



**SAWPA COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
JUNE 17, 2025**

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT

Mike Gardner, Chair, Western Municipal Water District
Gil Botello, Vice Chair, San Bernardino Valley Municipal Water District
Philip Paule, Eastern Municipal Water District
Jasmin Hall, Inland Empire Utilities Agency
Denis Bilodeau, Orange County Water District [via – zoom; left at 9:58 a.m.]
Fred Jung, Alternate, Orange County Water District [via – zoom]

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT

None

**COMMISSIONERS PRESENT;
NON-VOTING**

T. Milford Harrison, San Bernardino Valley Municipal Water District
[via – zoom]

STAFF PRESENT

Jeff Mosher, Shavonne Turner, Dean Unger, John Leete, Rick Whetsel, Ian Achimore, Alison Lewis, Natalia Gonzalez, Marie Jauregui, Emily Fuentes, Zyanya Ramirez, Linda Kim, Haley Gohari

OTHERS PRESENT

Thomas S. Bunn, Lagerlof, LLP; Nick Kanetis, Eastern Municipal Water District; Leighanne Kirk, Eastern Municipal Water District; Craig Miller, Western Municipal Water District; Carly Pierce, Western Municipal Water District; Mallory O'Connor, Western Municipal Water District; Lisa Haney, Orange County Water District; Adekunle Ojo, San Bernardino Valley Municipal Water District; John Kennedy; Orange County Water District; JPW Communication; Abby Taylor Silva, Kahn, Soares & Conway; Tess Dunham, Kahn, Soares & Conway; Edgar Tellez Foster, Chino Basin Watermaster; Robin Glenney, City of Riverside

The Regular Meeting of the Santa Ana Watershed Project Authority Commission was called to order at 9:30 a.m. by Chair Mike Gardner on behalf of Eastern Municipal Water District, Board Room, 2270 Trumble Road, Perris, CA 92570, Commissioner Denis Bilodeau at 601 N. Ross Street, Room 327, Santa Ana, CA 92701, and Fred Jung at 303 W. Commonwealth Avenue, Fullerton, CA 92832.

1. CALL TO ORDER

2. ROLL CALL

An oral roll call was duly noted and recorded by the Clerk of the Board.

3. PUBLIC COMMENTS

There were no public comments.

4. ITEMS TO BE ADDED OR DELETED

There were no items to be added or deleted.

5. CONSENT CALENDAR

A. APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES: MAY 20, 2025

Recommendation: Approve as posted.

MOVED, to approve the Consent Calendar as posted.

Result:	Adopted by Roll Call Vote
Motion/Second:	Paule/Botello
Ayes:	Bilodeau, Botello, Gardner, Hall, Paule
Nays:	None
Abstentions:	None
Absent:	None

6. WORKSHOP DISCUSSION AGENDA

A. PERRIS NORTH BASIN GROUNDWATER PREVENTION AND REMEDIATION PROGRAM

Leighanne Kirk, of Eastern Municipal Water District (EMWD), provided a presentation on Perris North Basin Groundwater Prevention and Remediation Program.

The Perris North Basin Groundwater Prevention and Remediation Program, managed by EMWD, aims to remediate nonpoint source contamination in the San Jacinto Groundwater Basin, particularly addressing nitrate and perchlorate pollution. Funded through Proposition 1 with over \$62 million secured out of a total \$165 million program cost, the initiative includes construction of six groundwater wells, raw water pipelines in three phases, a centralized treatment facility, and 14 monitoring wells. The treatment process incorporates granular activated carbon and ion exchange systems to remove contaminants, with brine byproducts managed via truck haul to the Inland Empire Brine Line. This effort is projected to restore up to 6,000 AFY of municipal water and produce an additional 3,470 AFY of potable supply while protecting currently uncontaminated areas.

Stakeholder engagement has been ongoing since the project's inception in 2020, including collaboration with multiple local, state, and federal entities. Construction phases concluded by April 2025 and well testing and monitoring are scheduled to begin in mid-2025. A comprehensive community outreach strategy accompanies technical work, using direct mail, social media, and public presentations. Baseline water sampling is set for August/September, and long-term monitoring will transition from quarterly to semi-annual testing. The Program is closely following a state-approved schedule and remains on track for final reimbursement and completion milestones. There was no discussion.

This item is to receive and file; no action was taken on agenda item no. 6.A.

7. NEW BUSINESS

A. COLA AND MERIT POOL INCREASES – FY 2025-26 (CM#2025.45)

Karen Williams provided a verbal report on the Cost-of-Living Adjustments (COLA) and Merit Pool increases for FY 2025-26 and referenced the memo contained in the agenda packet on pages 15-17.

