

DESERT WATER



Legislative & Policy Platform

2025 - 2026



(This page is intentionally left blank.)

INTRODUCTION

The 2025-2026 Legislative & Policy Platform (Platform) outlines core policy principles to guide Desert Water Agency's (DWA) legislative, regulatory, and administrative advocacy efforts at the local, state, regional, and federal levels.

Developed for the new biennial sessions of the California Senate and Assembly and the 119th Congress, the Platform ensures timely and consistent action on key policy issues. While DWA's bimonthly Board meetings provide opportunities for discussion and direction on specific legislation, once adopted by the Board, the Platform serves as a framework for the General Manager, designated staff, and contracted lobbyists to act in a timely manner in alignment with its directives.

This document was created by DWA staff in collaboration with DWA's Board of Directors and federal and state advocacy teams. While it aims to address DWA's anticipated legislative needs and policy positions, it acknowledges that unforeseen issues or shifts in priorities may arise during the term.

The Director of Public Affairs & Conservation will maintain regular communication with the Legislative Committee, which is tasked with monitoring legislative developments and collaborating with staff and lobbyists. This ongoing coordination, along with regular updates to the full Board of Directors, will ensure that DWA's advocacy efforts remain responsive and aligned with evolving priorities.



BILL POSITIONS



The following represents bill positions that DWA staff may adopt or recommend for consideration by the DWA Board of Directors. If the bill language clearly aligns with one of the directives outlined in the Platform, staff may adopt a position without requiring a Board vote. Advocacy efforts will focus on advancing DWA's adopted bill positions in support of the Board's policies.

- **SUPPORT:** This position reflects DWA's strong support for the legislation, with the goal of seeing it become law. DWA staff and legislative advocates will actively work toward the bill's passage in its current form.
- **SUPPORT AND SEEK AMENDMENTS:** This position indicates strong support for the bill, similar to the SUPPORT position, but with a preference for specific amendments to improve the measure. DWA staff and legislative advocates will continue to support the bill, even if the proposed amendments are not included.
- **SUPPORT IF AMENDED:** This position reflects conditional support, contingent upon specific amendments being made to the bill. DWA staff and legislative advocates will not advocate for the bill unless it is amended as requested by DWA.
- **WATCH:** This position is for bills that do not currently affect DWA but will be monitored for future developments or amendments. This can also be considered a "neutral" position.
- **OPPOSE UNLESS AMENDED:** This position reflects conditional opposition, unless specific amendments are made to address DWA's concerns. DWA staff and legislative advocates will work to defeat the bill until the requested amendments are made. If the bill is amended as requested, DWA may move to a WATCH position, or potentially a SUPPORT position, if aligned with the Board's vote or Platform directives.
- **OPPOSE:** This position reflects DWA's firm opposition to the legislation, aiming to defeat it in its current form. DWA staff and legislative advocates will work to defeat the bill without seeking amendments to address its shortcomings.

Staff and legislative advocates monitor all bills that may be of interest or concern to DWA. If any of these bills are amended, they will be reevaluated to determine whether a formal position should be recommended for consideration by the Board or Legislative Committee.

KEY STAKEHOLDER ALIGNMENT

The DWA Board, staff, and advocates should actively consider the positions of key associations and organizations that influence or align with DWA's policy objectives. Collaborating with these entities is crucial for strengthening DWA's advocacy efforts and ensuring a unified approach to water policy at the local, state, regional, and federal levels. Key organizations include:

- Association of California Water Agencies
- National Water Resources Association
- Groundwater Management District Association
- National/California Special Districts Association
- State Water Contractors
- Western Urban Water Coalition
- WateReuse Association
- Other local and regional water districts

RELATIONSHIP BUILDING FOR EFFECTIVE ADVOCACY

The DWA Board, staff, and advocates should actively work to develop and maintain positive relationships with key stakeholders to advance DWA's policy priorities. These relationships are essential for strengthening DWA's influence and ensuring its goals are effectively represented in state and federal legislative and regulatory discussions. By fostering these connections, DWA can enhance its advocacy efforts and contribute to the success of its policy objectives. Key stakeholders include:

- Members of Congress and State Legislators
- Congressional and Legislative staff
- Congressional and Legislative Committees
- Governor's office
- Federal and State Agencies
- Native American Tribes
- Associations, their staff and working groups
- Coachella Valley cities
- Other local government and public agencies

POLICY DIRECTIVES



1. Maintain local control of water resources and avoid constraints on operations.

DWA is committed to maintaining local control over water resources, which it has successfully managed for more than 60 years. The Agency will strongly oppose any efforts at the state or federal level that seek to diminish its autonomy or that of its local groundwater management partners.

To address regulatory challenges, DWA will work to minimize additional burdens and ensure they remain manageable. When appropriate, the Agency will collaborate with other water providers and associations, advocating through coalitions to highlight the broader operational impacts of proposed regulations on the state or region.

