

THE FUTURE OF CALIFORNIA WATER

COEQWAL
COLLABORATORY FOR EQUITY IN WATER ALLOCATION

PROJECT BRIEF
FEBRUARY 2025

“So much water is moved around California by so many different agencies that maybe only the movers themselves know on any given day whose water is where.”

Joan Didion, The White Album (1979)

What is COEQWAL?

To ensure a healthy, more equitable water future for all, California needs to consider diverse perspectives about how we use our water. To meet this need, we launched **COEQWAL, a Collaboratory for Equity in Water Allocations**. Collaborating with a wide array of partners, we co-create tools enabling anyone to explore the many different ways California water can be allocated. Our data and tools will be shared online, empowering all Californians to envision and advocate for a just and equitable water future.



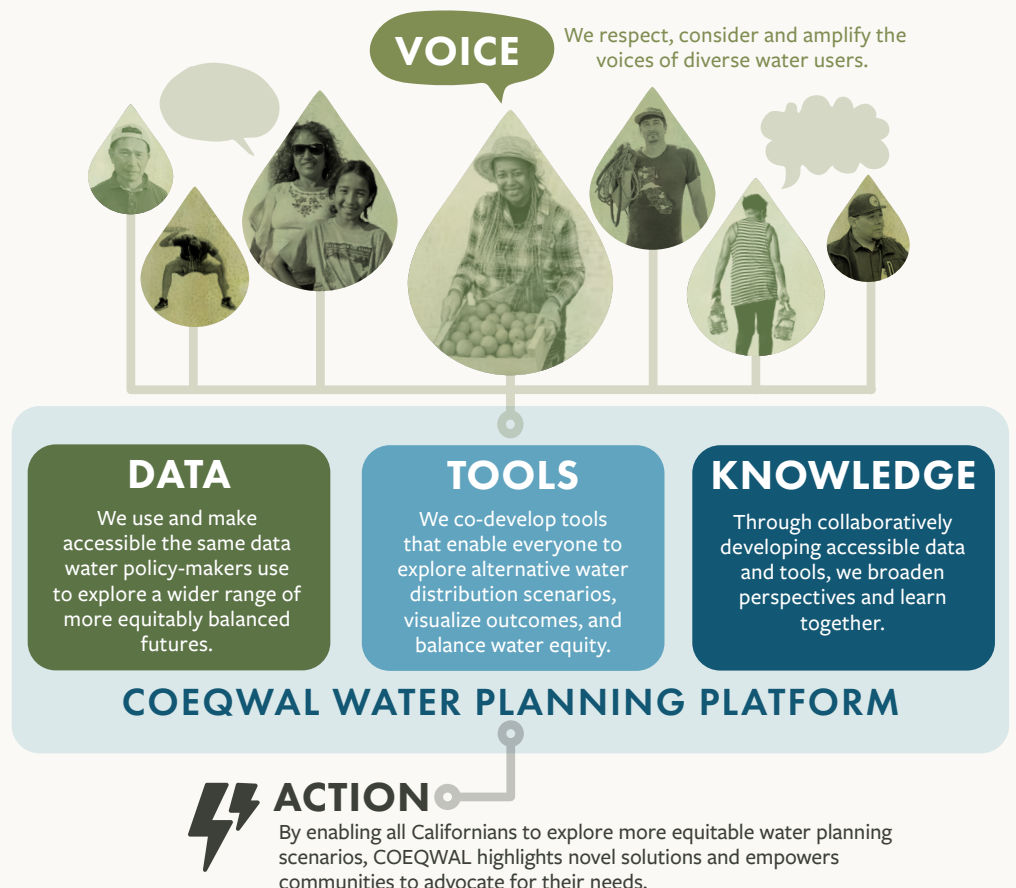
CALIFORNIA SURFACE WATER PROJECTS

California has one of the largest systems in the world for moving water where and when we need it. California's reservoirs (circles) dam rivers (blue lines) store water when stream flows are high. A system of canals and tunnels (orange, grey, red lines), pumps and weirs move water across the state (source: PPIC, CA DWR).

How will COEQWAL empower Californians to influence water management decisions?

VOICE DATA TOOLS KNOWLEDGE ACTION

COEQWAL aims to realize a more equitable water future for all. By building tools with diverse California communities, we amplify underrepresented voices, learn from each other, and build relationships. By empowering everyone to access the same water planning tools used by policymakers and explore additional, more equitable water distribution possibilities, we open opportunities for new solutions to emerge.



Why do we need COEQWAL?

DIVERSE DEMANDS, INEQUITABLE ACCESS

California has one of the largest systems in the world for moving water where and when we need it. Agriculture, towns and cities, and the environment all depend on California water, but some water users have more reliable access to water than others.

COEQWAL will explore more equitable ways of managing our water system by evaluating trade-offs and co-benefits for a wide range of water allocation options. COEQWAL data, tools, and resources will be freely available on a public website.

EVERYONE NEEDS A VOICE

Many voices have been historically excluded from decision making about who gets water, where and when. Computer models used by water policymakers can generate many different water distribution possibilities, including more equitably balanced options. **Until now, these water planning tools have been largely inaccessible to most communities. COEQWAL is working to change that.**

Through an accessible website, COEQWAL will empower all Californians to access the same water planning data and tools used by policymakers. Using a collaborative modeling approach, COEQWAL will develop water allocation scenarios reflecting the values and priorities of diverse community members, and work to ensure that these results are meaningful to the broadest possible audience.

CLIMATE CHANGE

COEQWAL is needed now more than ever before as climate change brings more extreme weather to California. We often get less water than we need or more water than we can manage. Rising sea levels push salt water further inland. Ecosystems, already in decline, face increasing stress.

COEQWAL will evaluate how California's water system will respond to climate change and identify pathways to a more sustainable, equitable, and resilient water future.



Tulare County resident
photo by L. Valenzuela



Yurok on the Klamath River
photo by B. Finley / [CC BY-NC2.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/2.0/)



Lake Shasta in 2021 photo by A. Innerarity

How to get involved?

COEQWAL is a two-year project, launched in 2023 at public universities across California. We invite all Californians to collaborate with us through interviews, surveys, and workshops. Share your voice! Use the contact form on our website and sign up for project updates. Learn more at coeqwal.berkeley.edu.



Scan to visit our contact form.