

CUWA

ANNUAL REPORT: FISCAL YEAR 2021

Adapting to challenges while guided
by long-term aspirations

Through the challenges faced over this past year, CUWA agencies banded together to help each other navigate unprecedented and rapidly evolving challenges and continue as a unified voice for California Water, responding to disruptors while still advancing long-term aspirations.

California Urban Water Agencies (CUWA) is a nonprofit corporation of 11 major urban water agencies that collectively deliver drinking water to two-thirds of the state's population. CUWA's mission is to provide a forum for combining the expertise and resources of its member agencies to advance reliable, high-quality water supplies for the State's current and future urban water needs in a cost-effective manner for the public, the environment, and the economy.

Fiscal Year 2021 Highlights

Leveraging the shared knowledge and expertise among its 11 member agencies, CUWA focused on exchanging ideas and best practices related to pandemic, wildfires, and advancing racial justice through Board member “current topics” calls and networking committees. These discussions continue to spur creative thinking and actions as agencies adapt to virtual work and pursue greater diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in their own agencies and the water industry.

While adapting to changing conditions, CUWA’s long-term vision is guided by four overarching aspirations for the future of California Water, as introduced in the 2020 Annual Report and refined at the Board’s 2021 strategic workshop. The updated aspirations underscore CUWA’s commitment to DEI, both among our member agencies and in our communities. CUWA’s FY 2021 accomplishments are described below in the context of these four aspirations.

1. Consumers Trust the Quality of Tap Water

CUWA agencies shared best practices and experience to continue providing high-quality drinking water amid the COVID-19 pandemic, wildfires, and related water quality challenges. Initially convened around emergency operations at the start of the pandemic, CUWA’s Operations Committee has continued to meet monthly to discuss ongoing issues and best practices for safe, reliable water supply. Additionally, the Water Quality Committee has been preparing for new drinking water requirements, such as those included in the revised lead and copper rule and pending microplastics regulations.

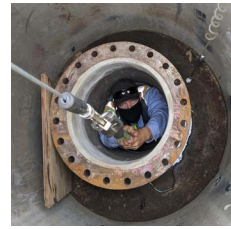
In October 2020, CUWA held a joint workshop with the Water Quality and Operations Committees to discuss implications of wildfires and how best to respond. Bringing experts together from different parts of CUWA agencies’ organizations enabled productive dialogue and development of best management practices, adaptation resources, and lessons learned. This work has been leveraged to inform agencies nationally, as the cover story of the June edition of [AWWA Opflow](#) and through wildfire incident checklists and other resources on [CUWA’s website](#).

2. Reliable Water Supply Is Available to All Californians

As agencies prepared their 2020 urban water management plans, CUWA held discussions around water supply, demands, and the importance of planning for different scenarios in the face of uncertainty. Recurring drought conditions highlight the importance of CUWA agencies’ water supply reliability investments to date, including supply diversification, progress in water use efficiency, and drought planning. CUWA continues to track and inform implementation of long-term water use efficiency and promote a holistic planning and management approach.

Another way CUWA agencies and others are improving drought resilience is through thoughtful implementation of water reuse. CUWA’s new issue brief, [Facing Challenges with Maximizing Water Reuse](#), developed in collaboration with WaterReuse CA, Cal Desal, and Southern California Salinity Coalition, highlights potential obstacles and presents strategies to achieve greater progress—including promoting collaborative/regional approaches, supporting research and funding opportunities, and advancing regulations. CUWA hosted a [virtual panel discussion](#) with industry leaders to hear their perspectives on the topic.

Additionally, CUWA’s past work around water reuse and [distributed systems](#) has continued to provide value, informing a new LEED pilot credit for “[integrated project water reuse strategy](#)” (published in April 2021). The pilot credit encourages new developments to engage local water authorities and ensure onsite water reuse systems reflect and advance regional and community objectives, where possible.



