

# NEWS CLIPS

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**Resource Conservation and Public  
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**Organized by date**

## Is drinking water a right?

By William Kahrl  
LA Times 7/28/2017

Deciding how to give people water to drink and grow food — and to do so without damaging the state’s economy or the environment — shouldn’t have been this hard. For the last dozen years and more, California has been entangled in heated debate over updating the state’s water system. But now we’re getting closer to resolving that question. And that, in turn, opens the way to considering future water policy in a very different political landscape.

The state’s WaterFix plan — the focus of contention — proposes to secure drinking water supplies for 25 million people in Southern California and the Bay Area, and enable farmers to continue providing fresh produce to the rest of the country and the world. To do so, it would replumb the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta with two 35-mile-long tunnels that would serve the dual purpose of protecting the Delta’s life-giving wetlands while assuring more reliable water supplies, despite the worsening effects of climate change.

Late last month, two federal fisheries agencies, after reviewing more than 40,000 pages of environmental analysis, each concluded the new “conveyance” wouldn’t “deepen any harm” to the Delta’s endangered species and habitat. As the state Department of Water Resources said, that’s a “momentous step” forward.

To be sure, it will be years before construction gets under way. State and federal regulatory agencies overseeing the effects of the new delivery system could impose so many restrictions that some communities may not be able to afford the water. And the project’s opponents, who once touted the federal regulators as the experts who would stop WaterFix cold, are not going away. They’ve already filed suit denouncing the fishery agencies’ biological analysis as arbitrary, capricious and illegal.

Nonetheless, the recent progress on WaterFix is real, and its implementation would enable California to look beyond basic supply issues.

For example, policymakers today often echo the United Nations’ assertion that people have a right to water. But in practice such access is treated only as a goal. Which is it? If access to water is a right — and it should be — then it must be enforceable. Making it so would initiate a revolution in how we think about and address our needs throughout the state.

For example, many small, isolated communities up and down the state currently lack clean water, and WaterFix won't solve that. In a state as sophisticated as California, with its natural and financial resources, this is obscene. But with an enforceable right to water in place, those communities would gain an important leg up in the competition for water.

Such a right might also help to shed some light into the regulatory black box of internal committees and bureaucratic task forces where many of our most important water management decisions are made, often without public oversight.

Opening the decision-making process could help us avoid the familiar, unproductive rhetorical flourishes about "fish versus people." More important, giving more than lip service to a right to water can help us do a better job of balancing the equities for all concerned.

On another front, if WaterFix, which has been propelled by Gov. Jerry Brown, succeeds in meeting our supply needs, future governors will be able to take a broader view of all the dimensions of water's importance to our lives — food production, energy, recreation, resource protection, sustainable use and residential and industrial development.

It could even allow us to ask new questions about how we pay for water. Currently, the revenues we generate for water, through rates and fees, taxes and bond sales are allocated among public water agencies, tribal governments and nonprofit organizations that serve the public interest in water education, environmental issues and consumer protection. At the same time, we emphasize the importance of funding individual water-related projects on the basis of their efficiency. But again, which is it? The missions of the conventional triumvirate of service providers were defined in the last century. None of these entities are noted for their efficiency. And all need more meaningful incentives to improve.

The state is home to Silicon Valley, a resource of unprecedented innovation, capital and progressive thinking — and yet California has done little to engage its leaders in the creative disruption of water policy. It might enrage environmental, academic and regulatory groups, but why shouldn't Sacramento encourage private investment in water, opening the door to selecting our water policy advisors on the basis of what they can deliver rather than their tax status?

We do not have the luxury of thinking of WaterFix as an end in itself. When implemented it will be an important measure of our progress. But it could also offer a welcome way station where we can catch our breath along the way to something even better.

William Kahrl is the editor

of “The California Water Atlas” and author of “Water and Power: The Conflict over Los Angeles Water Supply in the Owens Valley.” He served as one of the many consultants who reviewed WaterFix for California’s Natural Resources Agency.

# When is the **best time** to water?

## Water **early** for the best results.

Watering in the early morning (between 4 a.m. and 8 a.m.) saves money and water, while keeping your grass, plants and trees healthier.

Watering early when the sun is low and winds are calm:

- Helps reduce water loss from evaporation due to heat and wind.
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[www.smartirrigationmonth.org](http://www.smartirrigationmonth.org)



[www.LVMWD.com/Irrigation-Efficiency](http://www.LVMWD.com/Irrigation-Efficiency)



## Keeper of the creek

### Oak Park man tackles onslaught of crayfish

By Sylvie Belmont



**INVASION OF THE BEASTIES**—Above, Oak Park resident Joel Goldes checks a trap for crayfish, which are encroaching Lindero Creek near his home. Top left, a close-up of one of the annoying critters, which prey on native species and cause issues with creek-bed erosion. Photos by SYLVIE BELMOND/Acorn Newspapers

During a morning outing with his two dogs last week, Joel Goldes retrieved more than two dozen crayfish from the nine traps he'd set in the water along a quarter-mile stretch of Lindero Creek.

