2025 | **HIGHLIGHTS**

Quantifying What Collaboration Built. Positioning for Investment.

For more than two decades, Sacramento-area water providers have used conjunctive use to stabilize declining aquifers and strengthen regional reliability. By 2025, groundwater levels were no longer the question — they were stable and sustainable.

In 2025, the region answered the next question: what else has that collaboration delivered?

Modeling analysis conducted for the Sacramento Regional Water Bank (Water Bank) confirmed that conjunctive use and in-lieu recharge actions since the late 1990s have done more than stabilize groundwater levels. Groundwater banking has contributed a net increase of approximately 14,000 acre-feet of additional baseflow annually to the lower American River — and more than 310,000 acre-feet of cumulative flow since 1997.

Those findings do more than validate past investments — they define our opportunity. In 2025, the Regional Water Authority (RWA) formalized the Water Bank's accounting system, establishing a defensible starting balance and creating clear operational rules so that we can expand these multi-benefit outcomes. The same collaborative approach that rebuilt groundwater levels can now be scaled to increase recharge in wet times, protect river conditions in dry times, and strengthen long-term regional resilience with climate change.

The throughline is clear: proven performance, credible accounting, watershed-scale planning, and a region aligned to deliver.

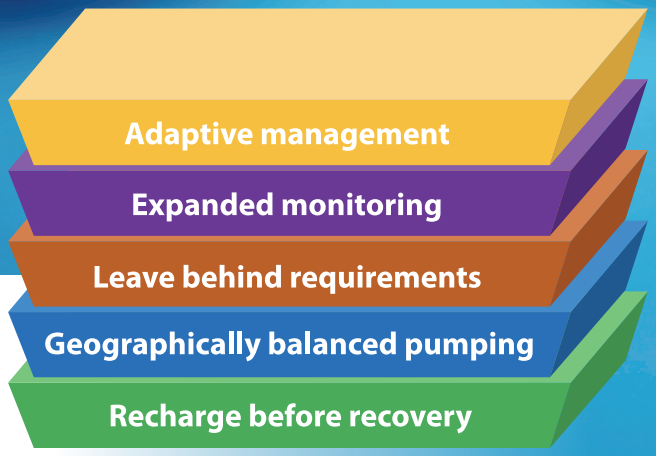
James Peifer

RWA
Regional Water Authority
BUILDING ALLIANCES IN NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

ADVANCING THE SACRAMENTO REGIONAL WATER BANK

Building the Foundation for a Fully Operational Water Bank

RWA focused on strengthening the Water Bank's technical and policy foundation, clarifying how groundwater banking is measured, how benefits and losses are accounted for, and how historic banking activity informs a defensible starting balance for future operations.



Key Outcomes in 2025

- Completed and released the Water Accounting System (WAS)
- Advanced technical analysis of Previously Banked Water (PBW)
- Quantified long-term regional and environmental outcomes of groundwater banking
- Developed initial starting balance concepts reflecting recoverable stored water
- Elevated the Water Bank in statewide research and policy discussions
- Expanded engagement across technical, environmental, and policymaker audiences

Water Accounting System: RWA completed and released the Water Accounting System (WAS), providing a clear, consistent method for tracking how water moves into and out of the Water Bank. Developed with local suppliers, Groundwater Sustainability Agencies, and technical experts, the WAS aligns with SGMA. It tracks recharge, recovery, leave-behind volumes, and modeled losses within a shared basin-wide system.

The framework reinforces a core principle: recharge must occur before recovery. By establishing agency-specific baselines, the WAS distinguishes intentional banking — especially in-lieu recharge — from routine operations. This structure embeds sustainability into Water Bank operations and improves transparency for all participants.

