



**SAWPA COMMISSION  
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES  
NOVEMBER 4, 2025**

**COMMISSIONERS PRESENT**

Mike Gardner, Chair, Western Municipal Water District  
Gil Botello, Vice Chair, San Bernardino Valley Municipal Water District  
Philip E. Paule, Secretary-Treasurer, Eastern Municipal Water District  
Jasmin A. Hall, Inland Empire Utilities Agency  
Denis Bilodeau, Orange County Water District

**COMMISSIONERS ABSENT**

None

**COMMISSIONERS PRESENT;  
NON-VOTING**

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

**STAFF PRESENT**

Karen Williams, David Ruhl, Shavonne Turner, John Leete, Alison Lewis, Haley Gohari, Ian Achimore, Rick Whetsel, Sara Villa, Zyanya Ramirez, Linda Kim

**OTHERS PRESENT**

Thomas S. Bunn, Lagerlof, LLP; John Kennedy, Orange County Water District; Lisa Haney, Orange County Water District; Jose Velasquez, San Bernardino Valley Municipal Water District; Carly Pierce, Western Municipal Water District; Derek Kawaii, Western Municipal Water District; Mallory O'Connor, Western Municipal Water District; Ryan Shaw, Western Municipal Water District; Jennifer Ares, Yucaipa Valley Water District

The Regular Meeting of the Santa Ana Watershed Project Authority Commission was called to order at 9:30 a.m. by Chair Gardner on behalf of the Santa Ana Watershed Project Authority, 11615 Sterling Avenue, Riverside, California.

**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: OCTOBER 7, 2025**

Recommendation: Approve as posted.

**B. TREASURER'S REPORT: SEPTEMBER 2025**

Recommendation: Approve as posted.

**MOVED**, to approve the Consent Calendar as posted.

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

## 6. **NEW BUSINESS**

### A. **SANTA ANA RIVER HABITAT SURVEY UPDATE (CM#2025.80)**

Ian Achimore provided a presentation titled Santa Ana River Habitat Survey Update, contained in the agenda packet on pages 21-36.

The 2025 Santa Ana River Habitat Survey marks the twentieth year of this long-term monitoring effort, which was completed just two weeks ago. An overview was provided of the data collected and outlining the next steps for the project. The survey continues to benefit from the collaboration and support of multiple partner agencies, including the City of Colton, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Orange County Water District (OCWD), the San Bernardino Valley Municipal Water District, and the Riverside County Regional Park and Open-Space District.

Mr. Achimore noted that the survey is led by the Santa Ana Sucker Conservation Team, a partnership among OCWD, the City of Riverside, and SAWPA. Established in 1998, the team focuses on habitat protection, education and public outreach, fish monitoring, habitat condition assessments, and research efforts aimed at supporting the federally listed Santa Ana sucker. This species depends on rocky substrates such as gravel, cobble, and boulder for both feeding and spawning, making riverbed composition a key focus of the annual habitat assessment.

Each year, the survey collects data from 116 fixed points along an 18-mile stretch of the middle Santa Ana River between Colton and Corona. At each point, surveyors visually assess a 4-meter-wide river transect, documenting substrate composition to classify habitat as good, marginal, or poor based on the proportion of suitable rocky substrate. The resulting data are used by watershed stakeholders, including water and regulatory agencies to guide habitat mitigation and restoration projects, evaluate their effectiveness, and inform regional conservation planning, such as the Upper Santa Ana River Habitat Conservation Plan.

The 2025 survey followed a minor storm on October 14 that produced about half an inch of rain. Elevated flows and turbidity delayed data collection for several days, and only 61 of the 116 points were surveyed. Of those, most were classified as poor habitat, with only a few marginal and one good site recorded. Access to 26 sites was restricted due to ongoing levee construction by the Riverside County Flood Control District and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, while 14 additional sites could not be surveyed safely because of high turbidity.

Mr. Achimore noted that this year's results are consistent with long-term trends. On average, about 80% of surveyed points have been classified as poor habitat. Preliminary analysis also suggests a relationship between downstream increases in turbidity and recent wildfire activity near the survey area, as identified through CAL FIRE data. This connection will be explored further using site photographs and additional water quality data.

Next steps include reviewing the 2025 findings with the Santa Ana Sucker Conservation Team, investigating the observed turbidity variations across the survey area, coordinating closely with flood control agencies on construction impacts, and planning a potential winter mini survey in early 2026 to assess post-storm conditions. The project team will also update the Riverwalk report and publish the data on SAWPA's website to continue supporting regional habitat management and conservation planning. There was no discussion.

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

**B. CLASSIFICATION AND COMPENSATION STUDY UPDATE (CM#2025.81)**

Karen Williams provided a presentation titled Classification and Compensation Study (Study) Update, contained in the agenda packet on pages 175-183.

