

# AQUALLIANCE

DEFENDING NORTHERN CALIFORNIA WATERS



## Press Release

June 24, 2026

### AquAlliance, Central Delta WA, and CSPA Challenge Water Transfers

Chico, CA. AquAlliance, Central Delta Water Agency, and the California Sportfishing Protection Alliance (plaintiffs) filed a lawsuit challenging the 2026/2027 North-to-South Water Transfers proposed by San Luis Delta Mendota Water Authority (SLDMWA or agency) on June 12, 2026. The litigation alleges that the agency relied upon a California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Addendum to the Long Term Water Transfers Environmental Impact Report as environmental review for the new, distinct Project, for which no prior EIR or negative declaration has ever been prepared.

The proposed 2026/2027 water transfer program may transfer up to 250,000 acre-feet through “groundwater substitution and/or stored reservoir release actions” by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (Bureau) and water districts with the majority of the water coming from north of the Delta.<sup>1</sup> The plaintiff’s petition states: “The Addendum fails CEQA in numerous, independent, and overlapping respects: the Project’s reliance on it is unlawful; it employs an improper review tier; its mitigation measures are deferred, unenforceable, and weaker than those of the prior environmental impact report (EIR) without justification; the environmental analysis of biological resources, land subsidence, and water quality is inadequate and unsupported; required analyses of alternatives, cumulative impacts, Indian Trust Assets and environmental justice are wholly absent; and changed circumstances and new information regarding threatened and endangered species require supplemental environmental review.”

AquAlliance’s Executive Director, Barbara Vlamis, explained, “The agency and the Bureau have tried for almost two decades to extract more water from northern California for mostly agricultural buyers south of the Delta with junior claims to water. Water transfers once involved more land fallowing in the Sacramento Valley that caused impacts to local economies, but the lust for ever more water expanded to include groundwater substitution transfers that have harmed groundwater dependent farmers, communities, local streams, ecosystems, wildlife, and the very structure of the aquifer basins through land collapse (subsidence). AquAlliance was formed to combat these abuses.”

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<sup>1</sup> SLDMWA 2025. *ADDENDUM TO THE FINAL LONG-TERM WATER TRANSFERS EIR FOR EVALUATION OF 2026-2027 NORTH TO SOUTH WATER TRANSFERS*. “The transfers could originate from Sellers in Butte, Colusa, El Dorado, Glenn, Merced, Nevada, Placer, Sacramento, San Joaquin, Shasta, Sierra, Stanislaus, Sutter, Tehama, Yolo, and Yuba counties.” p. 1.

Dante John Nomellini, Manager and Counsel for the Central Delta Water Agency explains “This is just another effort by the federal water exporters and the State and Federal agencies to circumvent the promises including those of the Bureau of Reclamation and law for protection of the watersheds of origin ‘that no water will be diverted which will be needed for the full development of all the irrigable lands within the watershed, nor will there be water needed for municipal and industrial purposes or future maintenance of fish and wildlife resources.’ ”

“This perfunctory environmental document is a fig leaf for a bankrupt water budget,” asserted Chris Shutes, Executive Director of California Sportfishing Protection Alliance. “Draining the aquifers of the Sacramento Valley to fill the insatiable demand for water in the San Joaquin Valley makes no more sense than catching the last salmon to prolong the life of the fishing industry.”

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## Background

### **AquAlliance's 11-Year History of North-to-South Water Transfers**

#### **A) 2015 10-Year Water Transfer Program History**

USBR and SLDMWA (Agencies) approved a Program that could send up to 600,000 acre-feet of Sacramento Valley water south of the Delta – each year.<sup>2</sup> When combined with additional state approved transfers, the total could have been over 800,000 acre-feet each year. With history as a guide, half of the transfer water would have come from groundwater substitution transfers.<sup>3</sup> Although widely opposed by NorthState residents and local government, the Agencies moved forward approving the use of groundwater substitution, fallowing, reservoir releases, and conservation to make the transfers possible. The Agencies proposed a thin veneer for mitigating impacts that depends only on monitoring the stressed hydrologic systems (groundwater, streams, and rivers). AquAlliance and partners sued in 2015 and received a favorable ruling in 2018. Successful claims included:

##### 1. CEQA

1. The absence of performance standards for groundwater mitigation measure.
2. The FEIS/EIR failure to mitigate for land subsidence.
3. The inadequate cumulative biological impact analysis regarding reduced delta outflow.
4. The FEIS/EIR's failure to analyze impacts to the giant garter snake and propose mitigation.<sup>4</sup>

##### 2. NEPA

1. Failure to evaluate the effectiveness of groundwater mitigation.
2. Climate change.

#### **B) U.S. Bureau of Reclamation /SLDMWA Long Term Water Transfer Program**

2015 Project - <https://www.usbr.gov/mp/cvp/long-term.html>

2019 Project - [http://www.usbr.gov/mp/nepa/nepa\\_projdetails.cfm?Project\\_ID=18361](http://www.usbr.gov/mp/nepa/nepa_projdetails.cfm?Project_ID=18361)

#### **C) 2026/2027 North-to South Water Transfer CEQA and NEPA Documents**

<https://sldmwa.org/water-transfers/>

[https://www.usbr.gov/mp/nepa/nepa\\_project\\_details.php?Project\\_ID=56209](https://www.usbr.gov/mp/nepa/nepa_project_details.php?Project_ID=56209)

#### **D) Maps through 2021 illustrating the groundwater conditions in the Sacramento Valley.**

<https://data.cnra.ca.gov/dataset/northern-sacramento-valley-groundwater-elevation-change-maps>

DWR stopped producing these maps following the creation of Groundwater Sustainability Plans mandated by the legislature.

#### **E) AquAlliance maps of subsidence in the Sacramento Valley.**

Scroll to the bottom at <https://aqualliance.net/ground-water-issues/subsidence/subsidence-in-colusa-glenn-tehama-sacramento-counties-2015-2024/>.

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<sup>2</sup> 600,000 acre-feet each year for 10 years is equivalent to what a city of 100,000 people would use in 300 years.

<sup>3</sup> Groundwater substitution transfers take place when a water district sells its river water that is normally used to irrigate rice and instead continues growing rice by pumping well water. The grower makes money on both the water sale and the rice that is grown

<sup>4</sup> "This type of failure was deemed dangerous because the lack of analysis and findings about the extent of impacts makes it impossible to determine if the mitigation measures are sufficient."