The recommendation is a 5% Merit Pool and a 2.53% COLA increase. These recommendations are based on regional Consumer Price Index (CPI) data, specifically the Riverside-San Bernardino-Ontario index, which reflects a 2.53% inflation rate as of March. The proposed merit pool exceeds prior years, where an average of about 3.4% was awarded from a 4% Merit Pool.

Comparative data from SAWPA's five member agencies shows varied COLA and merit increases, with some still in negotiation. SAWPA's approach aims to remain competitive while being fiscally responsible. The budget for FY 2025-26 has sufficient funds to accommodate both the COLA and Merit pool, with a total of \$365,581 in recommended increases falling below the \$389,521 budgeted for salary adjustments. The recommendations align with both market conditions and internal fiscal planning. There was no discussion.

MOVED, to approve a 5% Merit Pool and a 2.53% COLA increase for FY 2025-26.

Result:	Adopted by Roll Call Vote
Motion/Second:	Paule/Hall
Ayes:	Bilodeau, Botello, Gardner, Hall, Paule
Nays:	None
Abstentions:	None
Absent:	None

B. BASIN MONITORING PROGRAM TASK FORCE REGULATORY FACILITATOR (CM#2025.46)

Ian Achimore provided a presentation on the Basin Monitoring Program Task Force Regulatory Facilitator, contained in the agenda packet on pages 23-39.

Staff recommend authorizing the General Manager to execute Task Order KSC374-04 with Kahn, Soares & Conway, LLP for up to \$148,900. This contract would provide regulatory and strategic support for the Basin Monitoring Program Task Force through FYE 2026 and 2027. The Task Force, composed of 20 water agency members, was established following the 2004 Basin Plan Amendment and is responsible for monitoring salt (as total dissolved solids) and nutrients (as total inorganic nitrogen) in the Santa Ana River watershed. Key ongoing efforts include the Reach 3 Special Study, annual water quality reporting, and addressing groundwater data gaps.

Kahn, Soares & Conway (KSC) has long served as the Task Force's regulatory facilitator, and their continued involvement is unanimously supported by Task Force members. Their responsibilities include drafting regulatory documents, facilitating Basin Plan Amendments, and coordinating directly with the Santa Ana Regional Water Quality Control Board and the State Water Board. The proposed scope of work aims to strengthen regulatory relationships, ensure compliance, and advance the region's water quality goals through effective collaboration and regulatory navigation.

Commissioner Botello emphasized the importance of the Task Force's work in supporting permitting efforts within the watershed, noting that KSC plays a vital role in maintaining focus and progress. He acknowledged KSC's strength in fostering key relationships that contribute to the Task Force's overall effectiveness.

MOVED, to authorize the General Manager to execute Task Order KSC374-04 with Kahn, Soares & Conway, LLP for an amount not to exceed \$148,900 to provide strategic and regulatory support for the period Fiscal Years Ending 2026 and 2027 in support of the Basin Monitoring program Task Force.

Result:	Adopted by Roll Call Vote
Motion/Second:	Botello/Hall
Ayes:	Bilodeau, Botello, Gardner, Hall, Paule
Nays:	None
Abstentions:	None
Absent:	None

C. CONSULTANT TASK ORDER APPROVALS FOR THE EMERGING CONSTITUENTS PROGRAM TASK FORCE (CM#2025.47)

Emily Fuentes and Ian Achimore provided a presentation on the Consultant Task Order Approvals for the Emerging Constituents Program Task Force, contained in the agenda packet on pages 49-70.

Staff provided an overview of the Emerging Constituents Program Task Force (EC Task Force), established in 2008 and composed of 15 water agencies across the Santa Ana River Watershed.

The Task Force was formed under a cooperative agreement with the Santa Ana Regional Water Quality Control Board to avoid the imposition of formal regulations on imported water recharge related to emerging substances such as pharmaceuticals, pesticides, and food additives that currently lack water quality standards. Since its inception, the Task Force has successfully conducted voluntary water quality studies that have contributed to minimizing the likelihood of such regulatory actions, while also adapting to advancements in detection technologies that now identify these constituents at much lower concentrations.

To support its efforts, the EC Task Force has contracted with a regulatory strategy firm since 2010 and a public relations firm since 2012. These contracts facilitate engagement with regulatory agencies, integration of expert knowledge and regulatory updates into meetings, and public outreach to promote tap water safety and resource conservation. The dual approach helps EC Task Force members stay ahead of potential regulations, communicate the safety and quality of the water supply to the public, and respond proactively to misinformation. The EC Task Force continues to operate collaboratively, representing a broad coalition of water agencies including cities, water districts, and regional treatment authorities throughout the watershed.