Ralph Andersen and Associates were selected to conduct the Study on February 6, 2024. The purpose of the effort is to evaluate job classifications and compensation levels across comparable agencies to ensure equity and competitiveness in the labor market. The initial survey pool included 12 agencies selected based on labor market and organizational similarities. After receiving input from the member agencies, general managers, and HR staff, it was determined that some of the larger agencies were not ideal comparisons due to differences in size and structure. As a result, the City of Riverside, Riverside County, Irvine Ranch Water District, Eastern Municipal Water District, and Inland Empire Utilities Agency were removed from the pool. They were replaced with more comparable agencies, including the Big Bear Area Regional Water Authority, Water Facilities Authority, Encina Wastewater Authority, South Orange County Water Authority, San Elijo JPA, and Sweetwater Authority.

Following these adjustments, HR representatives from member agencies reviewed the work papers and job descriptions for accuracy and emphasized the importance of aligning the study with the organization's ongoing strategic planning efforts. After discussion with the general managers and HR teams, the consensus was to temporarily pause the study until the strategic plan is completed, allowing the classification and compensation recommendations to be more closely aligned with future organizational goals. This approach supports long-term precision, sustainability, and consistency in workforce planning.

Ms. Williams noted that the temporary delay is not expected to cause any operational issues. If salary adjustments become necessary in the interim, the General Manager has the authority to address them. Overall, salaries remain aligned with market conditions, though a few positions were found to be slightly below market levels, most of which are currently vacant. Moving forward, the focus will shift toward analyzing and comparing employee benefits, which were identified as a key area of interest once the strategic plan is complete.

The next steps are to finalize the strategic plan, anticipated for completion in the spring or summer of 2026, then resume the classification and compensation study with updated context and an emphasis on benefits comparison. Once completed, the final results will be presented to the Commission for review and approval.

Commissioner Botello inquired about making salary adjustments in an emergency. Under what circumstances would that be necessary before the study is completed? Ms. Williams noted that if there were a staff member considering leaving for another job due to dissatisfaction with their salary, and they were exploring opportunities at other agencies, the General Manager has the authority to offer a revised salary range to retain them at SAWPA.

Chair Gardner asked if there is sufficient flexibility in the current budget to make these adjustments at a reasonable level without needing to come back to Commission for approval? Ms. Williams confirmed, yes.

**MOVED**, to pausing further work on the Classification and Compensation Study until SAWPA's Strategic Plan is completed.

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

## 7. **INFORMATIONAL REPORTS**

Recommendation: Receive for Information.

### A. **COMMUNICATIONS REPORT**

**Presenter:** Karen Williams

### B. **GENERAL MANAGER REPORT**

Karen Williams reported that staff had the opportunity to attend several events in October, including the Herba Community Services District Fall Festival, the Wild and Scenic Film Festival at Riverside City College, and the Riverwalk. Additionally, staff have been busy working on plans for the 50th anniversary celebration. Today, interviews are being conducted for the video.

### C. **CHAIR'S COMMENTS/REPORT**

There were no Chair comments received.

### D. **COMMISSIONERS' COMMENTS**

Commissioner Hall commended staff for being out in the community, engaging with member agencies and doing outreach. This will help raise awareness about who we are and what we are working on in the region and really appreciates the effort.

### E. **COMMISSIONERS' REQUEST FOR FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS**

There were no requests for future agenda items.

## 8. **CLOSED SESSION**

There was no Closed Session.

## 9. **ADJOURNMENT**

Chair Gardner adjourned the meeting in honor of Duane Roberts, the owner of the Mission Inn. Mr. Roberts purchased the Mission Inn out of bankruptcy, and along with his wife, made significant investments to restore its historic value. Over the years, they reinvested every penny back into the Mission Inn, even in years when the economy was tough, and the Mission Inn faced financial losses. They never took any profits out of it, instead funding improvements with their own personal resources when needed.

Mr. Roberts passed away just a few days shy of his 89<sup>th</sup> birthday this past weekend. While funeral arrangements have not yet been announced, it is important to recognize that Mr. Roberts played a vital role in shaping Riverside as we know it today. The Mission Inn is truly a cornerstone of this city's identity, and Riverside would not be the same without it.

There being no further business for review, Chair Gardner adjourned the meeting in honor of Duane Roberts at 9:53 a.m.

**Approved at a Regular Meeting of the Santa Ana Watershed Project Authority Commission on Tuesday, November 18, 2025.**

Signed by:

*Mike Gardner*

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Mike Gardner, Chair

Attest:

DocuSigned by:

*Sara Villa*

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Sara Villa, Clerk of the Board