

NAVIGATING  
CHANGE

SHAPING  
THE  
FUTURE



**2026 SPRING CONFERENCE**

RENAISSANCE ESERALDA RESORT & SPA  
INDIAN WELLS, CALIFORNIA

FEB 25 - 27, 2026

# THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS

## DIAMOND



## GOLD



## SILVER



THE METROPOLITAN WATER DISTRICT OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA



 **BRONZE** 



 **EXHIBITOR** 



WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 25<sup>TH</sup>, 2026



**WIFI LOGIN INFORMATION:**

WiFi: UWIConference  
Access Code: HDRINC26



TIME	ACTIVITIES
12:00PM-1:00PM	<p><b>REGISTRATION, NETWORKING &amp; EXHIBITS</b> <i>Crystal Foyer</i></p>
1:00PM-1:15PM	<p><b>CONFERENCE WELCOME</b> <i>Crystal A-C</i></p> <p><b>Dave Pedersen</b>, UWI Incoming Board Chair; General Manager, Las Virgenes Municipal Water District</p> <p><b>Darcy Burke</b>, UWI Executive Director; Director, Elsinore Valley Municipal Water District</p>
1:15PM-2:00PM	<div style="display: flex; align-items: flex-start;"> <div style="margin-right: 20px;">  </div> <div> <p><b>OPENING KEYNOTE: CHANGING CALIFORNIA'S WATER PLANNING PROCESS TO MEET OUR UNPREDICTABLE FUTURE</b> <i>Crystal A-C</i></p> <p>On November 5th, Governor Newsom signed Senate Bill 72 into law. Sponsored by Senator Caballero, the "California Water for All" bill mandates long-term, data-driven water supply targets to secure the state's water future, targeting an additional 9 million acre-feet by 2040. It modernizes the California Water Plan, requiring updates to meet agricultural, urban, and environmental needs, including safe drinking water. Find out how DWR lead Joel Metzger is planning to implement SB 72 and change California's water planning process to meet our unpredictable future.</p> <p><b>Joel Metzger</b>, Deputy Director, Statewide Water Resources Planning and Enterprise Project Management, California Department of Water Resources</p> <p><b>MODERATOR:</b> <b>Andree Lee</b>, UWI Immediate Past Board Chair; Executive Vice President - Water Resources and Engineering, EKI Environment &amp; Water</p> </div> </div>
2:00PM-2:15PM	<p><b>BREAK &amp; MEET THE SPEAKERS</b> <i>Crystal Foyer</i></p> <div style="text-align: right;">  </div>

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 25<sup>TH</sup>, 2026

TIME	ACTIVITIES
<p><b>2:15PM-3:30PM</b></p>  	<p><b>THE PROJECTED CHANGE IS HERE: A PEEK INTO SGMA'S IMPACT ON THE CENTRAL VALLEY</b></p> <p><i>Crystal A-C</i></p> <p>The day of reckoning is here. The Central Valley is experiencing devastating economic and social impacts as a direct result of SGMA implementation. Water restrictions, fallowing, and land retirements have caused plummeting land values, food security and scarcity issues, and non-existent farming financing. Find out how rural communities are paying the price.</p> <p><b>MODERATOR:</b>  <b>Jason Phillips</b>, UWI Incoming 1st Vice Chair; Vice President, Water Business Group, Irrigation Practice Leader, HDR</p> <p><b>PANELISTS:</b>  <b>Janie Gatzman</b>, Owner, Gatzman Appraisal  <b>Jim Morehead</b>, Co-owner, Morehead Farms, Inc.  <b>Aaron Fukuda</b>, General Manager, Tulare Irrigation District; Executive Director, Mid-Kaweah Groundwater Sustainability Agency</p>
<p><b>3:30PM-3:45PM</b></p>	<p><b>BREAK &amp; MEET THE SPEAKERS</b></p> <p><i>Crystal Foyer</i></p> 
<p><b>3:45PM-5:00PM</b></p>  	<p><b>CHANGE MAKERS</b></p> <p><i>Crystal A-C</i></p> <p>Leadership across utilities, consulting firms, and regulatory agencies is changing. They are younger, more diverse, and come from a variety of education, experience and backgrounds. Meet the newest leaders taking charge. This panel will share the insight on how these change makers are shaping water's future.</p> <p><b>MODERATOR:</b>  <b>John Coleman</b>, UWI Board of Directors; Former Executive Director, Bay Planning Coalition; Past President, Association of California Water Agencies</p> <p><b>PANELISTS:</b>  <b>Shivaji Deshmukh</b>, General Manager, Metropolitan Water District of Southern California  <b>Anona Dutton</b>, Chief Executive Officer, EKI Environment &amp; Water  <b>Valerie Kincaid</b>, Partner, Paris Kincaid Wasiewski, LLP</p>
<p><b>5:00PM</b></p>	<p><b>BREAK &amp; MEET THE SPEAKERS</b></p> <p><i>Crystal Foyer</i></p>
<p><b>5:00PM</b></p>	<p><b>OPENING RECEPTION</b></p> <p><i>Rose Lawn</i></p> 

