



**SAWPA COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
August 5, 2025**

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT

Mike Gardner, Chair, Western Municipal Water District
Gil Botello, Vice Chair, San Bernardino Valley Municipal Water District
Philip E. Paule, Eastern Municipal Water District
Jasmin Hall, Inland Empire Utilities Agency [via – zoom]
Denis Bilodeau, Orange County Water District [via – zoom]

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT

None

**COMMISSIONERS PRESENT;
NON-VOTING**

T. Milford Harrison, Alternate, San Bernardino Valley Municipal Water District
Fred Jung, Alternate, Orange County Water District [via – zoom]

STAFF PRESENT

Karen Williams, Shavonne Turner, David Ruhl, Dean Unger, John Leete, Ian Achimore, Sara Villa, Alison Lewis, Natalia Gonzalez, Marie Jauregui, Emily Fuentes, Zyanya Ramirez, Rick Whetsel, Daniel Vasquez, Haley Gohari

OTHERS PRESENT

Thomas S. Bunn, Lagerlof, LLP; Carly Pierce, Western Municipal Water District; Craig Miller, Western Municipal Water District; Mallory O'Connor, Western Municipal Water District; Adekunle Ojo, San Bernardino Valley Municipal Water District; Alliah Smith, San Bernardino Valley Municipal Water District; Gene Hernandez; Yorba Linda Water District; Aaron Echols, Inland Empire Resource Conservation District; Eugene Fields

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 San Bernardino Valley Municipal Water District's Board Room, 380 E. Vanderbilt Way, San Bernardino, CA 92408 and Commissioner Denis Bilodeau at 601 N. Ross Street, Room 327, Santa Ana, CA 92701, and Commissioner Jasmin Hall at 10360 Sun City Boulevard, Las Vegas, NV 89134.

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: JULY 15, 2025

Recommendation: Approve as posted.

B. TREASURER'S REPORT: JUNE 2025

Recommendation: Approve as posted.

MOVED, to approve the Consent Calendar as posted.

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

6. **NEW BUSINESS**

A. **ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS FOR THE ARUNDO DONAX REMOVAL IN THE SANTA ANA RIVER BASIN HEADWATERS PROJECT (CM#2025.56)**

Ian Achimore provided a presentation on the Alternative Options for the Santa Ana River Basin Headwaters Project, contained in the agenda packet on pages 27-61.

At the May 20, 2025, Commission meeting, staff were directed to present follow-up information on herbicide use, specifically regarding glyphosate-based products, and explore alternative treatment methods for Arundo donax removal.

Mr. Achimore provided background on the project, including a previously proposed \$468,268 change order and subsequent Commission request for more treatment options. Two herbicides are currently used in the project: glyphosate and imazapyr, each with distinct roles in targeting Arundo.

Inland Empire Resource Conservation District (IERCD) has surveyed 14 project areas totaling approximately 10,000 acres in the upper watershed as part of ongoing efforts to control Arundo donax, within the 14 project areas that was originally anticipated at the start of the Project in 2022. Based on updated survey data and field observations, staff recommended the change order to revise the acreage extents of the Project Sites. These adjustments reflect more accurate mapping of *Arundo* occurrences within the project area's creeks, resulting in some site acreages increasing while others decreased.

Mr. Achimore outlined the herbicide application methods, mixture formulas (including surfactants and water), and site-specific practices. He explained that a combination of glyphosate and imazapyr yields more effective results than either used alone. Using only imazapyr is less effective and may require more frequent site visits and higher costs, potentially increasing removal costs by 2–3 times.

Mr. Achimore addressed herbicide regulations, including local and statewide restrictions and water quality protections. Integrated Pest Management (IPM) plans from other agencies, including those that classify herbicides like glyphosate and imazapyr as "last resort" options. Additionally, five alternative Arundo removal methods were discussed:

- Mechanical Removal – effective but labor-intensive and costly; may stimulate regrowth.
- Soil Solarization – ineffective on perennial species like Arundo; labor-intensive.
- Prescribed Burning – reduces biomass but not rhizomes; permits required.
- Biological Control – promising but still under research; may only suppress, not eliminate.
- Ecological Restoration – essential for long-term control but requires planning and resources.

Mr. Achimore emphasized that this project is distinct from others with IPM plans since it involves one-time invasive removal using special Proposition 13 funding, not long-term site maintenance. The options to move forward are the following:

- Change the project scope.
- Discontinue the project.
- Approve the proposed change order.
- Develop a detailed plan before proceeding with project.
- Further research project sites.
- Conduct other research before taking action.

Commissioner Botello noted that he brought this item to his Board and staff, and there are some strong-minded members when it comes to these issues, but the consensus was to stay the course and approve the change order. The Board felt that exploring alternatives wasn't worthwhile, as they offer limited value and success. What is being done now has proven results and is considered safe, and he supports the approval of the change order.

