

# Achieving Water Justice in California:

## A Vision for an Equitable and Resilient Future

### California's water rights system is rooted in land theft and racism.

It facilitates unjust and unsustainable outcomes that threaten the well-being and survival of people, agriculture, and ecosystems. Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) disproportionately receive contaminated and unaffordable water.

Meanwhile, investment funds, insurers, and even Harvard's endowment profit from overpumping California's diminishing groundwater, drying up domestic drinking water wells that people rely on.

Waterways have been so fundamentally altered and unsustainably managed that fish and ecosystems face extinction and declining health.

The climate crisis exacerbates these interconnected challenges, through more extreme droughts and precipitation events.



All conversations about California's future water management should foreground an unflinching understanding of the historical context of existing practices, current and future climate threats, and the incentives of actors with concentrated wealth and power to overuse water in pursuit of higher profits.



In this report, we propose three recommendations that meet the scale of the climate crisis and the injustice embedded in the water system. →

# Achieving Water Justice in California:

## A Vision for an Equitable and Resilient Future

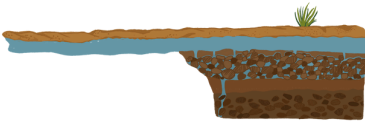
### Recommendation 1

We propose prioritizing water use in tiers to reflect its nature as a public good essential to the survival of people and ecosystems.



#### Tier One: Meeting Basic Needs

Give highest priority to ensuring that water allocations meet California's Human Right to Water (water for cooking, consumption, and sanitation), facilitate a transition to climatically suitable and sustainable agricultural systems, and support healthy ecosystems.



#### Tier Two: Resilience

Invest in water allocations and projects that increase underground water storage for dry years, water conservation, wastewater recycling, and green infrastructure approaches to help manage precipitation and climatic extremes.



#### Tier 3: Private Luxury Uses

Reduce and restrict water uses primarily for private benefit (e.g., extractive agriculture, lawns, and golf courses), and eliminate water use entirely for fossil fuel extraction and refining.

### Recommendation 2

We recommend that community watershed governance boards, with representation that counteracts historical power inequities, make allocation decisions within each watershed in alignment with such a tiered priority system.



# Achieving Water Justice in California:

## A Vision for an Equitable and Resilient Future

### Recommendation 3

We suggest intermediate steps that can build toward this vision of a just and democratically determined water future over time. Examples include making water pricing more equitable, increasing agricultural sustainability while growing worker power, and investing in climate resilience through wastewater recycling and storing water underground. Centering green infrastructure and Tribal comanagement approaches can also strengthen ecosystem benefits and resilience alongside benefits for water supply reliability.



This report builds on movement work to lay out a vision to tackle the drivers of California’s water challenges—an archaic water rights system, the climate crisis, and concentrated power—head on.

**Through a system of prioritizing water based on societal value, investments in climate resilience, and most importantly, community control that addresses historical power imbalances, California can secure a future in which people, agriculture, and ecosystems thrive in the face of increasing climate uncertainty.**