



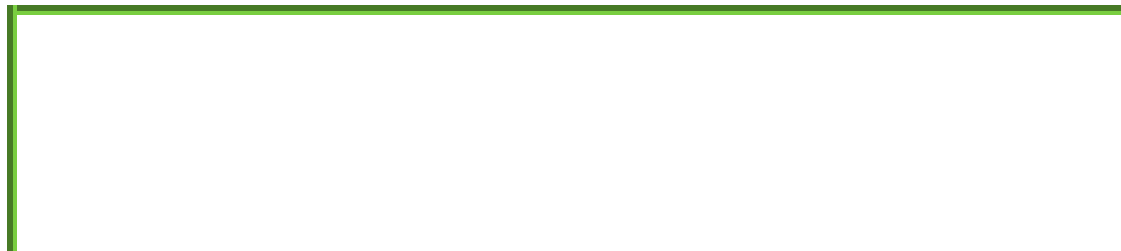
***Protecting our rural environment by promoting citizen  
participation in sustainable land use planning since 2006***

*The Community Action Project (CAP) administers the Calaveras Planning Coalition (CPC), which is comprised of regional and local organizations, community groups, and concerned individuals who promote public participation in land use and resource planning to ensure a healthy human, natural, and economic environment now and in the future.*

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### **Join Us!**

*Get a glimpse into what CPC membership is like by attending a meeting.  
There is no commitment, just show up and listen in!*

**Next Calaveras Planning Coalition Meeting**  
**December 6, 2021 3 P.M. - 5 P.M.**  
**New Members Welcome at CPC Meetings**

Organizations, groups, and individuals (known as associate members) may join the Calaveras Planning Coalition (CPC). Prospective members may attend two consecutive meetings before making a final decision on membership in the Coalition. The membership form is a pledge to support and advocate for the Coalition's eleven Land Use and Development Principles, which you will find on our website:

[www.calaverascap.com](http://www.calaverascap.com).

There is no membership fee. However, members are encouraged to donate to the Community Action Project/Calaveras Planning Coalition. Visitors and prospective members will, by necessity, be excluded from attorney/client privileged discussions.

If you are interested in membership, please email CPC Facilitator Tom Infusino, [tomi@volcano.net](mailto:tomi@volcano.net), to receive a membership form, agenda, and the Zoom meeting connection.

*To help prevent the spread of Covid-19 in our county, all CAP and CPC meetings will be held online via Zoom until restrictions are lifted by the Public Health Department.*

# Happy Holidays

## MAKE A DONATION AS A HOLIDAY GIFT

Dear Friend,

When shopping for holiday gifts this season, please keep the Community Action Project (CAP) and the Calaveras Planning Coalition (CPC) in mind. There may be people on your list who will truly appreciate having a donation to CAP/CPC made in their name rather than receiving a gift basket or a bottle of wine.

Making a donation to CAP/CPC is a unique way to show friends, family members, and co-workers that you are thinking about them during the holiday season. Whether you make a donation instead of purchasing a traditional gift or make a donation as an add-on, it is a truly thoughtful opportunity to spread a message of community solidarity and hope for a better Calaveras County in the new year.

It's easy to make a charitable gift for the people on your list who will appreciate such an expression of generosity. **Simply visit [calaverascap.com](http://calaverascap.com) to make your donation via PayPal.** If you prefer, send your check to CAP/CPC, P.O. Box 935, San Andreas, CA 95249 along with the recipient's name and address on the attached form so we can send an acknowledgement of your gift. Donations can be made in any amount.

If you are paying via PayPal, please email the gift recipient's information to **[calaverascap@gmail.com](mailto:calaverascap@gmail.com)** with "gift donation" as the subject. You may also combine multiple gifts in one payment. For example, a donation of \$200 may be given as four \$50 gifts. Just include that instruction in your email or with your check.

