



Briefing on Process to Update the Water Forum Agreement

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Attachments: Yes

Referring Committee: Land Use & Natural Resources

Issue:

An overview and briefing on activities to update the Water Forum Agreement.

Request:

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Recommendation for Board:

None; this item is for information only.

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None; this item is for information only.

Background:

In the 1990s, Sacramento faced unsustainable water supplies and environmental challenges due to heavy and increasing reliance on the Lower American River and declining groundwater levels. To address this, the city and county of Sacramento initiated the Water Forum negotiations in 1993. After years of negotiation, the landmark Water Forum Agreement was signed in 2000 by 40 agencies and businesses. This agreement aimed to ensure a reliable water supply for economic health and development until 2030, while preserving the Lower American River's ecological, recreational, and aesthetic values.

The Water Forum Agreement was one of the first of its kind—a voluntary agreement and North Star that has guided the region's actions for over two decades. It is an agreement and plan to balance two coequal objectives:

- Provide a reliable and safe water supply for the region's economic health and planned development through to the year 2030; and
- Preserve the fishery, wildlife, recreational, and aesthetic values of the lower American River.

Over the past 25 years, the Water Forum has successfully implemented water management solutions that protect the river and support regional vitality.

In 2019 in anticipation of the expiration of the agreement in 2030, Water Forum members began Water Forum 2.0 negotiations to develop a new agreement to guide stewardship of the regional water supplies and the Lower American River for the next 25 years. The negotiations have strived to continue the successes of the original agreement, and to provide a framework for ongoing collaboration in the face of unprecedented challenges posed by climate change. The updated Agreement is close to completion and is being termed the Water Forum 2050 Agreement (WF2050).

Discussion/Analysis:

Given its role as a long-range regional planning agency, SACOG was invited in 2021 to participate in the Water Forum 2.0 negotiations. SACOG staff have participated as subject matter experts on the application of SACOG's regional growth projections to long-range climate analysis. SACOG has also contributed to topics of long-term water demand management, data monitoring, and multi-stakeholder collaborative governance. The WF2050 agreement is scheduled to be completed by the fall of 2025, and all parties participating in the negotiations are invited to sign the agreement.

Signatories would become members of the Water Forum and participate in Water Forum activities, ultimately fostering regional collaboration and building ongoing trust with fellow regional stakeholders. Public agencies that are not water purveyors (who fund the majority of the annual budget for the Water Forum) are asked to contribute financially to support the implementation of the WF2050 agreement.

At the committee meeting, Ashlee Casey, Executive Director of the Water Forum, presented an overview of the Water Forum Agreement and the current process to update the agreement.

A brief overview of the WF2050 agreement is provided below:

- WF2050 is presented in five key Program Areas: (1) American River Flows and Operations, (2) American River Corridor Health, (3) Regional Water Supply Sustainability, (4) Science, Monitoring, and Decision Support, and (5) Governance, Funding, and Administration.
- These Program Areas are designed to support the coequal objectives and incorporate many elements from the expiring agreement while adapting to meet the region's evolving needs over the next 25 years. Each Program Area outlines specific guiding principles, commitments, and activities directed to its corresponding Program Area.
- Additionally, WF2050 introduces the American River Climate Adaptation Program (ARCAP), an ambitious cross-cutting initiative intended to make measurable quantities of water—referred to as ARCAP Water—available to support both environmental and supply objectives. ARCAP Water is intended to serve as an insurance policy against the challenges the region faces.
- Lastly, WF2050 includes a description of Metrics and Reporting for tracking progress of the agreement.

Water Forum members benefit from participation in many ways. A subset of benefits is offered below.

- By participating in the Water Forum, members build a common understanding of regional challenges and collaborate on solutions that include resources and support from multiple agencies and organizations. Creating broad support for regional solutions among Water Forum members greatly increases the opportunities for state and federal funding.
- Supporting the Water Forum plays a crucial role in safeguarding our water supply by contributing to a united regional voice with scientific expertise in engagement with state and federal agencies overseeing Folsom Reservoir and the statewide water system.
- The Water Forum is where diverse interests come together to tackle complex challenges and protect

our shared interests.

SACOG's participation in efforts like the Water Forum has been important when advocating both in D.C. and Sacramento for funding for regional scale projects. Our ability to speak to both our own projects as well as the efforts of our partners has been effective at not only signaling the unique collaborative nature of our region but a coordinated strategy that is multi-benefit in nature. As part of the 2024 Cap-to-Cap trip SACOG gathered multiple partners to both discuss and develop a multi-agency approach to a resilient Capital Region. Within this effort agencies including Sacramento Metropolitan Air Quality Management District, Sacramento Regional Transit, Sacramento Municipal Utility District, Sacramento Area Flood Control Agency, El Dorado County, Regional Water Authority, and Placer County Water Agency discussed the unique disaster preparedness challenges of our region in terms of climate-related threats ranging from increased flood risk, volatility in water resources, warmer temperatures and extreme heat, increased wildfire risk, and worsening air pollution. Discussion led to the development of a shared advocacy list of projects and programs which will be seeking funding over the next few years. Our federal partners had a positive response to this list and this coordination.

SACOG has also participated in other regional efforts looking to build up the resiliency of the region. We are members of the Capital Region Climate Readiness Collaborative and have supported the efforts of the Sac Metro Air District in their development of the Capital Region Climate Priorities Plan.

The next steps for in the Water Forum 2.0 process are:

- Current draft being reviewed by all Water Forum participants
- Next draft expected in summer time-frame pending member comments
- WF2050 expected to be finalized in the fall of 2025

Fiscal Impact/Grant Information:

Included in the Overall Work Program/Budget

List of Attachments:

Water Forum 2050 Executive Summary