

Water Blueprint for the San Joaquin Valley Memorandum

Date: June 18, 2025

Subject: Implementing Executive Order 14181 – Establishing Stakeholder Priorities for Federal Action and Leadership

Overview

President Trump's January 24, 2025, Executive Order 14181 on California Water marks a historic opportunity to restore reliability to the San Joaquin Valley's water supply. The directive instructs federal agencies to take immediate and comprehensive steps to increase water deliveries, modernize regulations, and accelerate infrastructure investment.

As stakeholders, it is important that we define the benchmarks for success. Based on current supply shortfalls, system capacity, and regulatory opportunities, we believe the federal response should target an increase of 9 million acre-feet per year (MAF/yr) in available water supply to Central and Southern California by 2040—with measurable progress beginning now. (See planning target in SB72 Caballero - Water Code SEC 5. Section 10004.6 (f))

Implementation Priorities

To translate the Executive Order into results, federal agencies must move swiftly on the following priorities:

1. Update CVP and SWP Operational Rules (Target: +1 MAF/yr)

Federal agencies must modernize the operational criteria governing the Central Valley Project (CVP) and State Water Project (SWP). Existing biological opinions, flow constraints, and outdated operational rules limit the ability to capture and deliver water even during wet years.

Specific steps should include:

- Real-time operational adjustments under revised biological opinions
- Rebalancing inflow/outflow and environmental flow objectives
- Coordinated export scheduling and flexible reservoir management

These changes alone have the potential to yield at least 1 MAF/yr in additional deliveries.

2. Eliminate Nonessential Regulatory Barriers (Target: +300,000 AF/yr)

Federal agencies should immediately review and revise flow or ratio-based constraints that exceed legal obligations under the Endangered Species Act. Many of these conditions were layered on through policy discretion and are not required to avoid species jeopardy. Removing these unnecessary constraints could restore 300,000 acre-feet per year in system flexibility and deliveries.

3. Accelerate Permitting for Storage and Conveyance Projects

The Order provides authority for agencies to fast-track infrastructure through coordinated reviews and NEPA streamlining. Priority projects should include:

- Surface and groundwater storage
- Aquifer recharge capacity
- Delta and regional conveyance upgrades

A federal implementation schedule with milestones and financing strategy should be established by mid-2026.

4. Ensure Adequate Resources and Interagency Coordination

Effective implementation will require:

- Dedicated staff within BOR, USFWS, and USGS
- Clear coordination across Interior, Commerce, EPA, and CEQ
- Regular progress reporting and accountability to stakeholders

The Role of Federal Leadership

While policy direction is vital, implementation will depend on the personnel chosen to lead it. The Trump administration must appoint individuals with a deep understanding of California's water systems—people who know how to navigate the legal, operational, and political terrain.

Key federal positions should be filled by leaders who:

- Have real-world experience managing CVP/SWP coordination
- Understand state and federal regulatory conflicts
- Can drive interagency reform while protecting supply reliability

Without this level of leadership in place, even a well-crafted Executive Order risks delay, misapplication, or failure.

Conclusion

This is a once-in-a-generation moment to realign federal water policy with the needs of California's most productive agricultural region as well as support a flourishing economy

and population. The Executive Order provides the opening—but stakeholders must now define the target, demand implementation, and insist on competent leadership.

We urge all agencies and allied organizations to align behind a shared goal: 9 MAF/year of additional water supply by 2040, starting with urgent regulatory and infrastructure actions that can yield gains in the next two years.