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Newsom administration releases long-awaited Water Resilience Portfolio

01/03/20 5:53 PM

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KEYWORDS [Climate Change \(/keywords/2008-climate-change\)](#) [drought \(/keywords/680-drought\)](#)

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Three months later than promised, California agencies published the first draft on Friday afternoon of Gov. Gavin Newsom's Water Resilience Portfolio (<http://waterresilience.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/California-Water-Resilience-Portfolio-2019-Final2.pdf>). The portfolio focuses on four areas for policy actions to help the state adapt its water to the changing climates and aging infrastructure:

- Maintain and diversify water supplies

- Protect and enhance natural ecosystems

- Build connections — across agencies as well as physical infrastructure for more readily moving water

- Preparing for the next droughts, floods and other weather stresses

More than 100 policy actions detail how the agencies will implement the goals, with a focus on supporting existing regional efforts. The California Department of Food and Agriculture is rebranding five of its climate-smart programs for the effort. This includes grants for water efficiency to help farmers adapt to the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) and funding Healthy Soils projects to promote water retention. The department is also offering technical assistance to help farmers improve fertilizer application and manure management for protecting water quality as well as to improve nutrient efficiency, drought adaptation and land management.

“State agencies are only one set of water decision-makers in California,” said CDFA Secretary Karen Ross in a prepared statement. “Continuing to improve our water systems relies on collaboration across all groups of water users and all stakeholders.”

The portfolio is based on a comprehensive statewide inventory of water issues and dozens of stakeholder meetings across the state, including three sessions hosted by the State Board of Food and Agriculture with local farmers up and down the Central Valley.

Other actions the portfolio proposes include accelerating permits and approvals for water storage projects like the Sites Reservoir and support for stormwater capture, groundwater recharge and cost-effective desalination projects. The portfolio also calls for developing a statewide system for transferring water on an open market, which would also help farmers adapt to SGMA. This effort would include expediting transfers between the Central Valley Project and State Water Project.

On the environment side, the report proposes new research to better quantify the timing, quality and volume of flows needed to maintain ecosystem health. With the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, the plan would add a requirement that agricultural water districts demonstrate how they are reducing reliance on impacted flows. It also would provide incentives for landowners in the delta to convert to rice cultivation in order to reverse land subsidence and reduce carbon emissions.

The portfolio’s working group (<http://waterresilience.ca.gov/>) will be taking comments until Feb. 7, with a final draft released soon after.

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