Once you have purchased your gift donation, the recipient will receive a "Happy Holidays" certificate (see below) showcasing the donation amount and the recipient's name, and, of course, the certificate will let them know it's from you. All funds raised through holiday gifts will go directly to support the important work of CAP/CPC in our fight to ensure a healthy human, natural, and economic environment now and in the future. Please make a decision to give today.

Happy Holidays and best wishes to you and your loved ones during this season of love and charity and all year long. Thank you.

Regards,

Joyce Techel, Co-Chair

Community Action Project

Note: The Calaveras Community Action Project is fiscally sponsored by Ebbett's Pass Forest Watch, a federally designated 501c(3) nonprofit organization. Your donation is tax-deductible. Our federal tax ID number is 68-0466959.

**Donate**

## Local News

### Calaveras County Coronavirus Dashboard Data for November 16, 2021

Total confirmed cases 4167

Recovered cases 4,049

Active cases 23

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## County seeks to incentivize affordable housing development with state funds, invites public input

*Marie-Elena Schembri / Calaveras Enterprise / November 17, 2021*

At a Nov. 9 board of supervisors meeting, Economic and Community Development director Kathy Gallino and Housing Programs Manager Lee Kimball presented a potential plan for the use of a state-issued grant to provide incentives for workforce housing development in the county. The proposed plan makes use of an estimated \$1.2 million over a five-year period, by providing low-interest (not to exceed 3%) loans as an incentive for homeowners and developers to build new affordable housing units.

The board resolved last Tuesday to go forward with the application for the funds and to open a 30-day public comment period, during which county residents can submit their suggestions, comments, and concerns regarding the plan to the county. The plan will be revised and brought back to the board for approval following the 30-day period.

The funding in question is being made available by the State of California Department of Housing and Community Development, through the Permanent Local Housing Allocation (PLHA) Program. According to the presentation on Nov. 9, this program was created to provide a “permanent, ongoing source of funding to local governments for housing-related projects and programs that assist in addressing the unmet needs of their local communities.”

Kimball stated that the county currently “has a need for 1,096 housing units in order to keep up with current demand.” This is based on the Regional Housing Need Allocation (RHNA) which covers an eight-year period from Dec. 2018 to June 2027. This determination was part of a housing element update for the county’s general plan that was created in 2018.

While housing of all kinds is needed, the plan specifically focuses on affordable housing and workforce housing, in accordance with data from the RHNA.

Kimball told the board, “The PLHA funding allows us to target incentivizing development of workforce housing, and that’s what we’re going to suggest as the strategy.”

The 5-year plan states that 85% of the funding “will be used to provide low-interest loans to offset costs for pre-development or development of ADUs (Accessory Dwelling Units) or

other affordable single-family housing units for individuals or households with incomes at or below 120% of AMI (Ares Median Income)."

According to Kimball, Calaveras County residents with an annual income of less than \$98,040 would qualify for these new housing units.

Repayment of loans and any interest received by the county would go into a PLHA Reuse Account, to be applied toward further eligible housing-related expenses.

The plan suggests focusing on "pre-development, development, acquisition and/or preservation of affordable rental or ownership housing, including ADUs (accessory dwelling units)."

The development could include new or renovated apartment buildings, single-family homes, multi-family units like duplexes or townhomes, and accessory dwelling units, which could mean additions to an existing home or property. There are stipulations, however, such as a requirement that ADUs "shall be accessible for occupancy for a term of no less than 30 days." This means the funds cannot be used toward short-term vacation rentals.

Funds could potentially be used for various construction costs including "site preparation, utility connections, foundations, engineering, permitting fees, in addition to material and labor per unit," according to Kimball.

Kimball adds, "this will meet the growing need for workforce housing in our county."

The five-year plan retroactively includes 2019 and 2020, for which funds are already in place and will be made available to the county upon acceptance of the grant. Additional funds for 2021-2023 will be made available at a later date.

