



...A United Voice for the Santa Ana River Watershed

OWOW STEERING COMMITTEE

REGULAR MEETING MINUTES

May 28, 2026

Committee Members	
<u>Santa Ana Watershed Project Authority Representatives</u>	
Gil Botello, Convener, San Bernardino Valley Municipal Water District	Present
David Slawson, Eastern Municipal Water District	Absent
<u>County Supervisor Representatives</u>	
Vicente Sarmiento, Orange County Board of Supervisors	Absent
Amanda Carr, Orange County Public Works (OC Alternate)	Present
Karen Spiegel, Riverside County Board of Supervisors	Present
Jesse Armendarez, San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors	Absent
Jesse Streeter, San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors (SB Alternate)	Present
<u>County Municipal Representatives</u>	
Fred Jung, Orange County Municipal Representative	Present
Wes Speake, Councilmember, City of Corona	Present
Judy Woolsey, San Bernardino County Municipal Representative	Present
Helen Tran, San Bernardino County Municipal (SB Alternate)	Absent
<u>Business Community Representative</u>	
James Hessler, Director of West Coast Operations, Altman Plants	Present
<u>Environmental Community Representative</u>	
Garry W. Brown, President, Orange County Coastkeeper	Present
<u>Regional Water Quality Control Board Representative</u>	
William Ruh, Regional Water Quality Control Board	Absent
John Scandura, Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB Alternate)	Present
Others Present	
<u>SAWPA COMMISSIONERS:</u>	T. Milford Harrison, Denis Bilodeau
<u>SAWPA STAFF:</u>	Karen Williams, Emily Fuentes, Erika Beyer, Haley Gohari, John Leete, Marie Jauregui, Natalia Gonzalez, Rick Whetsel, Joel Osuna-Williams, Sara Villa
<u>OTHERS PRESENT:</u>	Thomas S. Bunn, Lagerlof LLP; Christy Suppes, County of Orange

The OWOW Steering Committee meeting was called to order at 11:00 a.m. by Gil Botello, Convener, at the Santa Ana Watershed Project Authority, 11615 Sterling Avenue, Riverside, CA 92503.



1. **CALL TO ORDER | PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

2. **ROLL CALL**

An oral roll call was duly noted and recorded by the serving clerk.

3. **PUBLIC COMMENTS**

There were no public comments; there were no public comments received via email.

4. **ITEMS TO BE ADDED OR DELETED**

5. **CONSENT CALENDAR**

A. **APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES: FEBRUARY 26, 2026**

MOVED, to approve the Consent Calendar as posted.

Result:	Adopted by Roll Call Vote
Motion/Second:	Spiegel/Streeter
Ayes:	Botello, Carr, Hessler, Jung, Scandura, Speake, Spiegel, Streeter, Woolsey
Nays:	None
Abstentions:	Brown
Absent:	Slawson

6. **INFORMATIONAL REPORTS**

A. **DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITIES INVOLVEMENT PROGRAM: 2021 URBAN AND MULTI-BENEFIT DROUGHT RELIEF GRANT PROGRAM SET-ASIDE FUNDING (SC#2026.2)**

Rick Whetsel provided a presentation titled *DWR DACI Program Set-Aside Funding, 2021 Urban and Multi-benefit Drought Relief Grant Program*, contained in the agenda packet on pages 13-31.

The presentation summarized SAWPA's implementation of approximately \$5 million in Department of Water Resources drought-relief grant funding for projects benefiting disadvantaged communities. Five projects were initially selected, with four completed following project modifications and funding reallocations resulting from increased construction costs and implementation challenges. Completed projects benefited Box Springs Mutual Water Company, the City of Colton, Marigold Mutual Water Company, and the City of Fullerton. The DeVore Water Company project did not proceed, and most of its funding was reallocated to other projects. Whetsel noted that no grant funds were returned to the State and that completed projects are subject to three years of post-performance monitoring.

Committee discussion focused on the challenges smaller water systems face in developing and implementing grant-funded projects, particularly where staffing and technical capacity are limited. Members discussed the importance of technical assistance and regional support in helping smaller systems successfully access and administer State funding. The Committee also discussed lessons learned through the program and how those experiences could help inform the administration of future funding opportunities.

This item was for discussion purposes; no action was taken on Agenda Item No. 6.A.



B. SUMMARY OF DEPARTMENT OF WATER RESOURCES' APRIL 30 WATERSHED RESILIENCE AND SGMA FUNDING WORKSHOP (SC#2026.3)

Haley Gohari provided a presentation titled *Summary of DWR April 30 Watershed Resilience and SGMA Funding Workshop*, contained in the agenda packet on pages 35-49.

