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# Mountain Democrat

## Mountain Counties brings water and ag leaders together



GENERAL MANAGER PANEL, from left to right, Delta Protection Commission Executive Director Mike Machado, Placer County Water Agency General Manager Dave Breninger, Metropolitan Water District of Southern California General Manager Jeff Kightlinger, and Santa Clara Valley Water District Chief Executive Officer Beau Goldie spoke at the joint quarterly meeting of the Mountain Counties Water Resources Association and the Association of County Water Agencies on Sept. 18 in Loomis. Photo by Roberta Long

By [Roberta Long](#)

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Mountain Counties Water Resources Association and the Association of County Water Agencies held their joint quarterly meeting on Sept. 18 at the Blue Goose Event Center in Loomis. The Blue Goose Event Center is a renovation project of the South Placer Heritage Foundation.

Mountain Counties Chair Bill George, El Dorado Irrigation District president, welcomed 124 guests from all over the state to the day's program.

Placer County Agriculture Commissioner Josh Huntsinger highlighted Placer County's 2011 Crop Report. Rice was the No. 1 income producer at \$17,909,400, followed by cattle and calves at \$11,266,500. Nursery stock, timber and walnuts rounded out the top five.

Placer County District 3 Supervisor Jim Holmes, a fifth-generation farmer, said gross sales of agricultural products last year was \$170 million. "Irrigated agriculture provides jobs and supports businesses," he said.

The topic was "Water and Agriculture in Northern California: Understanding the challenges and opportunities for sustaining a reliable, high-quality water supply for agriculture in northern California." The key word was "understanding," but the underlying theme by the different speakers was "communication."

#### **A farmer, two regulators and an advocate**

Bryce Lundberg, vice president of Lundberg Family Farms in Richvale, Butte County, is an educator, an elected official and an advocate. He speaks to groups, blogs and posts educational videos on YouTube. He is an elected member of the board of the Western Canal Water District, which is a member of the North State Water Alliance, and is he is chair of the Northern California Water Association. He is a tireless advocate for California agriculture and the water needed to grow food. He stressed that in addition to growing healthy food, the rice fields provide thousands of acres of waterfowl habitat.

Lundberg said northern California water rights are at risk because policymakers in Washington do not understand the geography, the people and the issues involved. He cited the Butte Accord, which was implemented in 2008, as an example of local groups overcoming their animosities to come up with a solution to managing the Lower Yuba River. Lundberg said the goal of water policy is to balance the economic with ecologic and social values.

Felicia Marcus, from Emeryville, brought her legal and environmental advocacy skills to the Delta Stewardship Council, where she served for nearly two years. Gov. Brown appointed her to the State Water Resources Control Board as of July 2. As a newcomer to the board, she said she is still learning the job. She said the federal government has been driving the action on water issues. The objective is to put the state in the driver's seat.

Throughout her career, Marcus has been back and forth on either side of the regulatory table. She gave several tips on communicating, saying that each professional group has its own language. "I had to learn to speak 'engineer,'" she said. "People don't always hear what you say in the way you meant. They hear what they expect to hear."

She said that being invited to the different areas in the state is important. As a member of the State Water Board, she is not allowed to meet personally with individuals, but she looks forward to tours and programs like the one that day.

Marcus observed that Mountain Counties had an impact on the formation of the Delta Plan as a result of strong participation. She said the mountain counties have been "incredible stewards of upper watersheds and should not be taken for granted."

Agriculture is the last sector to be regulated, after industrial and municipal. She said, "I will rely on you to tell me how you are affected by the Water Board. I pledge to be your partner and to advocate for agriculture."

California Secretary of Natural Resources John Laird represented Santa Cruz, Monterey and Santa Clara in the Assembly from 2002 to 2008. He expressed some empathy for the concerns represented in the audience. "Santa Cruz does not get any of its water from the State Water Project, but our residents still had to pay," he said.

Natural Resources is the lead agency for the Bay Delta Conservation Plan. "Our goal is not to push problems upstream from the Delta by solving problems in the Delta," he said.

Laird said that during his time in the Assembly he and Sen. Tim Leslie, from Tahoe City, created the Sierra Nevada Conservancy in the Natural Resources Agency. "Before that, there was no way for local people to have a seat at the table," he said.

He made a spirited argument for support of the \$11.1 billion water bond currently scheduled to be voted on during the November 2014 General Election. He tackled the major criticism, that the bond contains funding for a number of projects that do not pertain to the Delta. "The project [State Water Project] is aging and needs repairs," he said. "The water bond has to touch everybody, and that is not 'pork.'"