Gallino and Kimball "anticipate a minimum of 21 affordable housing units will be developed as a result of PLHA funding and supports."

District 2 Supervisor Jack Garamendi voiced concerns about the plan, including the possibility of the county "acting as a bank" for the loans, which would include the future collection of funds for repayment.

"I just have grave concerns about us loaning money out," said Garamendi. Other board members agreed, asking how the county could provide other incentives that would be of less risk to the county and have the greatest impact on the housing issue.

Kimball offered that there is flexibility in the plan and that the loans could be made forgivable. Permit fee mitigation to help offset costs for developers is another possibility.

Board members also questioned whether the total amount of funds was enough to be an incentive to developers, as one building project could easily use up more than the whole budget.

Supervisor Merita Callaway expressed interest in the plan, saying, "In all the years I've been on this board we have done nothing for affordable housing." She continued, "This is the first time that we as a county have the funding and have an opportunity to do something and not just pontificate that we need housing. We need workforce housing. If we don't do this, then

in another 10 years we're going to be sitting here talking (about) the same thing. Here is a wonderful opportunity, and we should proceed."

Gallino and Kimball plan to compile feedback from both the board and the community in order to draft the final plans, which they will bring back before the board in December. Public comment will be received by the county until Dec. 9.

The presentation and plan information can be viewed on the county website, at [calaverasgov.us](http://calaverasgov.us) under Items of Interest. Comments may be sent to: Lee Kimball, 509 East Saint Charles Street San Andreas, CA 95249, [Lkimball@co.calaveras.ca.us](mailto:Lkimball@co.calaveras.ca.us), (209) 754-6734 or Kathy Gallino, 891 Mountain Ranch Road, Building A San Andreas, CA 95249, [kgallino@co.Calaveras.ca.us](mailto:kgallino@co.Calaveras.ca.us), (209) 754-6742.

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## Four Central Valley groundwater plans fail to meet CA standards. What's next.

*Danielle Bergstrom, Lois Henry, SJV Water, Jesse Vad, SJV Water / Fresno Bee /*

*November 18, 2021*

Four groundwater plans in the Central Valley — including those for Westlands and Chowchilla water districts and the Merced and Eastern San Joaquin subbasins — do not show how they will protect water quality, keep drinking water wells from going dry or stop land from sinking further, according to the Department of Water Resources.

In short, those plans earned "D's" in DWR's first round of assessments of Central Valley groundwater plans. DWR expects to issue assessments on the remaining groundwater plans, about 36 that cover the Valley from Madera to Kern counties, within the first two weeks of December.

Groundwater agency managers weren't given DWR's assessments prior to their release Thursday morning so couldn't answer questions about specific issues. Some plan managers said they only received calls from DWR alerting them of the coming assessments the day before.

DWR says it wants to see responses from the groundwater agencies that show clear actions to reduce harm to domestic well owners and the impacts of subsidence.

"We're not going to accept a plan to do a plan," said Paul Gosselin, deputy director for the California Department of Water Resources, Sustainable Groundwater Management Office. "We're looking for very concrete, measurable changes to address these deficiencies."



The groundwater plans are the outcome of the state's [Sustainable Groundwater Management Act](#), passed in 2014, which mandates that, by 2040, over-pumped aquifers be brought into balance — in general, more water shouldn't be pumped out than goes back in.

DWR's letter on the Westside Subbasin, overseen by Westlands Water District, stated the plan did not have adequate information when it comes to issues of subsidence, chronic lowering of groundwater levels and water quality. The issue of dropping groundwater levels, which have put domestic and community wells at risk throughout the San Joaquin Valley, was particularly lacking, according to the letter. The plan contained "little to no" specific information to support sustainable management of dropping groundwater levels, the letter read.

Westlands Water District was not immediately available to comment but a spokesperson did write via email that staff will continue to work with DWR to ensure the plan is in compliance with the state's requirements.