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 26<sup>TH</sup>, 2026

PROGRAM SCHEDULE

TIME	ACTIVITIES
8:30AM-9:00AM	<b>BREAKFAST</b> <i>Crystal Foyer</i> 
9:00AM-10:15AM	<b>CHANGING AFFORDABILITY METRICS</b> <i>Crystal A-C</i>  <p>Are water and wastewater rates affordable? Can families keep up with rising costs, and is that sustainable? Given the rate constraints utilities face, how are the taps staying on and the sewage still flowing? What are utilities doing to keep water affordable?</p> <p><b>MODERATOR:</b>  <b>Andree Lee</b>, UWI Immediate Past Board Chair; Executive Vice President - Water Resources and Engineering, EKI Environment &amp; Water</p> <p><b>PANELISTS:</b>  <b>Joe Mouawad</b>, General Manager, Eastern Municipal Water District  <b>Greg Thomas</b>, General Manager, Elsinore Valley Municipal Water District  <b>Dr. Kurt Schwabe</b>, Professor of Environmental Economics &amp; Policy, UC Riverside  <b>Peiffer Brandt</b>, CEO &amp; President, Raftellis</p> 
10:15AM-10:30AM	<b>BREAK &amp; MEET THE SPEAKERS</b> <i>Crystal Foyer</i> 
10:30AM-11:45AM	<b>HOW TO CHANGE PUBLIC PERCEPTION</b> <i>Crystal A-C</i>  <p>A 2024 AWWA Survey noted that public trust in tap water had declined by 9% since 2020. Groups like Environmental Working Group consistently put out content alarming the public that their tap water is not safe. How do you change the public's perception on the value you provide, trust their tap water, and trust their utility? How do others do it and do it well?</p> <p><b>MODERATOR:</b>  <b>Heather Collins</b>, President, American Water Works Association; Director of Water Treatment Operations, Metropolitan Water District of Southern California</p> <p><b>PANELISTS:</b>  <b>Will Ketchum</b>, President &amp; CEO, North Star Place Branding &amp; Marketing  <b>Lynn Lipinski</b>, Director of Communications, Southern California Water Coalition  <b>Bratton Riley</b>, Founder &amp; CEO, Citibot</p>  
11:45AM-12:00PM	<b>BREAK &amp; MEET THE SPEAKERS</b> <i>Crystal Foyer</i> 

# THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 26<sup>TH</sup>, 2026

TIME	ACTIVITIES
<b>12:00PM-1:15PM</b>	<b>LUNCH</b> <i>Olive Grove</i> 
<b>1:15PM-2:15PM</b>      	<b>BEYOND THE LABELS: UNDERSTANDING GENERATIONAL CHANGES IN THE WORKFORCE</b> <i>Crystal A-C</i> <p>We've all heard the stereotypes about different generations—but how much of that is true? What do Generations X, Y, and Z want and expect at work? In this interactive session, a panel of water professionals from across generations—and you, the audience—will share views, challenge assumptions, and explore what it takes to work better together. Expect a lively, thought-provoking conversation that connects all generations.</p> <p><b>CO-FACILITATED BY:</b>  <b>Jennifer Persike</b>, UWI Board of Directors; President/Founder, Jennifer Persike &amp; Company  <b>Liji Thomas</b>, Diversity, Equity &amp; Inclusion Officer, Metropolitan Water District of Southern California</p> <p><b>PANELISTS:</b>  <b>Hailey Rowbatham</b>, (Gen Z) Water Resources Engineer, EKI Environment &amp; Water  <b>William McDonnell</b>, (Millennial), Senior Water Resources Analyst, Inland Empire Utilities Agency  <b>Ofelia Rubio</b>, (Gen X), Manager of Project and Construction Management, Los Angeles Department of Water &amp; Power</p>
<b>2:15PM-2:30PM</b>	<b>BREAK &amp; MEET THE SPEAKERS</b> <i>Crystal Foyer</i>
<b>2:30PM-3:30PM</b>      	<b>THE WATER ASSOCIATION DATING GAME: FIND YOUR MATCH IN TODAY'S CHANGING LANDSCAPE</b> <i>Crystal A-C</i> <p>Today, the Water Association field is broader than ever before, and the differences matter! For agency leaders deciding where to invest resources, UWI's new fast-paced "Dating Game" gives association executive directors an opportunity to compete for our audience's interest and sometimes-fleeting-attention. Expect humor, clarity, and a few tough questions – without the slide deck!</p> <p><b>MODERATOR:</b>  <b>Lisa Ohlund</b>, UWI Treasurer; Principal, Ohlund Management &amp; Technical Services  <b>Rich Nagel</b>, UWI Vice Chair; Vice President, Jacobs</p> <p><b>PANELISTS:</b>  <b>Sue Mosburg</b>, Executive Director, California-Nevada Section of the American Water Works Association  <b>Danielle Blacet-Hyden</b>, Executive Director, California Municipal Utilities Association  <b>Brenley McKenna</b>, Managing Director, WateReuse California  <b>Charley Wilson</b>, Executive Director &amp; CEO, Southern California Water Coalition</p>

# THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 26<sup>TH</sup>, 2026

# PROGRAM SCHEDULE

TIME	ACTIVITIES
<b>3:30PM-3:45PM</b>	<b>ICE CREAM BREAK</b> <i>Crystal Foyer</i> <div style="float: right; text-align: right;">   </div>
<b>3:45PM-5:00PM</b>    	<b>CHANGING COMMODITY MARKETS; CALIFORNIA'S (WINE) GRAPES OF WRATH</b> <i>Crystal A-C</i>  <p>With wine sales decreasing, large California wineries are importing bulk foreign grape juice (concentrate) and blending it with California fruit, then selling the resulting product under labels that say "California." The excess foreign supply drives down local demand and prices, leaving growers in the dust. Meanwhile, consumers are none-the wiser. Hear from California wine grape growers and producers across the state about the challenges the wine industry is facing-both in the field and in the bottle.</p> <p><b>MODERATOR:</b>  <b>Darcy Burke</b>, UWI Executive Director; Director, Elsinore Valley Municipal Water District</p> <p><b>PANELISTS:</b>  <b>John Chandler</b>, Partner, Chandler Farms; Chairman, California Association of Winegrape Growers  <b>J.D. Harkey</b>, CEO &amp; Director of Operations, Drake Enterprises; Temecula Winegrape Grower  <b>Glenn Spyksma</b>, Board President, South San Joaquin Irrigation District; Former Executive Vice President, The Wine Group</p>
<b>5:00PM</b>	<b>BREAK &amp; MEET THE SPEAKERS</b> <i>Crystal Foyer</i>
<b>5:00PM</b>	<b>BOARD CHAIR'S RECEPTION</b> <i>Cascade Landing</i> <div style="float: right; text-align: right;">  </div>

# FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 27<sup>TH</sup>, 2026

TIME	ACTIVITIES
<b>9:00AM-9:30AM</b>	<b>BREAKFAST</b> <i>Crystal Foyer</i> 
<b>9:30AM-10:45AM</b>    	<b>A CHANGING COLORADO RIVER</b> <i>Crystal A-C</i>  Valentine’s Day was the last critical deadline to reach a new Colorado River agreement. As of this printing, we were not any closer than we were in December. Upper and Lower Basin states appear to be at an insurmountable impasse. Without an agreement, what are the consequences and where do we go from here? This panel will provide first-hand, “inside baseball” insights into the negotiation process, the challenges, what was left on the table, and who is left holding the empty bag.  <b>MODERATOR:</b> <b>Meena Westford</b> , Director of Imported Water, San Diego County Water Authority  <b>PANELISTS:</b> <b>Bill Hasencamp</b> , Manager of Colorado River Resources, Metropolitan Water District of Southern California <b>Amy Ostdiek</b> , Section Chief of Interstate, Federal, and Water Information Section, Colorado Water Conservation Board <b>Kathryn Sorensen</b> , Director of Research, Kyl Center for Water Policy at Arizona State University
<b>10:45AM</b>	<b>BREAK &amp; MEET THE SPEAKERS</b> <i>Crystal Foyer</i>
<b>11:00AM</b>	<b>CONFERENCE ADJOURNS</b>

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UWI ANNUAL CONFERENCE

# SAVE THE DATE

AUGUST 19-21, 2026

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**URBAN WATER INSTITUTE**

A FORUM FOR WESTERN WATER ISSUES