Each intake in the preferred alternative is estimated to cost around \$1 billion. The preferred alternative now calls for three intakes, a reduction from the five originally envisioned. "If we hold everybody in, we can do it," he said.

El Dorado County Water Agency General Manager Dave Eggerton said that the Sierra Nevada ecosystem should be recognized as critical to the health of the Delta. "Those that work on the Delta can't ignore how impacted we are with catastrophic fire," he said. "Our watersheds are the source of water supply in the Delta." Laird said that sometimes he gets a schizophrenic message from locals: "Leave us alone," and at the same time, "Help us." He suggested to those interested, "Help make the case."

California Secretary of Food and Agriculture Karen Ross, from Nebraska, said her agency has no regulatory power; nevertheless it takes on tough issues and speaks for California agriculture.

The value of California's annual agricultural production is fourth in the world. China, Mexico, India and Asia are the largest export markets and they are growing.

Ross said that one in six California children do not have adequate nutrition. "Providing healthy school lunches is good for the economy and good for kids," she said.

She wants to see every Californian have safe and healthy access to food. The agency has 26 Food Policy Councils that advocate with scientific and technical information to contribute to policymaking. An example is gathering fertilizer experts to investigate nitrogen issues.

Ross said that young people who come from the universities and want to start farming in this region have a business plan. "They are not like the generations that came before," she said. "They want quality of life. They want to take a vacation."

#### **"My Point of View:" California perspectives**

Put together four outspoken representatives, one each from a mountain county, a Silicon Valley county, Metropolitan Water District and the Delta, and you get some idea of the different pieces of the water puzzle. As executive director of the Association of California Water Agencies, Tim Quinn is familiar with them all, and he used his skills to moderate this panel.

Beau Goldie, chief executive officer for the Santa Clara Water District, oversees a district that serves both urban and rural customers. It has nearly 400 acres of groundwater recharge ponds and more than 275 miles of streams. Waters in the north flow to the San Francisco Bay, in the south to Monterey Bay. Subsidence (sinking land), salt intrusion and flooding have been problems. The district has removed 2,200 pounds of mercury mine contamination. Goals are: natural flood protection, healthy creeks and streams, and clean, reliable water. Goldie said it is important that their Bay area businesses, including Silicon Valley, have economic certainty.

Metropolitan Water District of Southern California General Manager Jeff Kightlinger's domain is the six-county southern California coastal plain. Metropolitan is a wholesaler of water. It sells water to districts and cities in its area; they in turn sell it to customers. Metropolitan provides water for a population of 19 million, nearly half of the state's 37.7 million as of 2011.

He said that even with increasing population, the district has imported less water than before. Los Angeles is growing, but it is not spreading out now. Most of the growth is infill, and urban residents use less water than suburban. "Our growth is coming internally, from women having babies, not from immigration," he said.

Kightlinger said Metropolitan's water comes from three sources: the Colorado River, 10 percent from Owens Valley, and the State Water Project. Each of them is 250 to 450 miles away. "The game plan changed in the 1990s when we had a drought," he said. Metropolitan responded by developing an Integrated Resources Plan, emphasizing conservation, recycling and reclamation. They are also considering desalinization and storage. He mentioned the impact of the cutbacks on water allocations to Metropolitan as a result of Court decisions to protect fish. "We can live with hydrologic uncertainty, but not regulatory," he said. "A conveyance gives us certainty."

Dave Breninger, from Roseville, has been Placer County Water Agency's General Manager for 20 years. Breninger said, "We feel for our colleagues in the Bay area and southern California. We just don't want to be the mitigation." He honed in on the requirement in the 2009 Delta Reform Act requiring 20 percent conservation. "The 2010 mitigation requires us to meet 20 percent conservation as though we are the recipients," he said. "We are the suppliers."

In many ways, Mike Machado is the voice of the Delta. Owner of a family farm, he represented the Delta in the Assembly and Senate from 1994 to 2008. Since 2010 he has been executive director of the Delta Protection Commission. One of the Commission's responsibilities is to develop an economic sustainability plan for the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta.

Machado opened by saying, "If ever there was an argument for protecting area-of-origin water it is today's lunch." He repeated his oft-stated criticism of the Bay Delta Conservation Plan that Delta stakeholders were not included in discussions. "Nowhere in the Act did it say it was infeasible to fix levees," he said, and added, "Tunnels are a risk to central and south part of the Delta."

