

Water Bond. Funding for Water Quality, Supply, Treatment, and Storage Projects.

- Authorizes \$7.12 billion in general obligation bonds for state water supply infrastructure projects, such as surface and groundwater storage; ecosystem and watershed protection and restoration; drinking water protection; water supply management; water recycling and advanced water treatment technology; and flood control.
- Reallocates \$425 million of unused bond authority from prior water bond acts, for same purposes.
- Appropriates money from the General Fund to pay off bonds.
- Requires certain projects to provide matching funds from non-state sources in order to receive bond funds.

Summary of Legislative Analyst’s Estimate of Net State and Local Government Fiscal Impact:

- Increased state bond repayment costs averaging \$360 million annually over the next 40 years.
- Savings to local governments related to water projects, likely averaging a couple hundred million dollars annually over the next few decades.

State Bond Cost Estimates	
Authorized new borrowing	\$7.1 billion
Average annual cost to pay off bonds	\$360 million
Likely repayment period	40 years
Source of repayment	General tax revenues

**Final Votes Cast by the Legislature on AB 1471 (Proposition 1)
(Chapter 188, Statutes of 2014)**

Senate:	Ayes 37	Noes 0
Assembly:	Ayes 77	Noes 2

Background

Sources of Water in California. A majority of the state’s water comes from rivers, much of it from Northern California and from snow in the Sierra Nevada Mountains. Water available underground (referred to as “groundwater”) makes up roughly a third of the state’s water use and is more heavily relied on in dry years. A small share of the state’s water also comes from other sources, such as capturing rainwater, reusing wastewater (water recycling), and removing the salt from ocean water (desalination).

Meeting the State’s Water Needs. Providing clean water throughout California while protecting the environment presents several key challenges. First, water is not always available where it is needed. For example, water from Northern California is delivered to other parts of the state, such as farmland in the Central Valley and population centers in the San Francisco Bay Area

and Southern California. Second, the amount of water available can change widely from year to year. So, when less water is available in dry years, it can be difficult to provide all of the water that people want throughout the state. This can include providing enough water to maintain natural habitats—such as wetlands—for endangered species as is required under state and federal laws. However, in very wet years the state can sometimes experience floods, particularly in the Central Valley. Third, water is sometimes polluted, making it unsuitable for drinking, irrigating crops, or fish habitat. Fourth, parts of the state’s water system have affected natural habitats. For example, providing more water for drinking and irrigation has reduced the water available for fish.

In order to address these challenges, California has built various projects. Some projects use natural rivers—as well as pipelines, pumping stations, and canals—to deliver water used for drinking or farming throughout the state. These projects also include dams and other

Analysis by the Legislative Analyst

Continued

types of water storage to hold water for when it is needed. Other projects to meet the state's water challenges include water treatment plants to remove pollutants from drinking water and wastewater, systems to clean up runoff from storms, and levees to prevent floods.

Environment and Water System Are Linked. The state's water system and the environment are linked in several ways. As noted above, the use of water for irrigation and drinking water affects natural habitats used by fish and wildlife. These effects on natural habitats are made worse by pollution, which harms water quality for fish, wildlife, and people. The state has taken a variety of actions to improve natural habitats and water quality. These include restoring watersheds (an area of land that drains into a body of water) by reintroducing native plants and animals. The state has also provided water to rivers when needed by fish species.

Roles of Various Governments in Water System. The state, federal, and local governments play important roles in providing clean and reliable water supplies. Most spending on water programs in the state is done at the local level, such as by water districts, cities, and counties. In recent years, local governments have spent about \$26 billion per year to supply water and to treat wastewater. About 80 percent of this spending is paid for by individuals as ratepayers of water and sewer bills. In addition, local governments pay for projects using other sources, including state funds, federal funds, and local taxes. While most people get their water from these public water agencies, about one-sixth of Californians get their water from private water companies.