The crayfish purge is part of Goldes' daily routine.

Over the past three months alone he's removed more than 1,000 crustaceans from the tributary that runs through his Oak Park neighborhood just east of Lindero Canyon Road.

"Few people come here, and it's kind of ignored. It's a wild oasis right in the middle of our suburb. It's a precious ecosystem and it's been badly polluted," Goldes said.



The Sonoma County native moved to Ventura County 17 years ago. He became aware of the widespread crayfish problem a decade ago, when he and his two daughters, along with his brother who was visiting from out of town, came to the creek to hunt for the small, lobster-like creatures.

“We counted 73 crawdads in two hours,” he said.

Originally from the southeastern and central U.S, the crayfish prey on native species, reduce water quality and cause problems with creek-bed erosion.

In California, where the climate is warmer year round, crayfish reproduce quickly and compete with native newts, arroyo chubs and frogs.

Lindero Creek runs all year long. While some sections have 4 to 5 feet of water, others are just a few inches deep. The creek is managed by the Rancho Simi Recreation and Park District.

Goldes, a state-licensed fisherman, uses dog biscuits to lure the crayfish into his traps.

He also picks up trash and removes dead wood and debris from the creek channel to clear blockages so the water can flow.

“It makes me feel like I’m making a difference down here. Picking up the trash is instantly gratifying because you can see a difference in five minutes of work,” he said.

Goldes has found drug paraphernalia in addition to scores of plastic bottles and bags, and he’s gathered more than 400 tennis balls, which he ships to a company that repurposes them into tennis court surfaces.

Many of the crayfish Goldes collected July 20 were juveniles. He kept a tally of the creatures and then disposed of them.

“When I first started collecting crayfish, I would leave them in buckets covered with ice so the raccoons could come and get them. But then I realized many crayfish were still there when I came back, so I figured it’s more humane to take care of it right away,” he said.

Loretta Castleberry said Goldes should be recognized for his efforts to safeguard the local riparian ecosystem.

“He is on a one-man mission to save the creek in Oak Park,” said the Northern California resident, who saw Goldes at work while visiting her daughter and son-in-law in the area.

Goldes, 53, and his wife, Vivian, a dance teacher, have two teenage daughters.

A former actor and director, Goldes became a professional dialect and accent coach about 25 years ago. As such, he helps actors prepare for roles that require a foreign accent or English dialect.

During his career, Goldes has worked with numerous celebrities, including Viola Davis, Nicolas Cage, Kevin Costner, Christopher Lambert, Roger Daltrey, and Will Smith and his son, Jaden.

Since most of his coaching sessions take place via Skype, Goldes said, he is able to devote a good amount of time at the creek hunting for crayfish.

## **IN A NUTSHELL**

Mountains Restoration Trust has an ongoing crayfish-removal program, and the agency works with the community to preserve and protect the streams and creeks of the Malibu Creek Watershed. Groups of volunteers are trained to trap and remove the crayfish. They also pick up trash along the stream



## A Free Family Adventure!

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On this free bus tour, you'll visit Malibu Creek, a Water Reclamation Plant, a regional Composting Facility and learn more about our precious water resources.



Saturday, August 5, 2017  
from 8:45 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

Tour begins promptly at 8:45 a.m. ending at 1 p.m.

Space is limited, pre-registration is required (walk-ins cannot be accommodated).

A complimentary continental breakfast and light lunch will be provided.

Register online at: [www.LVMWD.com/QuarterlyTours](http://www.LVMWD.com/QuarterlyTours)

Moderate walking and stairs are part of the tour, close-toed walking shoes are recommended.

*Reservation preference is given to customers of Las Virgenes Municipal Water District and Triunfo Sanitation District.*

*Children under 18 must be accompanied by a responsible adult.*



Presented by  
Las Virgenes Triunfo Joint Powers Authority

## Judge: Water company must pay Ojai Playhouse \$2.7M

CLAUDIA BOYD-BARRETT SPECIAL TO THE STAR  
Ventura County Star 7/27/2017

Three years after a water-main break flooded the historic Ojai Playhouse movie theater, a judge has ordered the town's former water purveyor to pay \$2.7 million in damages.