Machado has repeatedly argued that the Delta has statewide significance because of the infrastructure it contains, which includes natural gas, electricity and water pipelines, roads and highways, aqueducts, railroads and the levee system. "We aren't looking at water on an integrated basis, from source to discharge," he said.

Machado said for the future California needs to invest in recycled water and more storage. "We want California to work for everybody," he said.

#### **Facing challenges and recognizing opportunities**

The final group to weigh consisted of three state legislators. David Guy, Northern California Water Association President, moderated the panel of Sen. Tom Berryhill, and Assembly members Fiona Ma and Ben Hueso.

Berryhill, from Modesto, is the owner of a family farm. He was elected to the Assembly from 2006 to 2010, and now serves in the Senate. His father, Clare, also served in both houses and was director of the California Department of Food and Agriculture. "Ag people are the most resourceful business people I know," he said.

Addressing the controversial issue of Delta exports straight on, he said, "There is no reason we can't come to consensus about when you can take water and when you can't [from the State Water Project and Central Valley Project through the Delta]. There are ways to get to 'Yes.'" He believes the state has to have more storage. He added, "We have a couple years to build some trust."

Berryhill talked about the water bond. He said the environmental issues were "highly vetted," and the bond was the result of years of discussion and compromise. "Don't open up the bond," he said. That would delay any improvements for many years. Legislative oversight will be critical, he stressed.

He introduced Fiona Ma, from San Francisco, as an urban Democrat who is working hard for agriculture.

Assembly member Fiona Ma, a CPA, serves on the Assembly Agriculture Committee. She admitted that four years ago she knew nothing about agriculture. Berryhill has been a mentor for her. "I'm most excited about being an agriculture enthusiast," she said. She authored legislation to create the California Blueberry Commission, to promote California blueberries and create jobs.

Ma is concerned about an initiative in San Francisco that would require the city to spend up to \$8 million on a study about whether to shut down Hetch Hetchy Reservoir. "Yes, we are crazy," she said.

Ma said, "Water should not be a partisan issue. We all want water, food and fresh air. The last four years have been the most egregious. We need to keep the nasty rhetoric out." Ma said that when she votes in a way that people might not expect from a San Francisco Democrat it is because she knows the facts. "Everyone filters information differently," she said.

Hueso was a community-minded businessman in Logan Heights when he ran for San Diego City Council in 2006. As a new member of the Council, he saw the future of San Diego's water shortages in an abundant local resource: wastewater. Others didn't see the promise of treating wastewater for re-use. "I had to get people over the 'yuk' factor," he said. The first vote was 3-5, and the mayor pledged to veto the idea if it passed. After four years of incessant tap-tap-tapping on hard rock minds of his colleagues, Hueso convinced them, including the mayor, to approve wastewater re-use in the city. His goal was to make the city independent of reliance on outside water. He pushed heavy conservation, recycling and reservoirs.

Elected to the Assembly in 2010 in a district that includes the coastal areas of San Diego from Coronado to the Mexican border, Hueso has taken on several responsibilities, including chairing the Assembly Water, Parks and Wildlife Committee, and serving on the Jobs, Economic Development and Economy Committee.

Hueso said the Delta smelt decisions [to reduce water deliveries from the Delta] affected all of California. "Even in San Diego, we have an obligation to help the system," he said. "Areas are so different. Every water district has different goals and challenges. Monterey has a moratorium on construction. Imperial County's water table is growing, and there are liquefaction problems there [saturated soil becomes more liquid]. We can't make mistakes about water."

He expressed willingness to visit agricultural and water sites. "Let us know. Invite us," he said. "In order for us to move past the Democrat-Republican separation, we have to see for ourselves. If the legislature does not take action, the courts will decide."

He said that California is the leading producer of food for the world, supplying 50 percent of the nation's food supply, and a leading producer for China and India. "Farming will be more important in the future," he said. "We need affordable, abundant food."

Two themes came out of the question-and-answer period: 1) the bond; 2) education and communication. Tuolumne Utilities District director Barbara Balen said, "We think the bond mix is unfair."

Calaveras County Water District Director Bob Dean followed up, "We get \$75 million in bond funds out of \$11.1 billion. How can we do a better job of education?"

Berryhill said one-third of the Assembly members turn over every two years. This year 48 out of 80 members are new. The Assembly needs stability, he said.

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