Commissioner Botello raised questions regarding the budget allocated for public messaging and requested clarification on how messaging strategies are developed in coordination with JPW Communications LLC (JPW). He emphasized the importance of ensuring that messaging reflects the needs of the watershed and is effectively shared across SAWPA's member agencies. In response, Emily Fuentes explained that the EC PR Task Group, composed of communications staff from member agencies, collaboratively reviews and approves all content, including blog posts, videos, and social media materials. Strategies are developed collectively and include testing different formats such as reels, carousel posts, and shorter blog content to increase engagement and reduce page abandonment. She noted that tactics like captioning and content timing are continually refined for better results and confirmed that member agency communications teams have been actively involved and supportive.

Commissioner Paule then inquired about language accessibility, stressing the need to ensure that campaigns like "Trust the Tap" reach immigrant communities who may have lower trust in tap water due to experiences in their countries of origin. Ms. Fuentes responded that materials have previously been translated into several languages, including Spanish, and noted that she would follow up on the full list. Commissioner Botello echoed about the need for a strategic approach, recommending a focus on the most spoken languages within the service area to ensure effectiveness and manageability. Ms. Fuentes acknowledged the recommendation and expressed appreciation for the guidance.

Commissioner Bilodeau left the meeting at 9:58 a.m. during Agenda Item No. 7.C, and Commissioner Jung assumed his role as the representative for OCWD.

MOVED, to approve the following related to the Emerging Constituents Program Task Force for the period Fiscal years Ending 2026 and 2027:

1. Task Order KSC392-04 with regulatory strategy firm Kahn, Soares & Conway, LLP for an amount not-to-exceed \$65,070, and
2. General Service Agreement and Task Order JPW392-03 with public relations firm JPW Communications LLC for an amount not-to-exceed \$134,624.

Result:	Adopted by Roll Call Vote
Motion/Second:	Paule/Botello
Ayes:	Jung, Botello, Gardner, Hall, Paule
Nays:	None
Abstentions:	None
Absent:	Bilodeau

8. **INFORMATIONAL REPORTS**

Recommendation: Receive for Information.

A. **CASH TRANSACTIONS REPORT – APRIL 2025**

Presenter: Karen Williams

B. **INTER-FUND BORROWING – APRIL 2025 (CM#2025.48)**

Presenter: Karen Williams

C. **PERFORMANCE INDICATORS/FINANCIAL REPORTING – APRIL 2025 (CM#2025.49)**

Presenter: Karen Williams

D. **PROJECT AGREEMENT 25 – OWOW FUND – FINANCIAL REPORT, APRIL 2025**

Presenter: Karen Williams

E. **PROJECT AGREEMENT 26 – ROUNDTABLE FUND – FINANCIAL REPORT, APRIL 2025**

Presenter: Karen Williams

F. **THIRD QUARTER FYE 2025 EXPENSE REPORT**

- General Manager
- Staff

Presenter: Karen Williams

G. **STATE LEGISLATIVE REPORT**

Presenter: Jeff Mosher

H. **CHAIR'S COMMENTS/REPORT**

There were no Chair's Comments/Report.

I. **COMMISSIONERS' COMMENTS**

Commissioner Botello asked if the interviews for Legal Services RFQ was going to take place at San Bernardino Valley Municipal Water District. Mr. Mosher clarified that the interviews would take place at the Western Municipal Water District.

J. **COMMISSIONERS' REQUEST FOR FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS**

There were no requests for future agenda items.

Chair Gardner recessed the meeting at 10:35 a.m. for Closed Session.

9. **CLOSED SESSION**

A. **PUBLIC EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE EVALUATION**

Title: General Manager

10. CLOSED SESSION REPORT

Chair Gardner resumed the Open Session at 11:55 a.m. and Legal Counsel, Thomas Bunn reported that the SAWPA Commission had met in Closed Session to discuss the performance of the General Manager, with a focus on certain communications from employees. The Commission determined that a personnel investigation is necessary. The following action was taken during the Closed Session, on Agenda Item No. 9.A.

MOVED, to authorize the following:

1. Legal Counsel is authorized to engage and coordinate with an independent third-party personnel investigator.
2. An Ad Hoc Committee will be formed to act as a liaison between the third-party investigator, the SAWPA Commission, and Staff. Chair Mike Gardner and Commissioner Jasmin Hall will serve on this committee.
3. General Manager Jeff Mosher will be placed on paid administrative leave, and Karen Williams will assume the role of Interim General Manager.
4. Recruitment for the Assistant General Manager for the Planning Services position will be suspended.

Result:	Adopted by Roll Call Vote
Motion/Second:	Botello/Paule
Ayes:	Jung, Botello, Gardner, Hall, Paule
Nays:	None
Abstentions:	None
Absent:	None

11. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business for review, Chair Gardner adjourned the meeting at 11:57 a.m.

Approved at a Regular Meeting of the Santa Ana Watershed Project Authority Commission on Tuesday, July 1, 2025.

Signed by:

Mike Gardner

5A149ABF4DAF4C0...

Mike Gardner, Chair

Attest:

DocuSigned by:

Sara Villa

722360038ACC422

Sara Villa, Clerk of the Board