



# THE STATE WATER PROJECT FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

## **WHAT IS CALIFORNIA'S STATE WATER PROJECT (SWP) AND WHY IS IT CONSIDERED OUR MOST CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE?**

The SWP is a collection of 700 miles of canals, pipelines, reservoirs and hydroelectric power facilities that deliver water flowing from high in the Sierra Nevada mountains all the way to your tap. Two of every three Californians receives water from the SWP, which provides high-quality drinking water to 27 million Californians and 750,000 acres of farmland throughout the state. This complex water grid is the largest state-owned and operated water and power delivery system in the world, and drives California's quality of life and economic vitality.

## **WHO ARE THE STATE WATER CONTRACTORS (SWC)?**

The SWC is a non-profit association of 27 public water agencies from Northern, Central and Southern California that deliver water for use in our homes, schools, hospitals, farms and businesses. These public water agencies help manage our state's precious and finite water resources. The State Water Contractors' mission is to advocate on behalf of our members for improved supply reliability and water quality based on sensible, science-based policies that result in sustainable and cost-effective management of the SWP for California's citizens, economy and environment.

## **WHAT PARTS OF CALIFORNIA DOES THE SWP SERVE WITH HIGH QUALITY DRINKING WATER?**

California relies on the SWP as the backbone of the state's water supply delivery system. It serves the Bay Area, San Joaquin Valley, Central Coast, Southern California, Inland Empire and Desert regions. Without the SWP, California would need to replace 2.5 million acre-feet of water annually to meet state demand, or enough to supply approximately 5 million homes for a year.

## **WHERE DOES THE WATER COME FROM AND HOW DOES THE SYSTEM WORK?**

The SWP's water supplies come from the high Sierra Nevada Mountains where rainfall and snowmelt fill rivers and tributaries that travel toward the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, which serves as the hub for California's water supply and delivery system. The SWP captures and stores a share of these supplies, which are then delivered through 700 miles of canals and pipelines for use throughout the state. But the SWP facilities in the Delta are overdue for modernization. When combined with climate change and droughts, the outdated Delta infrastructure is limiting our ability to capture and move water when conditions allow for it. An upgrade in Delta conveyance is needed to protect the SWP against the threat of climate change and ensure reliable water deliveries into the future.

## **HOW DOES THE STATE REGULATE AND OVERSEE THE MANAGEMENT OF THE STATE WATER PROJECT IN CALIFORNIA?**

The Department of Water Resources (DWR) manages California's SWP water supply, systems and infrastructure in a responsible, sustainable way. The SWC public water agencies contract with DWR to receive and deliver water through the SWP, and pay for 100% of the operation and maintenance of the system. The State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB) works to ensure water quality standards are met for California's water resources and drinking water for the protection of the environment, public health, and all beneficial uses, and to ensure proper water resource allocation and efficient use for the benefit of present and future generations.

## **WHO PAYS FOR THE SWP?**

The SWC public water agencies finance the system's maintenance, operations and capital improvement costs. Ultimately, the SWP is paid for by the 27 million Californians who receive water from the SWP. The water rates paid by ratepayers help to ensure California can continue to meet our need for high quality drinking water now and into the future.

## **HOW DOES THE SWP HELP TO BOLSTER CALIFORNIA'S RESILIENCE TO CLIMATE CHANGE?**

Climate change has resulted in prolonged periods of drought, reduced snowpack, flashier and more unpredictable rainfall and sea level rise. To meet the challenges associated with the aridification of our state, we must continue to invest in maintaining the SWP while seeking every opportunity to develop alternative sources of water supplies. The SWP can store and move water when it is available, so that it can be used during drier times to support local projects, like desal and recycling. SWC member agencies are able to deploy a host of innovative water management techniques such as water banking, recycling, groundwater storage and recharge and surface water storage. These methods, made possible through the SWP, increase our ability to manage our water supply more efficiently, especially in times of drought.