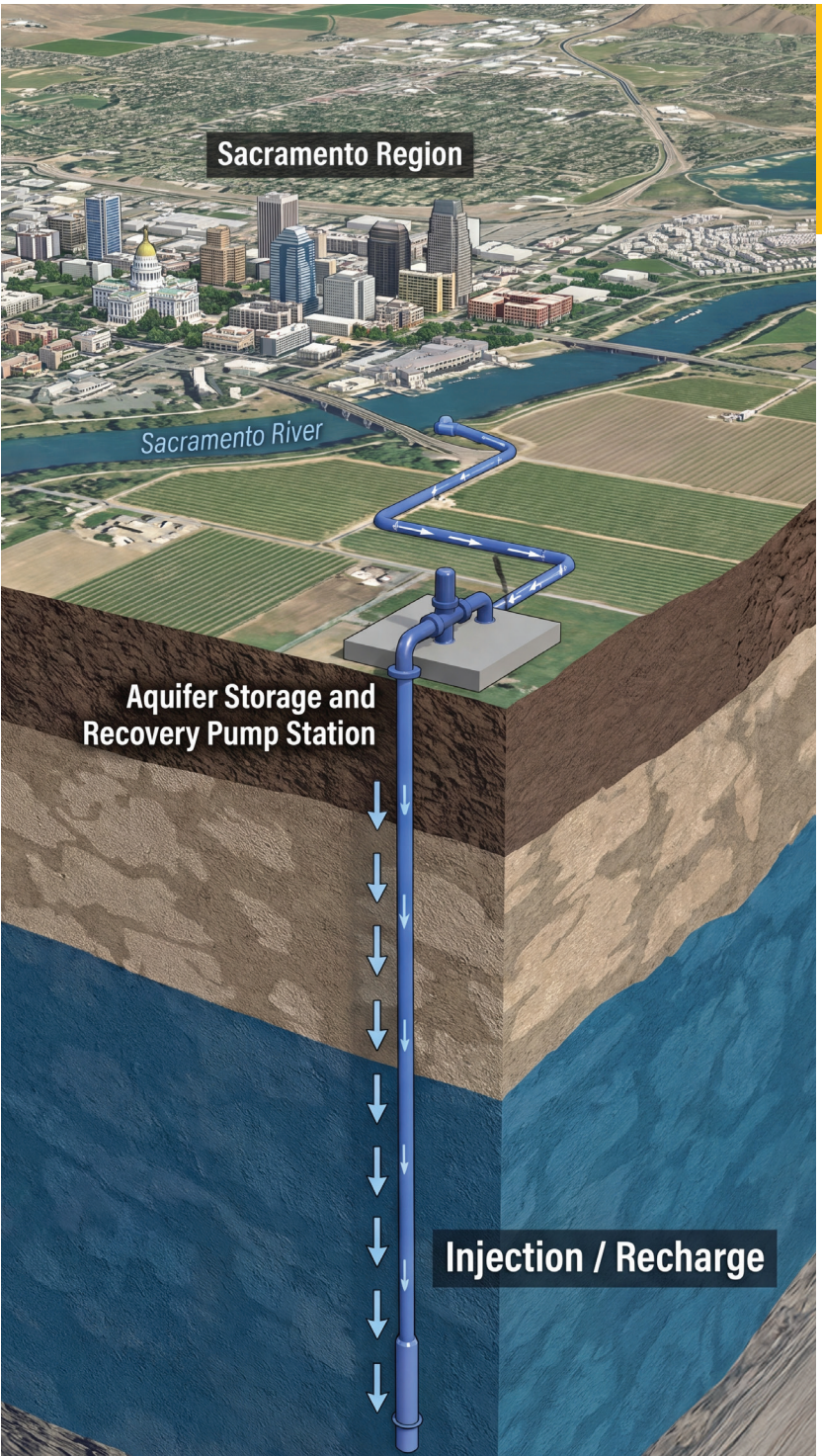
Previously Banked Water: RWA completed a comprehensive technical analysis to quantify Previously Banked Water (PBW) — water stored over roughly two decades through conjunctive use actions, primarily in-lieu recharge. Using calibrated surface-groundwater modeling (1997-2024), agencies compared conditions with and without banking actions to isolate impacts on groundwater storage, river baseflow, and interbasin movement. The findings demonstrated that groundwater banking has generated measurable regional and environmental benefits — not only stored water, but sustained river contributions over time.