3. Safe Water Is Accessible and Affordable to All

The pandemic exacerbated ongoing challenges, including water accessibility and affordability and utility revenue sustainability. CUWA collected data to update prior quantification of affordability issues, including recent trends in bill payment and increased enrollment in customer assistance programs within CUWA’s collective service area. Bob Shaver, CUWA’s FY 2021 CUWA Board Chair, shared insights on water affordability in PPIC’s [November 2020 blog post](#). Through committee discussions, CUWA agencies shared best practices around customer assistance programs and outreach and are continuing to advance emergency and long-term solutions, including exploring alternatives to water shutoffs and informing implementation of statewide assistance programs.

The Water Research Foundation report on [Solutions for Underperforming Drinking Water Systems in California](#), jointly prepared by CUWA and the Pacific Institute to enable significant improvement and accelerate progress on water accessibility for vulnerable communities, was published in September 2020. CUWA also co-authored a [Meeting of the Minds blog post](#) and served on the State Board’s 2020 SAFER Advisory Group, informing sustainable strategies for safe and accessible drinking water. CUWA is committed to implementing solutions and is working with the State Board on next steps towards becoming a Technical Assistance (TA) Provider, leveraging CUWA agencies’ collective knowledge and experience to help out-of-compliance and at-risk systems.

4. Water Agencies Embody DEI Through Culture, Practices, and Accountability

In FY 2021, CUWA expanded discussions beyond traditional water issues to exchange information and ideas on employee engagement and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). Recognizing the importance and urgency of change around DEI, CUWA launched a new committee and developed [DEI policy principles](#). The principles provide a framework for ensuring DEI is reflected in all facets of CUWA’s work, both internal and external, and a commitment to remain accountable by periodically assessing progress.

CUWA’s initial focus is on improving DEI internally, such that CUWA agencies set the right tone and model to motivate lasting, deep change in the water industry. CUWA is currently preparing a DEI Toolkit to collect best practices from member agencies and provide guidance on implementation of DEI policies and practices, including executive management commitments, strategic plans, and workforce surveys. Over time, the aim is for DEI to be embedded in water agency culture and for CUWA to help advance DEI more broadly—throughout the California water community and beyond.



Looking Ahead – A New Chapter for CUWA

After 10 years under the leadership of Executive Director Cindy Paulson, CUWA has appointed longtime CUWA staff member and water industry leader Wendy Broley as Executive Director starting in FY 2022. As a licensed professional engineer with a background in drinking water and reuse planning, engineering, and operations, Wendy has worked with private sector and municipal agencies to implement alternative water supplies and contribute to more diverse and resilient water portfolios. Wendy was a Co-Principal Investigator of Water Research Foundation's Blueprint for One Water, driving the inclusion of One Water thinking into utilities' culture and operation.

As a CUWA staff member, Wendy has facilitated several committees (e.g. Reuse, Water Equity, Innovation) and advanced technical studies that have left a lasting mark on California Water policy. Most recently, Wendy facilitated CUWA's past two strategic planning workshops.

CUWA's aspirations will continue to guide efforts in FY 2022 and beyond, framing CUWA's approach to ongoing challenges—such as long-term impacts of the pandemic and climate change—and issues on the horizon. In FY 2022, CUWA looks forward to serving as a Technical Assistance Provider and working directly with underperforming systems to create sustainable solutions for communities in need. In the years to come, CUWA will continue to leverage our collective knowledge to advance safe, reliable drinking water in the face of drought, climate change, and other water supply pressures.

“Wendy’s strategic vision, paired with her technical and policy expertise, positions CUWA well to grow our long-term aspirations for California Water. We look forward to her continued leadership in advancing our organization to provide solutions for the increasing water challenges in our future.”

Steve Welch, CUWA FY 2022 Board Chair



Executive Director: Wendy Broley

POPULATION SERVED:
26 MILLION



CUWA MEMBER AGENCIES

- Alameda County Water District (**ACWD**)
- City of **Fresno**
- City of San Diego Public Utilities Department (**San Diego**)
- Contra Costa Water District (**CCWD**)
- East Bay Municipal Utility District (**EBMUD**)
- Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (**LADWP**)
- Metropolitan Water District of Southern California (**MWD**)
- San Francisco Public Utilities Commission (**SFPUC**)
- San Diego County Water Authority (**SDCWA**)
- Santa Clara Valley Water District (**Valley Water**)
- Zone 7 Water Agency (**Zone 7**)

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