The major issues DWR found in the Chowchilla Water District included how the groundwater agency will monitor and fix domestic drinking wells if groundwater levels fall too far, how the agency justified continued subsidence in a portion of its coverage area and why the agency didn't find that groundwater pumping had any effect on area streams including the Chowchilla River, Ash Slough, Berenda Slough and San Joaquin River.

According to a [2020 report](#) from the UC Davis Center for Regional Change, over 80% of domestic wells are expected to go dry under the current groundwater plans for the Merced and Chowchilla sub-basins.

In Eastern San Joaquin — which includes Stockton, Lodi, Manteca, Oakdale, Lathrop and other communities across San Joaquin County — DWR requested more information and projects that would reduce chronic lowering of the groundwater table and more data that would accurately monitor subsidence.

The groundwater agencies in charge of these plans will have a quick turnaround to fix issues flagged by DWR before the agency issues its statutorily required evaluation in January 2022. If DWR still finds plans deficient in that evaluation, the groundwater agencies will have six months to bring them up to snuff.

### **Sacramento, Ventura plans OK'd**

Groundwater plans covering four other subbasins in Sacramento and Ventura counties were given a stamp of approval by DWR on Thursday. Those included the North and South Yuba groundwater plans as well as the Oxnard and Pleasant Valley plans.

DWR's Gosselin noted that even those approved plans received some corrections and other requirements.

"We view this as the beginning of a process of continuous improvement," he said. "We're not going to approve plans and walk away and leave it be."

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## Regional News

# California, Arizona and Nevada in talks on new plan to save Colorado river water

*Ian James / LA Times / November 17, 2021*

Two and a half years after signing a deal aimed at averting a damaging crisis along the Colorado River, water officials from California, Arizona and Nevada are discussing plans to take even less water from the shrinking river and leave it in Lake Mead in an effort to prevent the reservoir from falling to dangerously low levels.

Representatives of water agencies from the three states said they are firming up the details of a deal that would leave an additional 500,000 acre-feet of water in the reservoir next year, and the same amount again in 2023 — about double the quantity of water used annually by Las Vegas and the rest of southern Nevada.

For California, the deal would mean participating in water reductions prior to Lake Mead reaching levels that would otherwise trigger mandatory cuts.

The talks took on urgency this summer after federal projections showed growing risks of Lake Mead falling to critically low levels, despite plans for mandatory cutbacks throughout the Southwest that the states agreed to in 2019.

With the reservoir in a first-ever shortage and those cuts still insufficient, water management officials settled on a goal of together leaving half a million acre-feet of additional water in the reservoir instead of sending it flowing to farms, cities and tribal lands. The stored water would be roughly as much as 1.5 million average single-family households use in a year.

"We've got to stabilize the lake with this plan," said Tom Buschatzke, director of the Arizona Department of Water Resources. He said representatives of California, Arizona and Nevada developed the framework of the deal within about two months after they saw projections showing growing risks of Lake Mead dropping to lows that would trigger much larger water reductions in all three states.

“I think coming together in that short a period of time is indicative of urgency we're feeling to do more,” Buschatzke said. “If the lake keeps falling, cuts are going to be deeper and deeper and deeper. So I think it's indicative of the risks.”

The deal would nearly double the reductions in planned water deliveries next year among the three states beyond those already planned under the 2019 agreement, called the Drought Contingency Plan. This new proposal, dubbed the [500,000 Plan](#), would partially involve securing money to pay some water users to voluntarily relinquish water.

“We are estimating that we'll need \$100 million for those two years from the three states,” Buschatzke said. And while it’s unclear how much may be available from the federal government, Buschatzke and others said they hope to see a similar amount contributed from Washington, with funds available through the newly signed infrastructure legislation.

The water would come from various sources, including farmers who would be paid for leaving portions of their land dry, tribes that would contribute water supplies, and water agencies that would leave some water in Lake Mead instead of taking it out as planned.

