

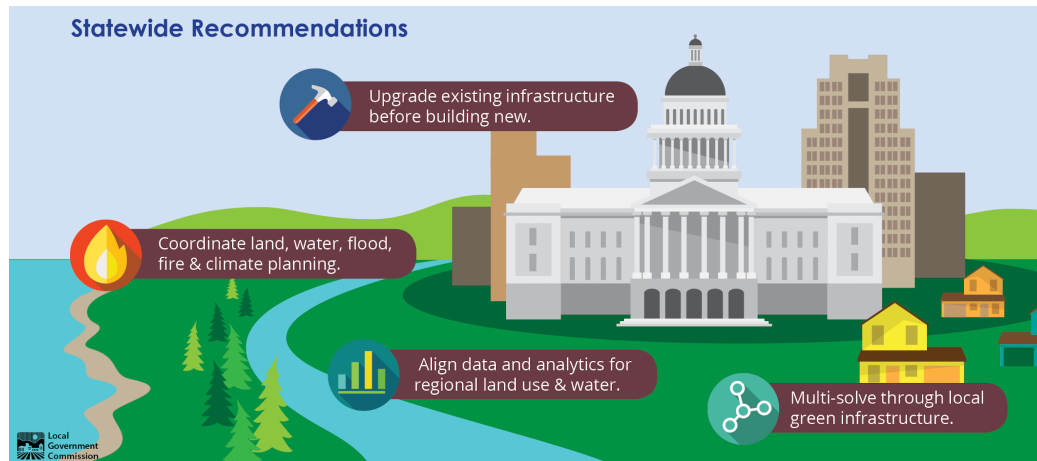
California Water and Land Use Integration: A Changing Environment

Building a resilient California is the name of the game for Governor Newsom as he addresses everything from economic growth to natural resource management. Newsom's most recent water-focused efforts aim to prepare the state for a myriad of future scenarios, particularly as climate change continues to exacerbate California's drought, fire, and flood cycles. The California's Fourth Climate Change Assessment shows that wildfires greater than 25,000 acres could become 50% more frequent by the end of the century, and climate projections for water-related events similarly indicate an increase in severe droughts and floods in California's future. In response to these threats, Governor Newsom's recent "water resilience portfolio" pushes beyond traditional segregated, single-issue water management to contend for a more comprehensive and integrated approach, which considers the uncertainty and variability of both water supply and water quality.

The April 29th, 2019 Executive Order N-10-19 directs state agencies to reassess Governor Brown's 2016 California Water Action Plan and develop a water resilience portfolio that "meet[s] the needs of California's communities, economy, and environment through the 21st century." Newsom outlines the need for greater coordinated regional efforts, and increased investment in conservation, water supply reliability, water quality, reuse, and watershed health to meet the demands of a growing population. Implementing the Executive Order will require a major paradigm shift for water management and governance in California. Our current fragmented system of state agencies, local governments, tribes, and special-purpose water districts will need to collaborate with the environmental, academic, business, and labor sectors to develop a resilient water future for all Californians. While we have made some progress on integration and collaboration over the past decade, we still have a long way to go.

The historical disconnect between water management and land-use planning in California is a significant barrier to achieving our resiliency goals. Aligning local, regional, and statewide land-use and water management planning, will transform our communities statewide. The effects of climate change most severely impact California's historically underserved groups, who are the least prepared to adapt. It is important, now more than ever, to ensure that underrepresented communities have a seat at the table when making decisions and implementing local solutions.

Fortunately, guidance and resources exist to support this effort. A recent report by the Local Government Commission provides both statewide and regional recommendations to bridge the gap between water and land-use planning, while focusing on the equitable engagement of all stakeholders impacted by water land-use decisions.



The four statewide recommendations offer solutions that apply to all communities across California. If implemented, they will transform how we manage our water systems, approach new development, and equitably engage all community members, especially the most vulnerable groups.

1. We can actively choose to prioritize existing underserved communities before immediately opting for new development on open land, which increases sprawl.

The City of Fresno’s General Plan and development code, for the first time, limit the expansion of growth on undeveloped areas and redirect it to existing areas, prioritizing infill development and establishing minimum rather than maximum densities. This approach can be used statewide to increase density and prevent further loss of land.

2. Ensure state and local investments are directed toward multi-solving through green infrastructure projects developed at local scales with robust community engagement.

Los Angeles County Public Works has done a great job of “multi-solving” through their proposed East Los Angeles Sustainable Median Project which will upgrade existing medians to address runoff, provide recreational opportunities, and educate the community about the benefits of green infrastructure. All scales of government can follow this example to promote projects that are integrated and multi-purpose in order to maximize benefits for all.

3. Incentivize or require cross-sector, coordinated planning and management of land use, water, fire prevention, flood mitigation and climate adaptation.

Regional Climate Collaboratives provide venues for important cross-jurisdictional and cross-sector collaboration. The San Diego Regional Climate Collaborative organizes regular workshops and trainings for local decision-makers on climate related topics of interest, and provides direct technical assistance to jurisdictions in the region. Coordinated planning statewide will increase California's resilience to climate change impacts.

4. Require additional sophistication and alignment (better data and analytics) of growth projections and coordinated regional planning for both land-use planning and water-management agencies at the watershed scale.

The San Joaquin Valley Greenprint is a comprehensive, interactive database that catalogs current conditions and trends related to the region's resources. The maps and data collected for the Greenprint are publicly available, and are presented in an easy-to-use online tool. A statewide database of this nature would highlight California's interconnected natural resources distributed across political boundaries, while also revealing the influence of population growth, shifting land-use practices, resource limitations, and changing climate.

California should strive to integrate water and land use planning on a statewide scale - but regional collaboration is key to getting there. The report's regional strategies provide a roadmap for implementing the statewide recommendations at all levels: locally, regionally, and statewide. Local agencies can take more direct action, and more equitably engage local groups, to achieve maximum benefit for all.

Many solutions exist to solve the interconnected issues created by climate change. If California residents and leaders work together, across sectors and regions, we can collectively strengthen our communities while transforming our water systems and unsustainable land use practices. Read the full LGC report and learn more here: www.lgc.org/water-and-land-use