The state runs programs to (1) conserve, store, and transport water around the state; (2) protect water quality; (3) provide flood control; and (4) protect fish and wildlife habitat. The state provides support for these programs through direct spending, as well as grants and loans to local governments, nonprofit organizations, and privately owned water companies. (The federal government runs similar programs.) Funding for these state programs usually comes from bonds and fees. Since 2000, voters have approved about \$20 billion in bonds for various environmental purposes, including water. Currently, about \$900 million (5 percent) of these bonds remain available for new projects.

Proposal

This measure provides a total of \$7.5 billion in general obligation bonds for various water-related programs. First, the measure allows the state to sell \$7.1 billion in

additional bonds. Second, the measure redirects \$425 million in unsold bonds that voters previously approved for water and other environmental uses. The state repays these bonds, with interest, using the state's General Fund. (The General Fund is the state's main operating account, which pays for education, prisons, health care, and other services.)

Uses of Funds

As shown in Figure 1 (see next page) and described below, the bond measure provides funding to (1) increase water supplies, (2) protect and restore watersheds, (3) improve water quality, and (4) increase flood protection. The bond money would be available to state agencies for various projects and programs, as well as for loans and grants to local governments, private water companies, mutual water companies (where water users own the company), Indian tribes, and nonprofit organizations.

Funds for Water Supplies (\$4.2 Billion). About \$4.2 billion would fund projects intended to improve water supplies, in order to make more water available for use. Specifically, the bond includes:

- ***\$2.7 Billion for New Water Storage.*** The bond includes \$2.7 billion to pay up to half of the cost of new water storage projects, including dams and projects that replenish groundwater. This funding could only be used to cover costs related to the "public benefits" associated with water storage projects, including restoring habitats, improving water quality, reducing damage from floods, responding to emergencies, and improving recreation. Local governments and other entities that rely on the water storage project would be responsible for paying the remaining project costs. These costs would generally be associated with private benefits (such as water provided to their customers).
- ***\$810 Million for Regional Water Projects.*** The bond also provides \$810 million for regional projects that are included in specific plans developed by local communities. These projects are intended to improve water supplies, as well as provide other benefits, such as habitat for fish and flood protection. The amount provided includes \$510 million for allocations to specific regions throughout the state and \$300 million for specific types of water supplies, including projects and plans to manage runoff from storms in urban areas and water conservation projects and programs.

Analysis by the Legislative Analyst

Continued

- **\$725 Million for Water Recycling.** The bond includes \$725 million for projects that treat wastewater or saltwater so that it can be used later. For example, the funds could be used to test new treatment technology, build a desalination plant, and build pipes to deliver recycled water.

Funds to Protect and Restore Watersheds (\$1.5 Billion). These monies would fund projects intended to protect and restore watersheds and other habitat throughout the state. This funding could be used to restore bodies of water that support native, threatened, or endangered species of fish and wildlife; purchase land for conservation purposes; reduce the risk of wildfires in watersheds; and purchase water to support wildlife. These funds include \$515 million to restore watersheds in designated regions around the state (including \$140 million specifically for projects in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta [Delta]) and \$475 million to pay for certain state commitments to fund environmental restorations. The remaining funding would be available to applicants statewide for programs

that restore habitat and watersheds (\$305 million) and increase the amount of water flowing in rivers and streams, for example by buying water (\$200 million).

Funds to Improve Groundwater and Surface Water Quality (\$1.4 Billion). The bond includes over \$1.4 billion to improve groundwater and surface water quality. More than half of this funding (\$800 million) would be used for projects to clean up and prevent polluted groundwater that is, or has been, a source of drinking water. The remaining funds would be available to (1) improve access to clean drinking water (\$260 million), (2) help small communities pay for wastewater treatment (\$260 million), and (3) provide grants to local governments to develop and implement plans to manage their groundwater supply and quality (\$100 million).