Negotiations on the details are continuing, and officials from California and Arizona said they hope to have the overarching agreement ready to be signed next month at a conference in Las Vegas.

Arizona has pledged \$40 million toward the deal. Board members of the Southern Nevada Water Authority are scheduled to consider approving [up to \\$20 million](#) in contributions this week.

The board of the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California is scheduled to consider the proposed agreement next month.

If the details of the proposal come together as planned, 500,000 acre-feet of water over two years would translate into water levels about 16 feet higher in Lake Mead.

The reservoir, the largest in the country, has declined to just 34% of its full capacity, the lowest point since it was filled in the 1930s with the construction of Hoover Dam.

For now, the talks have focused on lining up funds and water for two years. But Buschatzke said it’s intended to be a five-year plan, lasting until the current agreement expires at the end of 2026, by which time the states will need to have negotiated new rules for dealing with shortages.

If the winter were to bring heavy snow to the Rocky Mountains, it could still help ease the shortages. But the region’s water managers said they’ve decided to plan for more of the dismal runoff they’ve seen in the watershed during the past two years of extreme heat and parched conditions.

Bill Hasencamp, MWD’s manager of Colorado River resources, said if such extreme dryness persists for another year or two, then Mead could end up at such low levels that cuts would become “unmanageable.”

“By proactively taking the actions now, we can reduce the risk of hitting those levels and having to make these large, unpredictable cuts,” Hasencamp said. “It’s better to do it sooner than you need it, so you can have a little bit more control.”

Without such a plan, if nothing were done and the reservoir continued to drop, he said, then the whole region could be forced to deal with much larger cuts.

“Then it’s unmanageable. And it’s lawsuit time and fighting,” Hasencamp said. “So a much more collaborative approach has always been our preference. And we think now is the time to step up.”

Word of the proposal came as California water officials announced that [statewide conservation efforts](#) were “backsliding.” Although Gov. Gavin Newsom has urged state residents to voluntarily cut water use by 15%, urban areas statewide decreased water use just 3.9% in September compared to the same month a year ago. The reduction in water use was smaller than in August, when Californians used 5% less.

Buschatzke said officials from the three states have together identified 500,000 acre-feet of water that could be freed up in 2022 and 2023. He declined to give details, saying negotiations are continuing and those that contribute water could include farmers, tribes, cities and other entities.

“It’s basically paying people not to use water they’ve historically used,” he said, adding that participants would voluntarily and temporarily cede water in exchange for payments.

Such deals have been tried on a smaller scale in recent years. In California, MWD has recently scaled up a deal in which farmers in the Palo Verde Irrigation District are paid to [leave a portion of their lands](#) dry and fallow. In Arizona, the leaders of the Colorado River Indian Tribes have also been [leaving some of their farmland dry](#) in a similar deal.

“We’re going to look at mixing and matching water and money to come up with the plan that works,” Buschatzke said. “The key is getting the agreement down on paper in an enforceable way so that we know the conservation is going to occur in 2022.”

The Colorado River has long been [chronically overallocated](#), with so much water diverted to supply farms and cities that its once-vast delta in Mexico has been largely transformed into a stretch of desert, with only a smattering of wetlands remaining. Most of the water that’s diverted — [approximately 70%](#) — is used for agriculture.

While a large portion of the water is likely to be purchased through the fallowing of farmland, participants in the talks said some water will also come from other sources, including urban agencies leaving water in Lake Mead instead of sending it through their aqueducts.

For example, California’s Imperial Irrigation District has been underusing its allotment in recent years. And that “underrun” of water then typically ends up going free-of-charge to MWD, which is the next entity in line in the priority system.

That unused water is projected to be about 95,000 acre-feet this year, and likely a similar amount next year, said J.B. Hamby, vice president of the IID board.