Defining a Defensible Starting Balance: Building on the PBW analysis, RWA advanced initial starting balance concepts in 2025. This work defined the recoverable portion of banked water remaining in storage today after accounting for water that has already contributed to river flows and interbasin movement.

Stakeholder Engagement: RWA hosted its fourth Stakeholder Forum, providing updates on Water Bank progress, the accounting system, and plans for environmental review. Presentations were delivered to environmental organizations, business groups, Water Forum members, ACWA audiences, and other partners, expanding understanding of how the Water Bank functions in practice.

Elevating the Water Bank as a Statewide Model

RWA focused on elevating the Water Accounting System as a practical model for other regions. Briefings and technical discussions with the Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC) and other statewide audiences highlighted how collaborative governance, basin-scale coordination, and consistent accounting rules can support groundwater sustainability and climate adaptation. RWA also coordinated member engagement in PPIC's Accounting for California's Water initiative, positioning the WAS as a working example of transparent, SGMA-aligned accounting.



SACRAMENTO GROUNDWATER AUTHORITY
Advancing SGMA Implementation and Launching the First GSP Update

In 2025, the Sacramento Groundwater Authority (SGA) formally initiated the first five-year evaluation and amendment process for the Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP) for the North American Subbasin.

This effort is part of SGMA's built-in adaptive management framework. Since the original GSP was submitted, SGA has compiled new monitoring data, technical analyses, and updated modeling results to more accurately characterize basin conditions. By incorporating new information and refining its approach, SGA is strengthening the technical foundation of the GSP and reinforcing long-term groundwater reliability for the Sacramento region.

The update process also responds to feedback and corrective actions identified by the California Department of Water Resources (DWR), helping to ensure the plan reflects the most current science and regulatory expectations.

SGA held a public meeting in November 2025 to present this information and outline the amendment process. Presentation materials highlighted how new data on groundwater levels, basin performance, and sustainability indicators will inform refinements to minimum thresholds and management actions.

WATERSHED RESILIENCE PILOT PROJECT

Turning Vulnerability Into a Funding-Ready Roadmap

In 2025, the DWR-funded Watershed Resilience Pilot Project moved from foundational planning into a clear, data-driven understanding of climate risk across the American, Bear, and Cosumnes watersheds — and built the structure to translate that analysis into capital-ready action.

The Pilot advanced a comprehensive multi-hazard vulnerability and risk assessment, evaluating drought, flood, wildfire, and extreme heat across key systems, including surface water supply, groundwater, flood management, ecosystem health, water quality, hydropower, recreation, and community and equity considerations.

Building on a review of more than 60 existing studies, the team developed qualitative and quantitative tools to identify exposure, sensitivity, adaptive capacity, and overall vulnerability. This work establishes a consistent framework for comparing risks across watersheds and prioritizing strategies.

Just as important, 2025 focused on engagement. RWA activated a Watershed Network of agencies, tribes, and community partners; conducted one-on-one tribal outreach; convened Advisory Committee and Network meetings; and hosted a Watershed Network Tour and Lunch attended by nearly 80 participants. These efforts expanded participation and generated early project ideas.

By identifying shared priorities and building a pipeline of capital-ready projects, the Pilot positions the region to compete for Proposition 4 watershed resilience funding and other state investment opportunities in 2026 and beyond.

SHAPING POLICY AND FUNDING IN 2025

2025 Legislative Advocacy

RWA tracked approximately 100 state bills affecting groundwater, water rights, affordability, infrastructure, emergency response, and conservation implementation. Staff reviewed legislation throughout the session, identified measures with direct operational and financial implications for members, and took action where needed. RWA submitted formal letters to protect ARTESIAN program funding and reinforce regional priorities during the state budget process, helping safeguard investments critical to groundwater sustainability and system reliability.

As Proposition 4 shifted from voter approval toward implementation and early budget discussions emphasized other bond categories, RWA focused its advocacy on keeping groundwater recharge visible as priority investments that deliver measurable reliability and environmental benefits for the Sacramento region.

RWA also provided public comment at a California Senate informational hearing marking 11 years of SGMA implementation, reinforcing the importance of regulatory stability and opposing broad statutory changes that could undermine locally developed groundwater management strategies.

