

Interview with Water Committee Chair Jim Levine



According to Bay Area Council Water Committee Chair, Jim Levine, this year is shaping up to be a big one for long put off decisions in California's water world. With the state facing what may be its most severe drought in modern history, these decisions come not a moment too soon.

The reason for this upwelling is that many of the processes established to guide the state's warring water parties to agreement are reaching the end of their course, including the Blue Ribbon Task Force. Jim – whose day job is to serve as the Managing Partner of Montezuma Wetlands LLC – predicts that the next six months will likely produce action in two prongs.

Prong one will deal with governance of water decisions in California. Currently, the federal Bureau of Reclamation, the California Legislature, the Department of Water Resources and others can make overlapping policy decisions. The result, predictably, is anarchy. This anarchy has been the rule for the past thirty years and, as interest groups have played one decision maker off on another, a lack of trust and credibility has settled on these agencies and interest groups. Luckily, the Blue Ribbon Task Force process has brought tremendous healing to all parties. It has enabled the Bay Area Council and a coalition of partners to push for a clean break from the past by creating a centralized "California Water Commission." This new body would be structured and empowered much like the California Transportation Commission with the power to decide which projects should be built and how they should be managed. The "CWC" would have 7 or 9 members who would be appointed by the Governor and the Legislature.

The second prong will come from the Legislature and the Governor, who say they will negotiate a new bond measure to fund statewide water projects later this year. This bond measure will stipulate the categories these new funds would fill, such as water recycling, new storage, increased reliability, etc. If successful, the "CWC" would pick the actual projects for each category. While these bonds obviously can't be sold until California's credit rating is restored, it would provide the authority to make big new changes and get new projects keyed up to start.

The Bay Area Council and other business leaders are scheduled to meet with Secretary of Resources Mike Chrisman, on 19 February to discuss priorities and strategies. If you are interested in joining, please contact Andrew Michael at 415-947-8707 or amichael@bayareacouncil.org.

State Budget Update

The state budget remains infuriatingly unresolved. The delay has added an additional [\\$8.96 billion](#) to the deficit, which is an extra \$266 per Californian. Every day of delay costs another \$40 million.

Article of the Week

This past Sunday, [the Mercury News forcefully endorsed](#) the Bay Area Council's efforts on a [Constitutional Convention](#), stating "The time has come for Californians to grab their proverbial pitchforks and take back their government."

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