain storage capacity.
4. By 2025, inventory DWR-owned lands and identify and pursue opportunities for water resource development, groundwater recharge, habitat restoration, carbon sequestration, and renewable energy.
5. By 2025, develop a multi-division land stewardship program that contributes to various State land use objectives, including “30x30”, carbon sequestration, Natural and Working Lands, and incorporates basic principles of strategic long-term asset management.
6. By 2025, incorporate results and modeling from the San Joaquin Watershed Studies into major planning and project implementation actions to ensure consistent and cutting-edge approaches to multibenefit project design, investment decisions, and local agency engagement.
7. By 2025, implement collaborative watershed agreements for habitat enhancement measures and efficient functional flows to maximize water supply reliability and species benefits.
8. By 2025, in coordination with U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), identify potential watersheds within which to implement forecast informed reservoir operations (FIRO) and work with identified

partners to update water control manuals for the associated reservoirs.

9. By 2026, develop case studies of past projects that have incorporated nature-based principles, and use them to inform future infrastructure project design.
10. By 2026, implement at least five landscape-scale flood risk reduction projects that improve system resilience, increase groundwater recharge, and incorporate nature-based solutions.
11. By 2028, modernize forecasting and develop associated decision support tools to inform water supply operations and emergency response.

Objective 2: Align Financial Strategies with Infrastructure Needs

■ ACTIONS

1. By 2025, develop and annually update the Department’s strategy to pursue federal funding for California water management and natural infrastructure.
2. By 2025, review existing procurement and payment practices, policies, and statutory authorities and identify innovative approaches to meet the growing demands for DWR-led or funded project delivery.
3. By 2026, develop five-year investment plans for State Water Project and State Plan of Flood Control facilities, that includes the reduction of deferred maintenance.





4. Employ life cycle cost analysis to compare infrastructure investments and alternatives, and to develop a funding plan to finance operations and maintenance throughout a project's service life.
5. Pursue maximum federal cost recovery on emergency activation/deployment.
6. Ensure the affordability of the State Water Project by implementing the Contract Extension Amendments in 2024 and completing the Financial Management Enhancement Program in 2027.

Objective 3: Implement Sustainability Best Practices

■ ACTIONS

1. By 2024, utilize the Envision Rating Tool to inform new infrastructure project planning and design.
2. By 2025, support at least 10 new credentialed Envision Sustainability Professionals (ENV SP), with sustainability-related support activities in their duty statements.
3. By 2025, include zero-emission generation or battery storage resources in the Strategic Reliability Reserve Program.
4. By 2026, conduct a complete Envision evaluation for all new infrastructure projects that require an Environmental Impact Report.
5. By 2026, design and publish a public facing sustainability dashboard based on the structure of Envision.

GOAL 4: Respond to Public Safety Emergencies

Natural disasters are striking with more frequency and devastation. In response, DWR is working to optimize the management of water resources for the improved protection of lives, infrastructure, and the environment. The Department plays a significant role in preparing for, responding to, and recovering from emergencies that stem not only from drought and flood, but also earthquakes, energy shortages, and wildfires. DWR will work to better protect communities and the natural environment by ensuring well-trained personnel and building strong public safety partnerships.

Objective 1: Prepare for Emergencies

■ ACTIONS

1. By 2024, implement security management programs to protect DWR's essential functions.
2. By 2025, every employee will complete introductory emergency preparedness training that describes DWR's role in emergencies and provides an overview of the Standardized Emergency

Management System and Incident Command System.

3. By 2025, complete the DWR Emergency Communications Plan that includes expanded strategies to communicate internally and externally during emergencies.
4. By 2026, employees on an Emergency Operations Center or Incident Command Team roster will complete additional specialized training that is commensurate to their level of responsibility.
5. By 2026, complete Emergency Action Plans for all field divisions and region offices.
6. By 2028, identify and map the interconnections and dependencies of DWR-owned or controlled infrastructure with other infrastructure systems.
7. Continue to annually engage with external agency partners and frontline communities in preparation for emergencies.

Objective 2: Reduce Impacts of Emergencies

■ ACTIONS

1. By 2024, implement a dam safety enforcement program prioritizing the nature and number of the violation(s), and potential threat to life and property.
2. By 2025, develop strategies to increase participation in flood insurance programs, and further flood insurance pilot efforts.

3. By 2025, complete a pilot program using risk informed decision making to improve the evaluation of state jurisdictional dams.
4. By 2025, incorporate climate change projections in hydrologic and hydraulic evaluations of jurisdictional dam spillways, which may necessitate enhanced maintenance and capital upgrades to address increased activation of spillways during extreme storms.
5. By 2026, establish a permanent water supply shortage program focused on long-term planning and preparedness.
6. By 2027, develop an assessment of statewide flood risk reduction needs, with a focus on underserved communities.

Objective 3: Respond to Floods, Droughts, and Energy Shortages

■ ACTIONS

1. By 2024, establish teams to lead response and recovery efforts of major disasters effecting water resources.
2. By 2024, extend the contracts of existing emergency power plants in the Strategic Reliability Reserve Program.
3. By 2025, conduct an interagency exercise for the Delta emergency preparedness and response plan.
4. By 2025, work with the Drought Resilience Interagency and Partners (DRIP) Collaborative to establish a roadmap to



strengthen how the State responds to and supports local drought resilience.