2. Maintain or improve Desert Water Agency's ability to efficiently conduct business.

As a water manager and provider of essential services, DWA relies on effective business strategies to fulfill its mission. The Agency will support measures that enhance its ability to implement best management practices as an employer, supplier, purchaser, and local government entity.

DWA will also closely monitor and generally oppose measures that disrupt its ability to maintain day-to-day operations, including the imposition of unfunded mandates that impose costs without producing corresponding savings. These may include, but are not limited to, regulations or legislation affecting employment practices, infrastructure standards/building codes, and public agency contracting.

3. Protect DWA's local and imported water supplies.

DWA is committed to policies that maintain or enhance water supply reliability and affordability to support its domestic and other customer demands sustainably. Protecting its diverse water sources - including local groundwater, surface runoff, and imported State Water Project supplies - critical to advancing long-term reliability.

Advocacy efforts will focus on preserving the health of the groundwater aquifer, ensuring the dependability of imported surface water, and protecting the allocations and contracted volumes of imported supplies. DWA also prioritizes the reliability of conveyance infrastructure to ensure uninterrupted delivery of water.

DWA will support actions that increase water availability for its customers, maintain infrastructure reliability, and enable sustainable groundwater management in an economical manner. Measures that threaten these objectives will be closely monitored and generally opposed.



4. Support investments for Colorado River water quality and salinity reduction.

The Colorado River serves more than 40 million people; however, rising salinity levels threaten its long-term sustainability. High salinity, driven by natural processes and irrigation runoff, damages agriculture production, corrodes infrastructure, and increases water treatment costs.

DWA supports ongoing efforts to reduce salinity through the Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Program, which includes on-farm improvements, water management practices, and infrastructure upgrades. Key projects like the Paradox Valley Unit in Colorado, which diverts saline groundwater from the Dolores River and injects it deep underground, significantly reduces downstream salinity.

DWA advocates for increased and expedited federal funding to support both short- and long-term salinity mitigation efforts, including the continued operation of the Paradox Valley Unit. These actions are critical for ensuring the river's sustainability, benefiting the entire Colorado River Basin, and supporting the region's growing water demands.

5. Support the Lower Basin proposal for the post-2026 Operating Guidelines for the Colorado River.

The 2007 Interim Guidelines for Shortages and Coordinated Operations for Lake Powell and Lake Mead, along with the 2019 Drought Contingency Plan, will expire in 2026. While DWA does not have direct rights to Colorado River water, it has a vested interest in the ongoing negotiations. This is due to DWA's exchange agreement with the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California. The Agency exchanges its State Water Project allocation for Colorado River water, because there is no direct pipeline connecting the Palm Springs area to the State Water Project.



DWA supports efforts to promote cooperation among all stakeholders in the Colorado River Basin, emphasizing shared conservation during drought periods and long-term investments to enhance the region's resilience and sustainability. Given these considerations, DWA will support the Lower Basin's Proposal for the post-2026 Operating Guidelines as a balanced approach to managing the river's resources for all parties involved.

6. Support federal legislation to exempt conservation rebates issued by water districts from tax burdens.

Federal tax policies classify water conservation rebates as taxable income, creating a barrier to participation in programs like turf removal, low-flow fixture installation, and irrigation upgrades. This tax treatment disproportionately impacts disadvantaged communities, limiting access to these programs and discouraging broader participation.

DWA supports amending the federal tax code to establish tax parity for water conservation rebates that aligns them with untaxed energy efficiency rebates. Achieving tax parity would expand access to water conservation programs, promote equitable resource management, and remove financial and administrative burdens for customers and agencies alike.

To advance this goal, DWA will support legislative efforts and collaborate with stakeholders and associations to advocate for equitable and effective water conservation solutions.

7. Support liability protections for water and wastewater agencies following the designation of PFAS as a hazardous substance under CERCLA.

In April 2024, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) designated per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), also known as “forever chemicals,” as hazardous substances under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA). This designation allows the EPA to mandate cleanups at contaminated sites and seek cost recovery from responsible parties. However, water utilities often inherit PFAS contamination as passive receivers, despite having no control over the discharges, which may expose them to costly remediation efforts.

DWA supports efforts to shift the liability for PFAS cleanup away from passive receivers, advocating for legislative and regulatory measures that hold polluters accountable. Additionally, DWA encourages the appropriation of federal funding to support PFAS remediation efforts and limit Superfund liability for public water systems. These actions will reduce the financial burden on utilities, help keep water rates affordable, and ensure that water agencies are not unfairly penalized for contamination they did not cause.

8. Support federal and state avenues for conservation program funding, such as the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation’s WaterSMART program.

Historically, DWA has leveraged federal funding to support key conservation efforts, including turf removal. As of November 2024, DWA has converted 4.4 million square feet of grass to drought resilient landscape. These projects are costly, and incentives like state and federal grants make them feasible. DWA also supports funding for recycled water projects, which strengthen conservation and provide alternative water sources.