"All that water we don't use or over-conserve in a year, instead of that going to Metropolitan, Metropolitan has agreed not to consume it and to leave it in the river, which is a huge plus," Hamby said. "That's kind of a major shift."

Hamby said it's encouraging that the three states have come up with the plan in just a few months.

Others agreed that the quick negotiations bode well for more collaboration in dealing with worsening shortages. Kathryn Sorensen, director of research for Arizona State University's Kyl Center for Water Policy, said with Lake Mead at such low levels, the need for quick action is clear.

"If we get another bad year or two, you know, things look really dire. So I think the speed is commensurate with the nature and scale of the crisis," Sorenson said.

When Buschatzke testified in a congressional hearing on the Colorado River last month, he noted that snowpack in the Colorado River Basin peaked at 89% of average this year, but runoff in the watershed was only 33% of average.

"This phenomenon is likely the result of the hotter and drier conditions caused by climate change," Buschatzke said in his [written testimony](#). "This trend is one that water managers must take into account as we plan for the future of the Colorado River."

The options for immediate measures, Buschatzke told senators, include additional mandatory water cuts or voluntary conservation of more water in Lake Mead, and the talks among the states were focused on the voluntary path.

Since 2000, the Colorado River has been ravaged by a series of mostly dry years, which have been [compounded by the heating of the planet](#) with the burning of fossil fuels. In that time, the flow of the Colorado River has declined nearly 20% below the 20th century average.

Scientists have estimated that about [half the decrease in runoff](#) in the watershed since 2000 has been caused by unprecedented warming. And this heat-driven aridification is projected to significantly worsen as temperatures continue to climb.

Brad Udall, a water and climate scientist at Colorado State University, recently likened the [planned water reductions](#) under the existing deal to a parachute — one that is too small and being opened too close to the ground.

"This new plan gives us both a bigger parachute and we're going to deploy it sooner," Udall said. "So hopefully we can have a softer landing."

Given the alarming declines in the river's reservoirs, the flaw with the parachute analogy is that the end of the story would put the parachutist safely on the ground, Udall said.

"We're landing on the edge of a cliff, if you will. And there's still further to fall. We need another parachute here," Udall said.

Hopefully that next parachute will be ready well before 2027, he said, when the existing rules expire, and the Southwest needs to have long-term plans in place for adapting to a

hotter, drier watershed and a river that yields less water.

This story originally appeared in [Los Angeles Times](#).

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## Californians backsliding on water conservation amid drought

*AP / November 16, 2021*

State water regulators urged Californians to do more to save water after the latest monthly data showed conservation lagging in September, with statewide water use in cities and towns decreasing 3.9% compared with the same month a year ago.

The reduction in water use was smaller than in August, when Californians [used 5% less](#).

Gov. Gavin Newsom in July called for Californians to [voluntarily cut water use](#) 15%, but the latest figures, which were released Tuesday, show much of the state remains far from that goal.

“The backsliding isn’t welcome. But it is what it is,” said Joaquin Esquivel, chair of the State Water Resources Control Board. “We need to continue to focus on conserving in this critical time during drought.”

California’s past two water years, which ended Sept. 30, were the driest two years, based on statewide precipitation, in 126 years of records. The past water year was also the second warmest on record.

Esquivel said water conservation will continue to be critical for the state, “not just in the drought but for the long term because of climate change, because we know that we will continue to face deeper and longer droughts.”

The state’s major reservoirs in Northern California have fallen dramatically over the past two years. Even after storms drenched the state in October, the levels of the state’s reservoirs stood at just 66% of average at the end of last month.

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While conservation dipped statewide, Southern California saved a bit more water in September. In the South Coast region, where more than half the state’s population lives, people used 4.2% less that month, after conserving 3.1% in August.

In the Bay Area, water use decreased 7.6%, while in the North Coast region, usage was down 12.4%. In the San Joaquin River region, water use was up slightly.