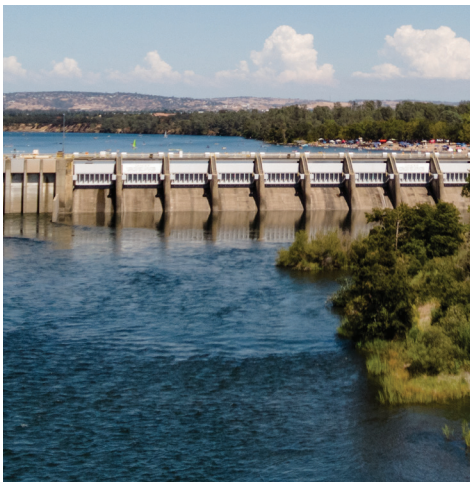
To further strengthen regional influence, RWA met with leaders of the newly formed Capital Caucus Foundation, expanding opportunities to engage bipartisan Sacramento-area legislators on water policy priorities.

Bill – Author	**Topic**	**RWA Position**	**Outcome**
SB 601 Sen. Ben Allen (D-Santa Monica)	Proposed dramatic changes to water quality requirements	**Opposed**	Two-year bill
AB 362 Asm. James Ramos (D-Highland)	Would recognize tribal uses as beneficial uses of water	**Opposed unless amended**	Bill died
AB 1413 Asm. Diane Papan (D-San Mateo)	Protects Groundwater Sustainability Agency work during adjudications	**Supported**	Two-year bill
SB 466 Sen. Anna Caballero (D-Merced)	Limits liability related to hexavalent chromium MCL compliance	**Sponsored**	Signed into law
SB 72 Sen. Anna Cabellero (D-Merced)	Requires DWR to plan for 9 million acre-feet of new water supply	**Supported**	Signed into law

PROTECTING MEMBER INTERESTS IN REGULATORY PROCESSES

RWA concentrated its regulatory engagement on the proposed update to the Bay-Delta Water Quality Control Plan and advancement of the Healthy Rivers & Landscapes (HR&L) Program. The goal was to safeguard regional reliability while contributing constructively to statewide environmental objectives. RWA also continued working to protect American River interests during discussions related to Reclamation's operations of Folsom Reservoir under the Endangered Species Act.

Early in the year, RWA engaged in a series of meetings with the State Water Resources Control Board on issues including cold-water pool formation, water rights, inflow objectives, habitat and flow accounting, and monitoring. RWA staff also worked to refine elements of the HR&L Program of Implementation and met with State leadership to address outstanding issues.



When draft updates to the Bay-Delta Plan were released in July, RWA issued a media statement reinforcing regional support for inclusion of HR&L as a collaborative, science-based alternative. A primary objective was preserving the American River component of the program — maintaining the locally developed approach that integrates habitat enhancement, environmental water deliveries, groundwater banking, and infrastructure investment.

As draft materials were postponed, revised, and reissued throughout the year, RWA remained actively engaged with State agencies — tracking changes to monitoring, flow accounting, and habitat accounting provisions, coordinating regional alignment, and preparing for hearings while continuing to advocate for adoption of HR&L rather than a flow-only regulatory pathway.

RWA also worked to protect American River interests during federal discussions affecting Central Valley Project operations. This included engagement with Reclamation regarding implementation of Action 5 from the 2024 Biological Opinion for Long-Term Operations of the Central Valley Project and State Water Project, as well as discussions related to Initiative 6, which could affect future CVP operations.

In addition, RWA participated in technical and policy discussions related to Interconnected Surface Water (ISW) and stream depletion, leading conversations with regional partners and engaging directly with the Department of Water Resources on groundwater implementation issues.

RWA prepared and offered support and recommendations for two federal initiatives. At the request of the Department of the Interior, RWA submitted recommendations for revising federal regulations, policies, and procedures affecting water management, particularly those involving Reclamation.

RWA also submitted a letter supporting funding for a new Folsom Reservoir Temperature Control Device through the Aging Infrastructure Account of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.