Mr. Achimore noted that the project has been on hold, as it's not currently an active time for implementation or Arundo removal. However, if the change order is approved, they'll move forward and ensure that work gets back on track and is implemented accordingly.

Commissioner Paule stated that the idea of using chemicals in an area with people living nearby raises real concerns. It's important we consider how this will be handled, it could help protect us from potential legal risks, especially if certain law firms try to find individuals and claim they were harmed.

Mr. Achimore said we don't own the site, nor do we have any agreements to access it. IERCD does have right-of-entry agreements, which require them to follow all applicable laws, hold the landowner harmless, and include other liability protections for the landowner. Additionally, IERCD is regulated by the Department of Pesticide Regulation, with enforcement carried out by the County Agricultural Commissioner. So, there are multiple layers of oversight when it comes to herbicide use in natural areas.

Commissioner Paule emphasized that the Santa Ana River is unique in that it has an unhoused population living in the area and wants to be cautious about exposing the agency to unnecessary legal risks in the future. He commended Mr. Achimore for the thorough presentation and agrees with continuing forward is the best course of action.

Chair Gardner said that his understanding is that glyphosate is more readily absorbed by people or plants while it's still in liquid form, and that once it dries, the risk of absorption drops significantly. It is the assumption that the personnel applying herbicide take care not to spray near or directly on people, and the risk is much lower once the herbicide has dried.

Aaron Echols of IERCD said that they're working upstream, where Arundo exists in scattered populations. Once efforts shift toward the lower watershed, where vegetation is much denser there will likely be a different conversation to determine who will lead the efforts.

Exposure is really the core concern when it comes to glyphosate and potential harm. All staff wear the required PPE, as listed on the herbicide label: eye protection, long sleeves, long pants, and specific gloves. With that, skin exposure is effectively eliminated unless something goes wrong. The other concern is inhalation, but their application methods (usually small backpack or hand sprayers) involve applying the herbicide directly to stumps or leaf tissue, not into the air. This minimizes any chance of the liquid becoming aerosolized, so inhalation risk is also very low.

Mr. Echols continued, regarding absorption: once glyphosate is applied to the plant, it begins to be absorbed and metabolized within about an hour. Staff carries small water sprayers so that if they accidentally spray a native plant, they can rinse it off within that window to prevent uptake. When glyphosate is applied to the ground, it binds quickly to the soil. It doesn't become completely inert, but it stays in place and begins breaking down through photodegradation and biodegradation. The risk of human exposure drops significantly once the herbicide has dried. If someone walks through a recently sprayed area before it dries, they could pick it up on their skin or clothing, but after it's dried, transfer from soil or plants is very unlikely.

Mr. Echols emphasized that when working in public areas, they also follow reentry guidelines listed on the herbicide label. These guidelines vary but usually range from 1 to 24 hours. While these products were developed for agriculture, where reentry often means harvesting crops, the principles still apply. For glyphosate, once it's dried, the risk of contact transfer is extremely low even for people or pets walking through the area. Signage will be put up to inform the public that the area is undergoing active treatment. The signs will stay in place as long as the herbicide is still wet, and we'll remove them once it has fully dried.

Commissioner Botello suggested that Mr. Achimore coordinate with Supervisor Karen Spiegel, she leads a group that works in the Santa Ana River watershed, not only cleaning up the river but also providing wraparound services for the unhoused population. As we move further, it could be a good idea to connect with that group.

Commissioner Bilodeau expressed concerns that Bayer, the manufacturer of glyphosate has already settled over 100,000 lawsuits for \$11 billion. These cases allege a link between glyphosate exposure and non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, and several jury verdicts have affirmed that connection. Another 65,000 lawsuits are still pending.

Although, it likely takes direct skin exposure to cause harm, there is still concern about the large-scale use of this chemical in the watershed. He's seen it purchased in 55-gallon drums, and while some agencies like Orange County Public Works may have stopped that practice, the risks remain. Given the potential liability, he cannot support the change order.

Commissioner Bilodeau emphasized that the photos of workers applying herbicide are not in hazmat suits, and because it must be sprayed directly on plant material, it often splashes back. He appreciates that alternatives are being explored, and he hopes staff find an effective option soon. But lawsuits are easy to file, and if we're funding the work, we could end up as defendants.

Commissioner Hall asked if there is a known level of glyphosate exposure that could potentially cause harm or lead to cancer? For example, if someone gets a small amount on their skin, inhales it, or is exposed occasionally, does that pose a significant risk? Or is it more about long-term, repeated exposure like what might happen to employees regularly applying it in the field?

Mr. Achimore stated that EPA and the State of California both evaluate exposure risks when approving herbicide use, and manufacturers are required to include this information on the product label. That includes short-term exposure limits like what could irritate eyes or throat as well as long-term risks, such as potential cancer links.

