

Investing in a Modern Water and Ecological Data System to Better Serve California

“Crucial to achieving the water supply actions described [in California’s Water Supply Strategy] is a common, readily available set of facts about water supply and use, better forecasting, and integrated use of data and technology. Water rights modernization and reform are critical to ensuring we can efficiently and effectively adapt to a changing climate.”

– California’s Water Supply Strategy

By passing the Open and Transparent Water Data Act¹, California has taken a major step forward in upgrading its water data infrastructure and better managing the state’s water resources. While we’ve made significant progress in advancing open data in the state², we must continue modernizing our water data system. The Newsom Administration’s Water Resilience Portfolio and California’s Water Supply Strategy both highlight the importance of investing in better water data infrastructure that will help us respond faster to water and climate emergencies, protect Californians and wildlife species, improve access to safe, affordable drinking water, and support adaptation to climate change.

The California Water Data Consortium recommends a \$353 million investment to modernize California’s siloed and inaccessible water data infrastructure. Investing in a modern water data system would pay for itself. Estimates show that California could gain up to \$780 million in economic benefits in the water management sector alone.³

- The State is currently planning to invest \$75 billion over the next 20 years in water infrastructure projects. With better data, the State can optimize these investments and ensure solid returns.
- Data infrastructure is critical to the security and effective operation of our water systems. The proposed \$353 million is just over one percent of the \$27 billion authorized by water bonds passed since 2000. The annual operations and maintenance of the updated water data system are projected to cost less than 0.5% of California’s yearly water spending.⁴

It’s time to give Californians the resilient and equitable water future we deserve by investing in forward-thinking water data infrastructure.

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¹ California Department of Water Resources, Open and Transparent Water Data Act Implementation Journal

² Strategic Plan for Assembly Bill 1755, the Open and Transparent Water Data Act, April 2018; and Protocols for Assembly Bill 1755, the Open and Transparent Water Data Act

³ Water Data is Essential Infrastructure, Redstone Strategy Group, May 2018

⁴ Paying for California’s Water System, Public Policy Institute of California, May 2021