Finally, RWA worked with the Department of Water Resources to request a time extension for the American River Terms for Ecosystem Support and Infrastructure Assistance Needs (ARTESIAN) grant, allowing recipients additional time to fully expend the $55 million allocated to the region for groundwater infrastructure projects.

WATER EFFICIENCY

Regional Reach. Measurable Results.

The Water Efficiency Program delivered coordinated, region-wide outreach that maintained conservation visibility in a non-drought year while preparing members for upcoming regulatory milestones.

The **Summer Strong Training Tips** campaign refreshed regional creative to translate irrigation efficiency, mulch, tree care, and smart controller upgrades into clear customer actions. At the same time, the program advanced preparation for California's nonfunctional turf requirements under AB 1572 by releasing ready-to-use fact sheets, FAQs, and graphics — providing consistent regional language for local implementation.

To inform future program design, the Program conducted focus groups with Commercial, Industrial, Institutional (CII) and HOA representatives. Insights on return on investment, decision-making structures, and communication preferences are now guiding rebate refinement and outreach strategy.

Beyond outreach, the Program leveraged **$6.7 million in grant funding (2021-2025)** to support coordinated rebates, direct installation services, and CII equipment upgrades — expanding conservation impact without increasing local ratepayer costs. These efforts are projected to produce **7.4 billion gallons of water savings and 7.9 million kilowatt-hours of energy savings over 10 years**, demonstrating measurable regional demand reduction

2025 Key Outcomes

- **25+ million paid media impressions** across TV, streaming, radio, outdoor, and digital platforms (an impression equals one ad view or airing)
- **4.4+ million additional impressions** through no-cost TV and radio public service announcements (~$113,000 in donated media value)
- **20+ brewery partners** reinforcing conservation messaging in community venues
- **77 classrooms (~2,000 students)** reached through the Drip Drop, Hip Hop education program
- **Top communications honors** from the California Association of Public Information Officials (CAPIO) and the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA).

Peer of the Year Award:

Program Manager Amy Talbot received the inaugural "Peer of the Year" award from the California Water Efficiency Partnership for leadership in representing water agency interests during the development of California's conservation regulations.

ADVANCING THE REGION'S VOICE AND influence

Shaping the conversation.
Strengthening partnerships.
Elevating regional leadership.

RWA expanded its role as a trusted convener and statewide resource — connecting science, policy, infrastructure, and collaboration through strategic communications and high-level engagement. Through consistent outreach and strategic visibility, RWA positioned the Sacramento region as organized, technically prepared, and ready to implement high-impact projects aligned with state and federal priorities.

Convening Statewide Leaders: Through the Coffee & Conversation series, RWA connected regional audiences with influential voices in climate science and water policy. Featured guests included:

- Dr. Daniel Swain, climate scientist
- Meghan Hertel, California Natural Resources Agency Deputy Secretary
- Paul Gosselin, Department of Water Resources Deputy Director

Elevating Regional Work in the Media: RWA earned extensive local, statewide, and national media coverage — amplifying groundwater banking, watershed resilience, regulatory engagement, and climate adaptation strategies. Coverage included POLITICO, Newsweek, Los Angeles Times, Sacramento Bee, CBS13, KCRA, Fox40, Capitol Public Radio, Maven's Notebook, and others.

Building Relationships That Move Work Forward: RWA connected regional initiatives with statewide priorities through targeted briefings, conferences, and advocacy. Engagements included:

- Industry and business leaders: North State Building Industry Association, California Irrigation Institute, and Valley Vision's 2025 Livability Summit.
- Policy and research partners: PPIC, Environmental Council of Sacramento (ECOS), and Water Forum caucuses.
- Statewide water leadership: ACWA Spring and Fall conferences (including moderating a Bay-Delta water accounting session), Groundwater Resources Association's annual workshop, and the Reclamation Water Users Conference.
- State agency coordination: California Natural Resources Agency briefing on ARCAP.
- Federal advocacy: Washington, D.C. engagement through Capitol-to-Capitol.
- Regional alignment: Coordination with the California Municipal Utilities Association and engagement with potential new members and partner agencies.
- Education and outreach partners: Water Education Foundation tours linking climate science and watershed resilience.

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