Golden State Water Co., which until recently managed Ojai's water system, must pay Ojai Playhouse owners Khaled Al-Awar and his brother Walid Alawar nearly \$2 million for repairing the severely damaged theater, Ventura County Superior Court Judge Vincent O'Neill ruled July 19.

The remaining amount includes \$400,000 in annoyance and discomfort damages, while the rest goes to cover lost profits.



**See OJAI, Page 2A** Above: Walid Alawar, co-owner of the Ojai Playhouse, walks through the water-damaged parts of the theater. A judge has ruled that Golden State Water must pay the owners of the Ojai Playhouse \$2.7 million for damage caused by flooding.

PHOTOS BY JUAN CARLO/THE STAR



Another hearing will decide how much the company must pay for attorney fees, according to John Howard, attorney for the brothers.

“It was very, very good — an excellent ruling,” said Khaled Al-Awar. “We were not asking for anything beyond what we were entitled to.” The ruling marks a victory for both the brothers and Ojai residents, who have been without a movie theater since the playhouse and adjacent restaurant The Village Jester flooded in July 2014. Located in the center of town, the theater is both an aesthetic and cultural landmark, and its prolonged derelict status has fueled seething community resentment toward Golden State. “The Ojai Playhouse is not just a movie theater; it’s a facility that’s used by the schools and some of the churches and some of the other community organizations for all kinds of events, and it’s a historically important building,” Howard said. “From our perspective, the only significance of the money is using it to repair the theater and compensating the owners of the theater modestly for what they’ve gone through.”

Initial repairs to the theater came to a halt in January 2015 because of a dispute between Golden State and its secondary insurance carrier. Khaled Al-Awar said the theater’s foundations and interior were destroyed by the flooding, which happened on a weekend when no one was quickly available to shut off the water.

He said it would take at least six to eight months to repair.

“This was a great catastrophe. It’s unbelievable,” he said. “We’re talking about millions of gallons of water that came into the theater.”

Al-Awar said he and his brother, who have run the theater for more than 30 years, can’t begin repairs until they have the money in hand. Golden State still has two months to appeal the judge’s orders, he said.

“I’m not celebrating yet,” he said. If the company appeals, “I will live with it. We waited three years. We can wait another couple of months.”

Howard said an appeal could happen, but he thinks it's unlikely. He called the judge's decision "rock solid" and said Golden State would be foolish to try to get it overturned.

"If they want to appeal, have at it. They can pay our costs for that, too, and any interest that's accruing while that's pending, if that's what they want to do," he said. "We hope they don't because our agenda is and always has been to get the theater repaired. We want it done, and we want it done as soon as possible." Golden State Water declined comment through a spokesman.



**Nigel Chisholm, owner of The Village Jester, shows the condition of the Ojai Playhouse in 2015, a year after a water main break flooded the business.**

**STAR FILE PHOTO**

**"We were not asking for anything beyond what we were entitled to."**

**KHALED AL-AWAR**

**OJAI PLAYHOUSE CO-OWNER**

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vcstar.com Sunday, July 23, 2017 5A



# Delta tunnel project advances

State officials approve environmental review of the massive water diversion system.



THE SUN SETS over the Middle River in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, where planned tunnels would divert water to pumps that fill southbound canals. (Katie Falkenberg Los Angeles Times)

By Bettina Boxall  
LA Times 7/22/2017

The proposal to build a major tunnel system under the hub of California's waterworks won another approval Friday when the state finalized its environmental review of the project.

"Today we are approving California WaterFix," said Cindy Messer, acting director of the Department of Water Resources.

DWR's blessing was expected. But the long-planned project still needs a number of other permits, as well as the financial support of major water districts, before construction can begin.

In an effort to lessen environmental restrictions on water exports, the project would change the way supplies are sent south from the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta to San Joaquin Valley growers and Southern California.

Two massive tunnels would divert water from the Sacramento River as it enters the delta and carry it to existing government pumps that fill southbound canals.

Delta growers and many environmental groups oppose the project, arguing that it will hurt delta water quality and create new problems for the delta's crashing fish populations.

The state approval will likely soon be challenged in court.

"We do anticipate there will be litigation associated with this particular milestone of the project," Messer said.

The state action closely follows federal findings that the project would not push the delta smelt and winter-run Chinook salmon to extinction. These findings are already the subject of environmental lawsuits.

Gov. Jerry Brown's administration says the tunnel system is necessary to avert further endangered species restrictions on water deliveries from Northern California to the west side of the San Joaquin Valley and the Southland.

The water districts that have to pick up the \$17-billion tab to build and operate the tunnels are expected to decide this fall whether they want to move ahead with the project.