There have been steady improvements in water-savings in the South Coast region, and that response should increase after the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California [declared a regional drought emergency](#) this month, said Marielle Rhodeiro, a data specialist with the state water board.

As the weather grows cooler in the fall, water use typically decreases as people scale back outdoor watering or turn off their irrigation systems, Rhodeiro said.

“So we are not entirely surprised to see lower savings as we move into cooler weather,” Rhodeiro said. “That being said, we do need Californians to step up their conservation efforts, and we are evaluating whether to move forward with emergency regulations to prohibit certain wasteful water uses, which could help amplify drought awareness.”

For part of the last drought between 2012 and 2016, then-Gov. Jerry Brown ordered a mandatory 25% reduction in urban water use. Many Californians responded and took steps such as replacing lawns with drought-tolerant plants. Those changes have had a lasting effect in reducing water use.

“I think what we’re trying to do as a state is really set goals that we can all be reaching for around efficiency and conservation,” said state water board member Laurel Firestone.

She said everyone should help with conservation, and it’s important to “make sure that people understand what an extreme drought we’re in.”

The state water board tracks monthly water use in cities and towns, while handling agricultural water deliveries differently. This summer, the board issued an [emergency order](#) barring thousands of water rights holders, including farmers and other landowners, from diverting water from the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta watershed. State officials lifted those [water curtailments in the delta](#) last month as the rivers swelled with rains. The water cuts could be reactivated as the drought persists.

Esquivel said the state water board will be watching the conservation numbers for October to see if the drenching storms helped Californians use less.

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## Learning to love ag land retirement

*John Lindt / The Sentinel / November 18, 2021*

Between global warming, the California drought and the reality of the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA), Central Valley farmers are already taking land out of production.

As we all know, the extreme drought has resulted in wells going dry and farmland in our area sinking. This has required expenditure of multi-millions of dollars to rebuild existing

concrete canals both on the Westside and Eastside to deliver the Sierra water supply we all count on.

We are not talking about new water or additional dam storage but existing infrastructure that has supplied farms and communities for decades.

Last month we all celebrated an Atmospheric River storm that waded into California with the first big storm of the winter season.

But water managers like Dan Vink from Tulare County realize this is simply a temporary pause in the multi-year drought. Instead we are looking at “a future where we will experience longer, multi-year periods of droughts interrupted by big storms.”

This altered reality requires new strategies to survive.

Vink has joined with Jay Ziegler of the Nature Conservancy to encourage targeted land retirement as a way we can help farmers. The two policy influencers write about the issue this month in an article published by the California Farm Bureau.

In a word, retirement of some parched farmland will balance water supply for the rest of us by repurposing these lands, they say.

“To bring the basins into balance and meet the requirements of the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act will require fallowing land in the range of 500,000 acres in the years ahead, possibly much more depending on the solutions we can create.

Crop switching and increasing water use efficiency through infrastructure improvements and soil management practices, such as those supported by the California Department of Food and Agriculture and U.S. Department of Agriculture National Resources Conservation Service, are part of the water-balancing equation. But we will need more tools in critically overdrafted basins to achieve long-term water use sustainability.

The state budget adopted by the legislature and Gov. Newsom offers real hope for land repurposing. There is a path forward in a new pilot effort — funded with \$50 million in the state budget — where we have a potential to strike a new balance by strategically retiring certain lands that can provide other public benefits.

These benefits are vast and include groundwater recharge and habitat for millions of migratory birds, renewable solar energy generation, public recreation, improved air and water quality for local communities, and restoration of upland habitats for endangered species.

Nature Conservancy expects this could lead to recover and delist over 10 species that are currently on the Endangered Species list — what would be the largest recovery in the history of the Endangered Species Act.

“The benefits of repurposing the least sustainable agricultural lands are clear, but it will come with very real costs to individual landowners, the broader community that relies on this agricultural economy and the reliability of a locally produced food supply. That is why



retirement and restoration must be done strategically and in partnership with local communities, farmers and irrigation districts.