DWA advocates for continued and expanded state and federal funding for conservation initiatives, including water efficiency and infrastructure upgrades. These investments are critical for long-term water sustainability, reducing reliance on imported water, and enabling communities to implement effective water-saving measures.



9. Keep water and tax rates affordable. When possible, seek external funding for planning, new projects, conservation, and/or facility improvements.

DWA is committed to providing reliable water and sewer service, including recycled water and hydroelectric facilities, which often requires significant capital investment in new infrastructure or upgrades to aging systems. To minimize the burden on customers and taxpayers, DWA should resist regulatory requirements that impose substantial operational costs.

Where possible, DWA will maximize opportunities for external funding, such as grants and matching funds, to reduce the financial impact of new facilities and improvements. Advocacy for increased access to federal and state funding for infrastructure, including expanded eligibility for programs, is vital to addressing aging infrastructure and ensuring long-term service reliability. Leveraging external funding is a critical strategy to maintain affordable rates while investing in the modernization of essential systems.



10. Support investments to enhance California’s water infrastructure for conveyance, storage capacity, flexibility, and reliability, including the Delta Conveyance Project, Sites Reservoir, and the State Water Project.

Desert Water Agency was founded in 1961 to manage local groundwater resources and facilitate the importation of water to the Palm Springs region. As one of 29 State Water Project (SWP) contractors in California, DWA uses imported water to recharge local aquifers and support long-term water reliability. DWA’s annual payment to the SWP is approximately \$30 million; however, delivery reliability has declined to less than 50% of contracted allocations since 2007.

To address this, DWA supports infrastructure investments like the Delta Conveyance Project (DCP) and Sites Reservoir. The DCP aims to construct a tunnel to convey water across the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta during wet years, enhancing storage opportunities for dry years. Recognizing its importance, DWA has consistently supported various iterations of this project and the DWA board recently supported the next phase of pre-construction work for the DCP.

Similarly, DWA is an original investor in the Sites Reservoir Project, which is designed to capture and store excess stormwater runoff, increasing California’s overall water storage capacity and resilience. DWA has actively participated as a member of the Sites Reservoir Committee since 2017.

Investments in these projects are critical to increasing the flexibility and reliability of the SWP and the broader Central Valley Project system. DWA will continue to monitor developments related to these initiatives and advocate for legislative and regulatory actions that enhance water delivery reliability. Additionally, DWA will work with Governor Newsom’s Administration on implementing the state’s "California’s Water Supply Strategy: Adapting to a Hotter, Drier Future" and support efforts to modernize the California Water Plan.



11. Oppose a state water “tax” or “fee” and monitor ways in which the state will address water affordability.

DWA recognizes the importance of water affordability and supports efforts to assist low-income customers through programs like the federal Low-Income Household Water Assistance Program (LIHWAP). However, DWA opposes a state-imposed water tax or fee that would burden customers and create additional administrative challenges for water agencies.

Recent legislative efforts, such as SB 222 (2022) and SB 1255 (2024), have aimed to address affordability through rate assistance programs. While SB 222 relied on an unsustainable funding mechanism, SB 1255 shifted the funding burden to customers who did not qualify for assistance, creating inequities and financial strain. Both proposals introduced significant administrative complexities for agencies like DWA.

DWA supports sustainable and efficient water affordability solutions that leverage existing programs and processes to minimize administrative burdens. Eligibility screenings should be conducted by third-party administrators, as water agencies like DWA do not collect sensitive customer information. Funding for these programs should come from recurring, state-managed sources without imposing new taxes or fees on water customers.

DWA will continue to monitor developments in state affordability programs and advocate for equitable, efficient solutions that align with its commitment to keeping water accessible and affordable for all.



12. Continue to engage with and advocate for the State Water Resources Control Board to implement the “Making Conservation a California Way of Life” regulation in a way that avoids unnecessary costs for water agencies and incorporates Desert Water Agency’s local conditions.

In 2018, SB 606 (Hertzberg) and AB 1668 (Friedman) established a framework to improve water use efficiency statewide, with specific milestones for reducing water consumption across residential, commercial, and outdoor uses. In 2022, SB 1157 (Hertzberg) further tightened indoor residential water use standards. In July 2024, the State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB) formally adopted the “Making Conservation a California Way of Life” regulations to implement these laws.

DWA will continue to advocate for the SWRCB to implement these regulations without imposing unnecessary costs or burdens on water agencies. Advocacy efforts will emphasize the need to account for DWA’s unique local conditions and water supply, ensuring fair and practical compliance pathways. DWA will also remain engaged with the SWRCB and industry associations to shape urban water use efficiency policies that are sustainable, equitable, and feasible for its service area.





For questions regarding these Legislative and Policy Platform directives, please contact
Victoria Lort, Director of Public Affairs and Conservation,
at 760-323-4971, ext. 273 or at vlort@dwa.org.

This Legislative & Policy Platform was approved by the Board of Directors on December 17, 2024.



Desert Water Agency
1200 S. Gene Autry Trail
Palm Springs 92263

www.dwa.org

