



## Principles for a Sustainable Water Future in California

### Introduction

California's water is a public resource subject to private rights to its use. Our State government is required by law to protect the public trust in California's water for the access and enjoyment of all. Unfortunately, the public nature of water is frequently ignored in public decision-making. Major river systems such as the San Joaquin River have been degraded for private benefit, tragically ruining public trust resources.

Major water projects have been built with public money to deliver water from where it is deemed to be in surplus to areas of uncontrolled growth. However, some critical water systems cannot deliver water as promised because of increasing concern over water quality, habitat and endangered species protection. Yet California continues to grow, putting more pressure on our limited water supplies. The solution promoted by the water industry is to pump more groundwater and build more reservoirs and canals, strategies which only exacerbate environmental and water quality problems. Reasonable solutions based on greater efficiency of use have been ignored.

We can meet the needs of the state, including population growth, habitat and wildlife restoration, by using water much more efficiently than we do at present. To accomplish this goal, the California Water Impact Network proposes a set of Principles for a Sustainable Water Future in California. These principles outline what is needed to achieve a comprehensive, holistic, integrated, and sustainable water policy for the State.

### Water must be managed in the Public Interest.

- 1. The Public Trust Doctrine.** The public trust doctrine is insufficiently recognized in decisions on how best to allocate water to serve all of the public's needs for access and enjoyment. Very high priority must be given to the public trust doctrine in future water allocation decisions.
- 2. Right to Water.** Every person in California must be assured the minimum amount of high quality water necessary for life at an affordable price. Additional water consumed should cost more.
- 3. Open Public Process.** The public, as owners of California's water resources, must have the determining role in the development and adoption of any statewide water policy. The process must be open, transparent and accountable, and include the active involvement of all sectors of California's diverse population.
- 4. Water Management.** Comprehensive management of state and regional water supplies is best achieved through agency cooperation and coordination. To that end, we support restructuring water administration by eliminating or combining, to the extent feasible, agencies whose jurisdictions lie within the same watershed.
- 5. Good Science.** Computer models used to project water supplies, both surface and groundwater, must be publicly available, be predictable, accurate, transparent and accessible on the Internet. They must be subjected to peer review and truly reflect the resources of the state.

### ***Water Must be Used Efficiently***

**6. Local Supplies.** Local water supplies, which usually are the most dependable, least costly, and most drought resistant resources available to a local community, must be carefully managed and protected for sustainable use by the community.

**7. Conservation.** Conservation is constitutionally mandated and often is the least environmentally damaging way of achieving efficiency in water use. The constitutional prohibition against waste must be fully implemented.

**8. Reuse.** Reuse of highly treated wastewater must be encouraged for a wide variety of uses including potable reuse, provided water quality is protected. Wastewater is now cleaned to near potable standards, and then most of it is thrown away.

**9. Groundwater management.** The groundwater and surface water within a basin or watershed are typically physically connected, and must be managed using whole system management approaches. In order to protect instream flows and terrestrial habitat, controls on overdraft should be instituted immediately. Ultimately, means should be found to reduce or eliminate groundwater overdraft.

**10. Watershed Management.** Watershed management plans shall be developed to maximize coordination of all government agencies and the public to achieve multiple benefits, including but not limited to capturing stormwater where it falls, recharging the groundwater, improving water quality, and restoring wildlife habitat. The beneficiaries of exported water shall be required to invest in watershed restoration.

### ***Habitat, Land Uses, and Water Quality must be Protected and Restored.***

**11. Ecosystem Restoration.** Our rivers, streams and estuaries have become so degraded by water projects and other pollution sources that restoration of instream flows and the ecosystems dependent on these flows must occur. Whenever the place or the purpose of use of diverted water changes, the public trust requires that some portion of the water in question be devoted to the restoration of degraded ecosystems. At least one third of all the water saved by conservation and reuse must be dedicated to fish and stream restorations, and to restoring overdrafted groundwater basins.

**12. Land use.** Land use and water are inextricably linked. Land use planning and development must be based on secure and reliable water supplies. Development that is compact, contiguous with existing development, and in places where supporting infrastructure including water supply already exists, should be encouraged. Development on flood plains, wetlands, prime ag land, and environmentally sensitive habitats should be discouraged.

**13. Sustainable Agriculture.** Sustainable agricultural land must be preserved. As ag land goes out of production because of globalization, global warming and other factors, water should be returned to the environment.

**14. Water Quality.** All water quality standards must be clear, publicized, and enforced. Enforcing water quality standards includes maintaining sufficient flows through river, streams and estuaries to ensure ecosystem health and the public health.

**15. Area of Origin.** The areas that are water rich, the areas of origin in northern California, must be protected so that these areas can grow and maintain their instream flows as required by state law.

**16. Innovation.** All water users should be encouraged to be more creative and to find ways to benefit themselves and the environment. Federal or other subsidies should be redirected to save minimally 10% of farmland for riparian habitat.