## **HOW DOES THE SWP BALANCE THE NEED TO ENSURE WATER RELIABILITY WHILE ALSO PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT?**

The SWC and its public water agencies are committed to science-based decision-making for the management of water supplies for the environment and the people of California. The SWC invests over \$2 million annually in science and research to study the delicate Delta ecosystem. The SWC aims to manage water actions and decisions in response to real-time conditions in the environment – nature doesn't operate on a calendar and neither should the regulations governing water management. The SWC promotes the use of science to inform the way state and federal regulators maintain a balance between providing a more reliable water supply for California and protecting, restoring and enhancing the Delta ecosystem.

## **HOW IS THE SWC WORKING TO PROTECT AND RESTORE HABITAT – ESPECIALLY IN THE SACRAMENTO-SAN JOAQUIN DELTA?**

SWC member agencies are restoring thousands of acres of habitat as part of our SWP operations – returning previously threatened species back to their native environments. In addition, the SWC is working with the state to develop a new approach to managing flows and restoring ecosystems in the Delta and its tributaries. Termed "Voluntary Agreements", this science-based approach represents the largest purchase of water for the environment in California's history -- dedicating a block of water for environmental flows and creating more than 45,000 acres of instream habitat, floodplain habitat and fish food production.

## **HOW DOES THE SWP SUPPORT DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITIES?**

The SWP serves approximately three-fourths of California's disadvantaged communities with some or all of their water supplies -- serving nearly 7 million people in more than 1,500 communities. The SWP provides these communities with the most cost effective and pure source of high-quality drinking water. Public water agencies provide subsidies for water rates to members of California's disadvantaged communities, ensuring the SWP can continue to provide California's most affordable water supply.

## **HOW ARE THE PUBLIC WATER AGENCIES WHO FINANCE THE SWP WORKING TO REDUCE CALIFORNIA'S RELIANCE ON THE DELTA?**

Each and every day, more than 27 million California residents and countless businesses depend on the SWP for 30 to 80 percent of their water supply, which is captured and delivered through the Delta -- the linchpin of the system. As our state's water supply is threatened by climate change and the realities of more intense droughts and floods, public water agencies are working to reduce their reliance on water from the Delta by:

- Applying best practices in water supply management to conserve water
- Investing in additional local and regional water supply sources such as water reuse, stormwater capture, recycling and desalination
- Partnering with local municipalities to capture and store stormwater
- Implementing local conservation programs with rebates, financial incentives, and outreach and education
- Collaborating with fellow water agencies to pool our collective knowledge, resources and experience

### **HOW DOES CALIFORNIA BENEFIT FROM THE HYDRO-ELECTRIC POWER GENERATED BY THE SWP?**

The SWP is the largest state-run water and power system in the nation. It produces 14% of the state's hydroelectricity. As California looks to decrease our reliance on fossil fuels and increase our investment in renewable energy, the state's electricity grid will become even more dependent on hydro-electric power generated by the SWP. The SWC is committed to continuing our contributions to a carbon-free California. In addition to providing 70% of its own energy needs with greenhouse gas (GHG) emission-free power, the SWP helps to stabilize the state's electricity grid by using solar energy when it is available mid-day and generating emission-free hydropower during peak hours. This helps California further integrate additional renewable resources into the grid, displaces fossil fuel generation, lowers overall grid emissions and helps to keep water rates low for ratepayers.

### **WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE TO PREPARE THE SWP FOR THE NEXT 50 YEARS?**

California's water reliability depends on hydrology. Climate change is presenting California with tough challenges, but the SWP is tougher. As we look towards the future, we must continue to invest in upgrading and maintaining SWP infrastructure to increase the system's resilience to climate change and seismic activity, including a solution for conveying water through the Delta, and to improve our operations to be as flexible as possible to meet the water needs of both people and the environment.

### **WHERE CAN I GO TO LEARN MORE?**

California wouldn't be the same without the SWP, a foundational network woven into the fabric of our communities from the Bay Area to San Diego. To learn more about the value of the SWP and what it means to you and your community, check out our website at [www.swc.org](http://www.swc.org) where you can view our fact sheets, op-eds, blogs, videos and other materials. You can also learn more by visiting DWR's webpage about the SWP at <https://water.ca.gov/Programs/State-Water-Project>.