5. Annually host inter-agency emergency exercises and pre-season flood briefings to align with local, tribal, State, and federal emergency responders.
6. Support California energy agencies in reaching out to public water agencies to reduce electricity usage and increase generation during electrical grid emergencies.

GOAL 5: Integrate and Transform California Water Management

Passage of the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) in 2014 was nearly a century in the making, and as it turns out, may be this century's best opportunity to transform California water management. This is because bringing our state's aquifers back into balance is hardly limited to just the water below our feet. Indeed, to fulfill the promise of SGMA, we must integrate groundwater with surface water—dam safety, reservoir operations, flood management, and ecosystem restoration—thereby expanding the solution space available to facilitate climate resilience and equity.

The challenge of integrating water management requires first and foremost that DWR have its own house in order. While the Department has certainly tackled tough things before, we've done so with the luxury of a relatively stable climate and at times abundant State and federal revenues. We must also recognize that our past approaches have often been more crisis-driven than strategic, and intentional or not, they have not always advanced social and environmental justice. In a changing



climate, reactive and ad hoc tactics simply will not be good enough. Integrating water management means thinking bigger—on regional and watershed-level scales—as well as more deeply, to leverage finite public resources and build adaptive capacity for local communities. Moreover, we will need to not only integrate but innovate—and to innovate, we must give ourselves permission to try and fail—and then to learn and try again.

To meet these challenges, DWR will establish innovation teams of emerging leaders across the Department.

■ ACTIONS

1. By April 2024, identify persistent and complex dilemmas where solutions demand integration.
2. By October 2024, assess potential opportunities for innovative problem-solving, such as the availability of willing and capable partners, aligned funding, regulatory flexibility, subject matter expertise, and Region Office leadership.
3. By 2025, empower cross-divisional groups reflecting the talent, diversity, and experience of our staff, to pilot integrated solutions in collaboration with tribes, local agencies, NGOs, philanthropy, and the federal government.

We should be clear and humble as we embark on this endeavor. Such challenges

are daunting, and include ensuring that all Californians have access to safe and affordable drinking water, transitioning local communities, land use, and regional economies and jobs dependent upon unsustainable groundwater pumping, and bringing fisheries back from the brink of extinction. Nonetheless, this model presents an opportunity for the Department to build upon its demonstrated ability, time and again, to rise to the occasion, but going forward, to do so with more thought, purpose, and integration, resulting in fairer and more creative and sustainable solutions.



CORE VALUES

The strategic plan is underpinned by five core values. These values drive DWR's decision-making and provide guidance on how it should conduct business. They are considered and incorporated into all Department activities.

World-Class Safety Organization ■

DWR is committed to the protection of the public and to the safety of its employees and partners. Safety is integrated into DWR's culture, and safety practices should be implemented by every Department employee. Public safety is the first priority among all aspects of management and operation of DWR's infrastructure. Infrastructure risk will continue to be identified, prioritized, managed, and communicated to the public.

Partnership Development & Transparency ■

The Department strives to inform and educate the public about the importance of water, California's unique water challenges and opportunities, and its role in managing and protecting a sustainable water



supply for communities and ecosystems. DWR's work affects every Californian and extends to neighboring states as it drives national and international discussions. Across communication platforms, DWR is committed to providing timely, accurate, and accessible information to the public, partners, and media. DWR values its relationships with federal, state, and local governments, tribes, academia, and nongovernmental organizations because it is through these partnerships that California can achieve its water management goals, plan for emergencies and minimize risks, and develop best available science and engineering tools.

Science Drives Our

Decision-Making ■ DWR is dedicated to using and advancing the best available science to make informed management decisions, a commitment that includes supporting staff-driven scientific inquiry and publication, scientific community engagement, and promotion and adoption of cutting-edge technologies. DWR uses science as a basis for all planning and project development actions while sharing expertise gained through this work with the national and international water community.

Environmental Stewardship ■

California is one of the world's great biodiversity hotspots, and its future is threatened. DWR is incorporating environmental benefits into programs and projects at appropriate scales that recognize this environmental context and regional setting. Integration of ecological principles, including traditional and local knowledge, into infrastructure planning and project design is critical to achieving multiple benefits for communities and the environment.

Professionalism & Respect ■

The Department is responsible for conducting business in a professional, courteous, ethical, and safe manner by demonstrating integrity, honesty, good judgment, courtesy, and respect at all times. Employees frequently interact with members of the public, partners, and colleagues to resolve a variety of difficult challenges. By maintaining positive relationships at work, DWR is able to provide the best public service to all Californians. DWR strives to create a trusting and welcoming workplace where employees embrace diverse viewpoints and treat each other with civility and respect.

MISSION

**To sustainably
manage the
water resources
of California, in
cooperation with
other agencies,
to benefit the state's
people and protect,
restore, and enhance
the natural and
human environments.**