Funds for Flood Protection (\$395 Million). The bond provides \$395 million for projects that both protect the state from floods and improve fish and wildlife habitat. While \$100 million of this funding

Water Supply	\$4,235
• Dams and groundwater storage—cost share associated with public benefits.	\$2,700
• Regional projects to achieve multiple water-related improvements (includes conservation and capturing rainwater).	810
• Water recycling, including desalination.	725
Watershed Protection and Restoration	\$1,495
• Watershed restoration and habitat protection in designated areas around the state.	\$515
• Certain state commitments for environmental restorations.	475
• Restoration programs available to applicants statewide.	305
• Projects to increase water flowing in rivers and streams.	200
Improvements to Groundwater and Surface Water Quality	\$1,420
• Prevention and cleanup of groundwater pollution.	\$800
• Drinking water projects for disadvantaged communities.	260
• Wastewater treatment in small communities.	260
• Local plans and projects to manage groundwater.	100
Flood Protection	\$395
• Repairs and improvements to levees in the Delta.	\$295
• Flood protection around the state.	100
Total	\$7,545

Analysis by the Legislative Analyst

Continued

could be spent on flood control projects anywhere in the state, \$295 million is set aside to improve levees or respond to flood emergencies in the Delta.

Requirements for Allocating and Spending Funds

How Projects Would Be Selected. The measure includes several provisions that would affect how specific projects are chosen to receive bond funds. The California Water Commission—an existing state planning and regulatory agency—would choose which water storage projects would be funded with the \$2.7 billion provided in the bond for that use. The Commission would not have to go through the state budget process to spend these funds. For all other funding provided in the measure, the Legislature generally would allocate money annually to state agencies in the state budget process. While the Legislature could provide state agencies with some direction on what types of projects or programs could be chosen, the measure states that the Legislature cannot allocate funding to specific projects. Instead, state agencies would choose the projects. In addition, none of the funding in the measure can be used to build a canal or tunnel to move water around the Delta.

Requirements for Matching Funds. Of the \$7.5 billion in funds made available by the measure, \$5.7 billion is available only if recipients—mostly local governments—provide funding to support the projects. This matching requirement only applies to the water supply and water quality projects funded by the measure. The required share of matching funds is generally at least 50 percent of the total cost of the project, although this can be waived or reduced in some cases.

Fiscal Effects

Fiscal Effects on State Government. This measure would allow the state to borrow up to \$7.1 billion by selling additional general obligation bonds to investors, who would be repaid with interest using the state's general tax revenues. We assume that (1) the interest rate for the bonds would average just over 5 percent, (2) they would be sold over the next ten years, and (3) they would be repaid over a 30-year period. Based on these assumptions, the cost to taxpayers to repay the bonds would **average about \$360 million annually over the next 40 years.** This amount is about one-third of a percent of the state's current General Fund budget. We

assume that redirecting \$425 million in unsold bonds from previously approved measures would not increase the state's anticipated debt payments. This is because, without this measure, these bonds likely would have been sold in the future to support other projects. (For more information on the state's use of bonds and the impact of this proposed bond measure on the state's budget, see "Overview of State Bond Debt" later in this guide.)

Fiscal Effects on Local Governments. The availability of state bond funds for local water projects would affect how much local governments, primarily water agencies, spend on water projects. In many cases, the availability of state bonds could reduce local spending. For example, this would occur in cases where state bond funds replaced monies that local governments would have spent on projects anyway. Local savings would also occur in cases where the availability of state bond funds allowed local governments to build projects that reduced operating costs, such as by increasing efficiency or using a new water source that allows them to purchase less water.

However, in some cases, state bond funds could increase spending on water projects by local governments. For example, the availability of bond funds might encourage some local governments to build additional or substantially larger projects than they would otherwise. These projects could also be more expensive to operate.

On balance, we estimate that this measure would result in savings to local governments on water-related projects. These savings would likely average a couple hundred million dollars annually over the next few decades.

An individual local government might use these savings in various ways. For example, it might use the savings to build other new facilities or for maintenance and repair of existing facilities. In other cases, a government might use the savings to keep water rates lower than they otherwise would be by delaying or reducing future rate increases. Since the amount of statewide savings in any given year is likely to be small relative to the overall amount spent by local governments on water, any effect on rates would likely be small for most ratepayers.

Visit <http://cal-access.sos.ca.gov> for details about money contributed in this contest.