The Nature Conservancy and other organizations are developing and testing approaches to strategic land retirement and restoration where targeted restoration can be best achieved with minimal additional impacts to the agricultural economy and food production.

New partnerships and broad collaboration are needed to shape changes in land use across the San Joaquin Valley in a way that increases the long-term viability of agriculture while improving social and environmental outcomes.

An ongoing partnership between the Pixley and Lower Tule groundwater sustainability agencies in Tulare County, Audubon California and The Nature Conservancy to develop a pilot project is one example of such a collaboration. The Nature Conservancy and Audubon California are providing scientific capacity to the newly-formed Tule Basin Land and Water Conservation Trust to inform how strategic land retirement can best be positioned in the Tule Subbasin, using analyses to evaluate optimal selection of lands for multiple benefits.

The Nature Conservancy is also co-investing in land use transition projects to demonstrate what is possible. New partnerships and broad collaboration are needed to shape San Joaquin Valley land retirement in a way that increases the long-term viability of agriculture while improving social and environmental outcomes.”

Water manager Aaron Fukuda is another local leader working in the greater Kaweah watershed with a Regional Conservation Investment Strategy program funded through the state. Fukuda wants to bring new funding to reimburse growers for repurposing some farmland into wildlife habitat that would require little to no water to support.

Clearly this “repurposing” is happening big time in western Kings County where solar panels have replaced King Cotton as the big money maker in these parts.

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## Financier Dean Witter's Northern California ranch along Eel River to become public park

*AP / November 17, 2021*

COVELO — A ranch in remote Northern California once owned by the late financier Dean Witter has been sold to a nature conservancy that plans to convert into a park, providing public access to a wild and scenic stretch of the Eel River for the first time.

The nonprofit [Wildlands Conservancy](#) announced Wednesday it closed escrow on the nearly 30,000-acre, \$25 million property and will rename it Eel River Canyon Preserve, after the 196-mile river that runs from the Mendocino National Forest to the Humboldt County coast.

The property features a 10-bedroom lodge and a stretch of mountains and valleys that is home to two herds of Roosevelt elk.

Witter, who founded the San Francisco investment firm Dean Witter and Co., bought a handful of parcels to create the ranch in the 1940s. He and his wife, Helen, used the property as a retreat, timber operation and working cattle ranch. After his death in 1969, the ranch was handed down to generations of his family, who in recent years decided it was too much for them to handle.

"When we put the ranch on the market, I had the very earnest prayer that the place be passed on to an entity that would take as good of or better care than us," Brooks Witter, Dean's great grandson, [told The San Francisco Chronicle](#).

The conservancy bought a 3,000-acre parcel from the Witter family two years ago and completed the acquisition of the rest of the property Tuesday with the support of private donors, the nonprofits Center for Biological Diversity and The Conservation Fund, and \$10 million in state funding.

"This historic conservation purchase will ensure permanent protection for one of the most wild and scenic river stretches in the western United States," said Peter Galvin, cofounder and director of programs at the Center. "The 'Grand Canyon of the Eel River' is home to dozens of endangered species and rare wildlife. The Wildlands Conservancy's heroic and visionary efforts to restore the Eel River and California's wildlands will be appreciated by generations to come."

The conservancy plans to retrofit the lodge within the next year for visitors and build a ranger station and primitive campground nearby. The property will initially be accessible by reservation; the group hopes to open to the public more broadly in two years.

The ranch acquisition is expected to move forward efforts to turn the abandoned Northwestern Pacific Railroad into a public path for hiking and bicycling and incorporate it into the Great Redwood Trail, a 320-mile path linking San Francisco and Humboldt Bays.

"The Eel River Canyon is like no other place in the west, and it will be the crown jewel of the Great Redwood Trail," said state Sen. Mike McGuire, who helped secure state appropriations for the conservancy.

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