PPIC WATER POLICY CENTER

Inspiring Change in California's Water Policy

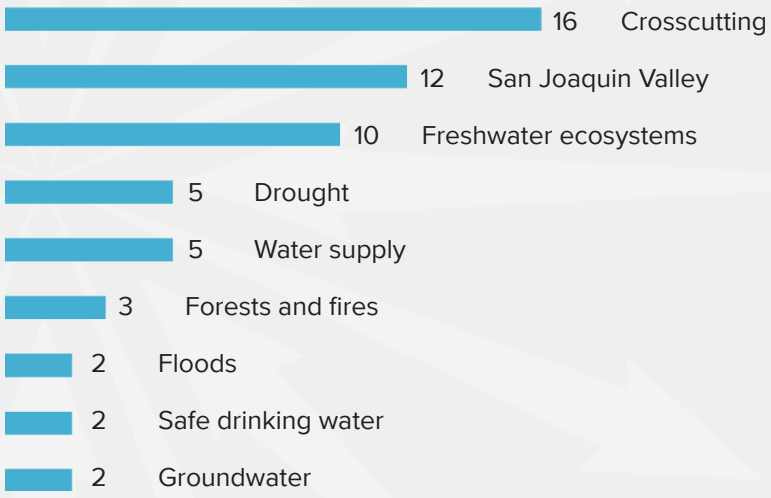
The past year saw a dramatic reversal in California's fortunes. After experiencing one of the driest three-year periods in the state's recorded history, the rains returned in December 2022. Weather whiplash is something California has always experienced, but climate change is making these swings even more dramatic—creating challenges for our water system and putting some communities at risk of water insecurity, as well as damaging floods.

Our water team met the moment with relevant—and sometimes prescient—research. Our events helped foster consequential conversations on water issues facing the state and explored innovative solutions. Our blog shared insights from diverse experts working on some of the state's toughest water challenges. And we met with a wide range of stakeholders for conversations about how to move forward. Key impacts of our work in the past year include:

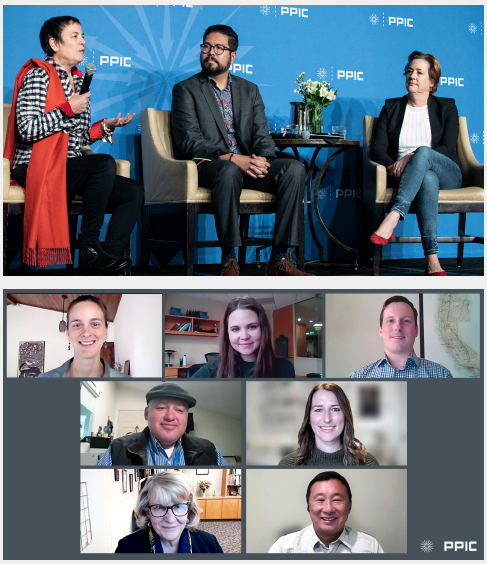
Managing water extremes, from scarcity to abundance

Much of our recent work has explored how to cope with California's increasingly volatile climate, because each extreme—too much water, or too little—brings its own challenges. In publications like last fall's "Priorities for California's Water" brief, we raised key policy issues around how to build drought

Center products covered a wide range of water issues



We held events throughout the year with thousands of viewers



resilience as well as how to better handle wet periods—and use times of abundance to help us weather times of scarcity. In February, we gave testimony before the state assembly about adapting our water rights system to a 21st-century climate. And as California experienced a string of powerful atmospheric rivers, we became a key resource for local, national, and international journalists, weighing in with real-time information on the impact of the storms and the dangers of the inevitable floods to come.

Reimagining land use and building resilience

As the San Joaquin Valley transitions to a future with less available groundwater, it will be important to reimagine land use in this heavily agricultural region. As our recent research has shown, achieving groundwater sustainability will entail bringing significant acreage out of irrigated production—and managing that newly fallowed land safely and productively. A trio of reports explored how to effectively manage fallowed land for dust, examined whether water-limited cropping could provide a viable alternative to fallowing, and investigated the role solar power may play in the valley's future. And an incisive policy brief considered the economic costs of transitioning to groundwater sustainability, along with innovative management approaches that could help to soften the blow. Our work inspired multiple news articles—including a prominent *Los Angeles Times* column on the potential benefits of ramping up solar power development in the San Joaquin Valley.

Giving the environment a seat at the table

As weather whiplash intensifies, California's ecosystems are often deeply impacted and imperiled—but they can also fall low on the list of priorities. We have been championing the importance of giving the environment a seat at the table. That means that it's time to consider dedicating a portion of our water storage specifically to the environment; understanding and tracking where water goes, particularly in the key Sacramento–San Joaquin Delta watershed; and promoting other tools that can aid our struggling freshwater ecosystems, such as water purchases and restoration.

For information on supporting the PPIC Water Policy Center, please contact Ava Gambero, development associate, at gambero@ppic.org or 415.291.4429.

Public Policy Institute of California
500 Washington Street, Suite 600
San Francisco, CA 94111
T 415.291.4400 F 415.291.4401

PPIC Sacramento Center
Senator Office Building, 1121 L Street,
Suite 801, Sacramento, CA 95814
T 916.440.1120 F 916.440.1121