

ACWA Members Receive Accolades



Left, ACWA Vice President Randy Record presents the Clair A. Hill Water Agency Award for Excellence to East Bay Municipal Utility District for its Richmond Advanced Recycled Expansion (RARE) water project. Director John A. Coleman accepted the award on behalf of the district. Right, Dan Nelson, executive director, San Luis & Delta-Mendota Water Authority, received ACWA's 2011 Excellence in Water Leadership Award. Awards coverage begins inside on page 8.

Photo credits: Dale Kolke, California Department of Water Resources

Assembly Accountability Committee Turns Attention to Special Districts

ACWA, Others Mark Success in Having Concerns Heard

The Assembly Committee on Accountability and Administrative Review, which is chaired by former Sacramento County Supervisor and current Assembly Member Roger Dickinson (D-Sacramento), is a relatively new standing committee in the state Assembly. The committee is tasked with “identifying savings and efficiencies in the management of state government, [and] reviewing and studying the implementation, operation, and effectiveness of state programs and agencies.”

Despite that charge, the committee has focused significant time this year on special (local) districts — including water and wastewater districts.

This year, ACWA and others in the special district community worked together to make a case against recommendations that would have included property tax reallocations.

Below is a summary and timeline of the committee's activities to date:

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New Coalition Organized to Educate Californians on Water Supply Challenges

A new coalition of business, agriculture, labor and public water agencies has been formed to educate Californians about problems facing the state's water system and the need to invest in improvements. The coalition, called Clean Water and Jobs for California, is spearheaded by ACWA, the California Latino Water Coalition and the California Alliance for Jobs and will work to build awareness of water supply challenges and the need to act now to improve our water system.

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From left, ACWA Executive Director Timothy Quinn, California Latino Water Coalition Director Mario Santoyo, and Andy Fields, water policy manager for the California Alliance for Jobs, announce a new coalition titled Clean Water and Jobs for California.

Photo credit: Dale Kolke, California Department of Water Resources

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First Hearing Focuses on Special District Consolidation

The committee held the first of what would turn out to be three separate special district-related hearings on March 2. The committee discussed matters relating to special district consolidation and heard from special district organization representatives. Committee staff was ultimately directed to prepare recommendations to be presented to the committee for a vote at a later date.

ACWA Raises Concerns at Second Hearing

The committee met again on April 6 to discuss and vote on staff recommendations.

The first draft of recommendations included formally requesting that the Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO) undertake a study of special district issues — including the potential reallocation of property tax funding — and report its findings and recommendations back to the Legislature.

During this hearing, ACWA, the California Special Districts Association, and other special district organizations provided testimony and answered committee member questions.

ACWA raised concerns regarding the effects of a reallocation of enterprise special district property tax revenues from special districts to counties, an issue critically important to ACWA member agencies. The committee members agreed to take the comments under advisement, and a later hearing date was scheduled.

Post-Meeting Results: Property Tax Shifts Off the Table

On April 22, the committee's staff met with the special district organizations, including ACWA, to hear concerns raised by the special district community. ACWA State Legislative Director Cindy Tuck emphasized that special districts provide essential local services, and shifting property tax revenues would only make controversial rate increases necessary. On April 25, the committee's staff issued a new, scaled-back version of the recommendations that did not include any mention of property tax shifts.

Committee Does Not Approve Any Recommendations at Third Hearing

On April 27, the committee heard these new recommendations and ultimately did not vote on any recommendations due to committee members' concerns about both substantive and process issues. This outcome is in part due to the fact that the special district community worked together in making the positive case about special districts to the committee.

Ultimately, the chair decided to send his own request to the LAO. Although they had the option to do so, no other committee members signed his letter.

ACWA will continue to closely monitor and participate in the developments in this area as they unfold.

If you have any questions about the Assembly Committee on Accountability and Administrative Review's actions, please contact ACWA State Legislative Director Cindy Tuck at cindy@acwa.com or 916.441.4545. ■■■

Assembly Committee on Accountability and Administrative Review Members

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Holly Mitchell (D-Los Angeles)
Richard Pan (D-Sacramento)
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Announcing the coalition May 12 at the ACWA Spring Conference & Exhibition in Sacramento, ACWA Executive Director Timothy Quinn said educating Californians is a top priority for the nearly 30 organizations taking part in the effort.

“It’s our mission to make sure the public understands we have to make strategic investments to improve our water infrastructure, expand local water resources development and restore the Delta’s ecological health,” Quinn said. “This is an effort to educate Californians on the need for comprehensive solutions to protect our environment and our water supplies.”

Mario Santoyo, director of the California Latino Water Coalition, said the group plans to show the connection between infrastructure investments and California’s water future.

“We will be planning activities and events at the local and regional levels to help the public better understand the importance of continuing investments in water projects and technology,” Santoyo said. “But we can’t be successful without everyone’s cooperation. The general public wants to hear what you, the water agencies, have to say.”

Andy Fields, water policy manager for the California Alliance for Jobs, said his organization shares the goals of improving water supply reliability and ecosystem health in the Delta. Raising awareness of the need for water investments is a key to reaching those goals, he said.

“We believe in the power of water... the power to provide potable water for people and to provide for and advance our economy through jobs,” Fields said. “Make no mistake; it’s only through a reliable water supply that our economy will be able to recover and rebuild.”

As part of its mission, Clean Water and Jobs for California plans to reach out to opinion leaders and the media regarding the state’s water problems and the need for investments. ■■■

Quagga Mussel Bill Heads to Senate Floor

ACWA-sponsored legislation that would extend the sunset on the current state Mussel Inspection Program is headed to the Senate floor following an 8-0 vote in the Senate Appropriations Committee.

SB 215 (Huff) would allow California to continue its main effort to control quagga mussels by extending the sunset date until Jan. 1, 2017. ■■■

Senate Report Offers Overview on Drinking Water Quality

The Senate Office of Research issued a new report May 31 providing an overview on drinking water quality in California.

Titled, “The Water We Drink: What is California Doing to Ensure its Water is Safe?”, the Policy Matters report provides an in-depth review of the state’s Drinking Water Program and how California’s drinking water is monitored for safety. Key agencies, laws and processes are described in detail, including water quality monitoring, enforcement actions, and violations reporting.

A number of charts and tables provide detail on the Safe Drinking Water Revolving Fund and public infrastructure funding, among other topics.

The report is online at sor.govoffice3.com. ■■■



State Auditor Looks at Bond Oversight by Department of Water Resources

The California Department of Water Resources has provided effective oversight of general obligation bond funds, but improvements could be made in certain areas, State Auditor Elaine Howle concluded in a report issued May 19.

Based on a review of 10 projects, the report found that DWR made appropriate decisions when awarding bond funds and making payments for project activities. For two of the 10 projects reviewed, however, the department could not demonstrate that it performed site visits or took other steps to ensure the projects achieved expected outcomes. The review also found that DWR lacks a documented review process to ensure information posted to the state’s Bond Accountability website is correct.

“Because it will spend significant amounts of funds from general obligation bond funds in the coming years, the Department of Water Resources must position itself to administer this spending effectively,” the report found.

To ensure that bond fund expenditures achieve the intended purposes, DWR should strengthen its monitoring of project deliverables, the report recommended.

Access the report at bsa.ca.gov/pdfs/reports/2010-117.pdf. ■■■