Mr. Echols added that the product label may not include specific exposure thresholds, but California's Prop 65 list does. Glyphosate is listed under Prop 65, which includes a no significant risk level of 1,100 micrograms per day. In their field applications, exposure is estimated at around 50 micrograms per day, about 22 times below that threshold. That's because their team isn't applying glyphosate all day.

If someone were applying glyphosate with a boom sprayer in an Ag setting without PPE, exposure could be much higher closer to that risk threshold. On acute effects (like skin contact), you'd look at the LD50, the dose needed to kill 50% of test animals. For glyphosate, it's 5,000 mg/kg of body weight. So, while there are long-term concerns at high exposure levels, both acute and chronic risks are considered low under field conditions.

Commissioner Botello noted that this is the second time a thorough presentation has been brought before the Commission and how this can be moved forward. Thomas Bunn, Legal Counsel advised that a vote cannot occur today because the item is listed as receive and file, meaning no action can be taken. To move forward, a Commission needs to request that it be placed as an action item on a future agenda.

Eugene Fields, a resident of Orange County, expressed concern about the long-term, chronic effects of glyphosate use. While he is not directly impacted, his friends are and is worried about repeated exposure from frequent spraying. He acknowledged glyphosate's cost-effectiveness but urged the commission to consider public and worker health alongside financial concerns, noting that some cities have already switched to safer alternatives.

Chair Gardner asked if the surfactant contains PFAS. Mr. Achimore noted he would come back with an answer if the surfactant contained PFAS. Mr. Echols noted there are over 700 glyphosate-containing products, each with different adjuvants and solvents, making safety comparisons complex. However, they intentionally use the safest formulation possible, especially in aquatic settings.

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

B. SANTA ANA RIVER CONSERVATION AND CONJUNCTIVE USE PROGRAM – WATER USE EFFICIENCY PROGRAM FINALIZATION (CM#2025.57)

Ian Achimore provided a presentation on the Santa Ana River Conservation and Conjunctive Use Program (SARCCUP) – Water Use Efficiency Program Finalization, contained in the agenda packet on pages 95-105.

A brief overview of SARCCUP was provided highlighting the closeout of a 3-year water use efficiency project implemented from 2021–2024, costing \$675,000. The goal was to help retail water agencies in the watershed comply with California regulations requiring landscape water budgets.

The project created 1,600 efficiency budgets in the upper watershed (Riverside & San Bernardino Counties) and 1,400 in Orange County, focusing on dedicated landscape meter customers (e.g., parks, rec centers). The work involved aerial imagery, weather data, and consultants (Eagle Aerial Solutions a subcontractor to NV5) with support from SAWPA, OCWD, MWDOC, and others.

The key outcomes are that each retail partner now has access to data portals to track usage (WaterView). Delivering raw data was helpful, and agencies not yet involved are seeking support to comply before 2027 enforcement deadline. There was no discussion.

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

7. INFORMATIONAL REPORTS

Recommendation: Receive for Information.

A. COMMUNICATIONS REPORT

Presenter: Karen Williams

B. GENERAL MANAGER REPORT

Karen Williams reported that SAWPA's Lobby construction is expected to be finished by the end of the month. If it's not completed in time, the first September meeting may be held at Inland Empire Utilities Agency. Further updates will be provided.

C. CHAIR'S COMMENTS/REPORT

There were no Chair comment received.

D. COMMISSIONERS' COMMENTS

There were no Commissioners' comments received.

E. COMMISSIONERS' REQUEST FOR FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

Commissioner Botello requested that the agenda item *Arundo Donax Removal in the Santa Ana River Basin Headwaters Project* be brought back for approval at the next Commission meeting.

Commissioner Bilodeau requested that it may be time to review commissioner compensation at SAWPA. It could be useful to look at how our member agencies handle compensation and consider whether any adjustments are appropriate. Ms. Williams noted that the compensation is brought annually, and last was in January. Chair Gardner noted if it turns out it hasn't been done recently; it will be added as a future agenda item.

Chair Gardner recessed the meeting at 10:34 a.m. for Closed Session.

8. CLOSED SESSION

A. PUBLIC EMPLOYEE APPOINTMENT

Title: General Counsel

9. CLOSED SESSION REPORT

Chair Gardner resumed the Open Session at 11:16 a.m. and Legal Counsel, Thomas S. Bunn reported that on August 4, 2025, the Commission received the written resignation of Jeffrey J. Mosher, effective immediately. The Commission formally accepted the resignation, and the Interim General Manager will continue to serve in that capacity.

10. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business for review, Chair Gardner adjourned the meeting at 11:17 a.m.

Approved at a Regular Meeting of the Santa Ana Watershed Project Authority Commission on Tuesday, August 19, 2025.

Signed by:

Mike Gardner

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Mike Gardner, Chair

Attest:

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Sara Villa

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Sara Villa, Clerk of the Board