Draft guidelines for the Watershed Resilience and SGMA programs are anticipated in fall 2026, with concept proposals expected in early 2027 and awards potentially beginning in late 2027 or early 2028. Gohari reviewed approximately \$152 million anticipated for Watershed Resilience activities, including early-action implementation and planning opportunities, and approximately \$386.25 million for SGMA-related activities. She also highlighted requirements related to disadvantaged and vulnerable communities and additional Proposition 4 opportunities involving dam safety, habitat restoration, invasive species, desalination, forest health, and wildfire resilience.

Committee member Brown asked whether nonprofit organizations and tribes would be eligible to participate in Watershed Resilience funding. Gohari explained that applicants are expected to apply on behalf of collaborative groups and that participation by tribes and community organizations could strengthen those partnerships. She noted that the collaborative approach aligns with the work already underway through the CARP.

Committee member Scandura asked whether regulatory and administrative issues that had previously delayed Proposition 4 funding had been sufficiently resolved to allow funding to begin moving later in the year. Gohari responded that some funding processes were moving forward, although State agencies were still completing various administrative requirements, with additional activity anticipated following the beginning of the new fiscal year.

Convener Botello emphasized the importance of SAWPA and the Steering Committee serving as a regional connection point to ensure agencies are informed of funding opportunities and prepared to pursue them, particularly for shovel-ready projects. Gohari noted that the CARP process is collecting planning documents from public agencies throughout the watershed and identifying potential projects, which can help establish partnerships and position the region for future competitive funding opportunities.

This item was for discussion purposes; no action was taken on Agenda Item No. 6.B.

C. SANTA ANA RIVER WATERSHED CLIMATE ADAPTATION AND RESILIENCE PLAN - COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT UPDATES (SC#2026.4)

Haley Gohari provided a presentation titled *SARWCARP Community Engagement Updates*, contained in the agenda packet on pages 54-69.

Community engagement activities include surveys, community events, interviews, and other outreach. Approximately 1,200 survey responses had been received, representing 147 of approximately 174 ZIP codes within the watershed. After removing responses from outside the watershed and invalid responses, approximately 900 usable responses remained. Preliminary results identified wildfire, drought, extreme heat, and pollution among the primary community concerns, while poor air quality and extreme heat were among the most frequently reported impacts. Engagement will continue through fall 2026, with a Community Advisory Panel planned for June and additional climate hazards and



vulnerability assessment information anticipated for the September Steering Committee meeting.

During discussion, a Committee member asked how members could assist with distributing the survey and expressed interest in increasing outreach within the Eastvale area. Gohari offered to provide the survey link, QR code, and prepared outreach materials for distribution.

The Committee also discussed communities in eastern Riverside County experiencing inadequate access to drinking water and significant climate-related challenges, including extreme heat. A Committee member asked whether resources identified through the CARP or Proposition 4 process could potentially assist those areas. Gohari explained that eligibility and requirements for regional projects were still developing and offered to provide State contacts and information regarding other resources that could potentially assist communities located outside the Santa Ana River Watershed boundary.

This item was for discussion purposes; no action was taken on Agenda Item No. 6.C.

7. SAWPA GENERAL MANAGER REPORT

General Manager Karen Williams thanked Committee members for their continued participation and emphasized the importance of attendance and regional involvement. She noted that SAWPA staff continue working to identify and bring funding opportunities into the region.

8. CONVENER COMMENT/REPORT

Convener Botello echoed the General Manager's comments and emphasized the importance of regional collaboration and demonstrating that agencies throughout the watershed are working collectively. He encouraged continued participation so the region is positioned to pursue future funding opportunities.

9. COMMITTEE MEMBERS' COMMENTS

Committee member Scandura recognized Committee member Carr's participation in the meeting while Orange County agencies were responding to a chemical incident in Garden Grove. He provided an update on the coordinated response involving Orange County Public Works, the Orange County Fire Authority, health agencies, the Regional Water Quality Control Board, and other State agencies. He noted that agencies were monitoring potential discharges to storm drains and waterways, implementing preventative measures, and coordinating sampling and follow-up investigation.

Committee member Carr provided additional context regarding the Garden Grove incident and recognized the work of the emergency response teams, including the Fire Authority's lead role and Orange County Public Works' support and preventative measures. She noted that the situation had the potential to become significantly more serious and emphasized the importance of appropriate regulation, oversight, and emergency protections. Convener Botello thanked Carr and the responding agencies for their efforts.

Committee member Brown expressed appreciation for the informational reports and noted that scheduling conflicts had affected his attendance at prior meetings but that he would make an effort to participate more regularly.

10. REQUEST FOR FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

There were no requests for future agenda items.



11. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting ended at 12:07 p.m.

APPROVED: September 24, 2026

Signed by:

Gil Botello

Gil Botello, Convener

Attest:

Signed by:

Zyanya Ramirez

Zyanya Ramirez, Senior Administrative Services Specialist