

# URBAN WATER INSTITUTE NEWSLETTER



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## Legislative Update



By Mary Aileen Matheis

The California Legislature returned to work last week following the Covid-19 instructions, which slowed the process of bill making as it has slowed all other elements of business life.

The major concern is the budget which faces a \$54 billion deficit due to the pandemic.

In January the state enjoyed a substantial surplus, but ...*(continue reading on page two)*

## Weather Forecasting

For more information on **Unusually Intense And Prolonged Early-Season Heatwave Developing Across California**, please visit <https://weatherwest.com/archives/7289>

## Virtual Realities – Water Utility Business On-line

**Mark your calendar for June 17th for UWI's  
"Virtual Meetings and Communications Webinar"  
Register Here - <https://www.urbanwater.com/webinar/>**

By Andree Johnson

Bay Area Water Supply and Conservation Agency represents the interest of 26 water providers in San Mateo, Santa Clara, and Alameda Counties, collectively serving over 1.8 million residents. While much of our world has stopped during the COVID-19 crisis, BAWSCA's goal of ensuring a reliable supply of high quality water for the region has remained constant - as has the communication with its customers, stakeholders, and partners essential to making that happen.



BAWSCA transitioned entirely to remote operations in mid-March, moving all staff activities and public meetings to virtual format. With news stories about "Zoom bombers" and public meeting mishaps, along with concerns about Brown Act compliance, maintaining effective and managed coordination among BAWSCA's Board and members was a high priority. Two months later, BAWSCA has tested the waters on a variety of previously unimagined ideas - from Zoom meetings for BAWSCA's 26-member board to virtual school assemblies and everything in between. The lessons learned along the way will prove valuable long past the pandemic.

At the onset of the shelter-in-place requirements, BAWSCA transitioned its Landscape Education Program, which provides free classes to the public on a variety of classes related to water use efficiency, to a webinar format. The virtual classes have exceeded expectations, consistently attracting triple the numbers of participants as the traditional in-person classes. The webinar format has also enabled BAWSCA to connect with residents who could not previously participate in the in-person classes, such as parents of young children, and customer feedback has been extremely positive. BAWSCA has also been able to record its webinars, providing for a robust digital library for customers to access on-demand.....*(continue reading on page two)*

**BAWSCA**  
Bay Area Water Supply & Conservation Agency

## Legislative Update



*(from page one) ... the lockdown slowed the economy to a standstill and funds were not flowing into the treasury.*

It was not only the economy melt down, but IRS tax returns have been extended until July 15th which have reduced the state coffers.

One piece of legislation of interest to the water industry is SB 1386 by Senator John Moorlach.

SB 1386 addresses the issue ownership and responsibility for water fees of fire hydrants. This bill has passed all committees and is ready to go to the floor of the Senate for a vote.

Early in 2020, the legislature considered a Climate Resiliency Bond for the 2020 Ballot. In response to the Covid-19 concerns, it is more likely to be phrased as an Economic Stimulus Bond.

Agencies continue to watch AB 2182 (Rubio) and SB 11099 (Dodd), which address issues of backup generators which many agencies depend on when there is PSPS (Public Safety Power Shutoffs).

There is likely to be more legislation related to the pandemic and the resulting economic concerns as the State moves to a budget agreement by June 15th.

It is an unprecedented time in our recent history.



**About The Author:** Mary Aileen Matheis has served on the Irvine Ranch Water District board since 1988.

## Virtual Realities

*(from page one) ... The remote structure has also yielded unlikely partnerships - for instance, BAWSCA and the Regional Water Authority, located in the Sacramento Region, are partnering on a webinar class in early June. Pre-pandemic, such a partnership wouldn't have been feasible for agencies located 100 miles apart. The virtual world removes such boundaries*



To support local schools seeking educational and engaging on-line content for their students, BAWSCA also partnered with Earthcapades to offer its school assembly program in online format. The web-based assemblies included a combination of pre-recorded and live content. A total of 24 assemblies were offered in April and May with positive feedback from teachers and parents.

With virtual stakeholder workshops and member agency meetings, a key concern was the loss of visual cues - the eye contact and nods that keep the discussion flowing. While video may not fully replace the personal connection for large meetings, some of the virtual meeting features have offered advantages. For example, BAWSCA has used the live polling features to collect and report feedback efficiently. An added benefit has been getting those participants who may have been hesitant to speak up in-person to share their thoughts.

Daily staff meetings provided a valuable opportunity for BAWSCA to test features of various virtual meeting platforms and to prepare for effective external engagement. Close coordination with BAWSCA's legal counsel was also key to ensuring that noticing and public comment requirements were appropriately met.

The crisis forced quick change and flexibility, not often the words used to describe public agency processes. In navigating these challenges, our industry has learned some things that may change the way we do business going forward.

*For more information about creative approaches to engagement in the remote world, join us on June 17th for UWI's "Virtual Meetings and Communications Webinar." Our panel of agency managers, outreach experts, and lawyers will share its do's and don'ts and lessons learned for successful virtual meetings and customer communications. For more information, please visit - <https://www.urbanwater.com/webinar/>.*



**About The Author:** Andree Johnson serves on the UWI Board of Directors and Executive Committee. She was elected in February 2020 by the board to serve as Secretary for the next two years.

## Op-Ed: Colorado River

**Bruce Babbitt: Here's how to save the Colorado River:** "It is no exaggeration to say that a mega-drought not seen in 500 years has descended on the seven Colorado River Basin states: Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, New Mexico, Nevada, Arizona and California. That's what the science shows, and that's what the region faces. Phoenix, Denver, Las Vegas and San Diego have already reduced per capita water use. Yet they continue to consume far more water than the river can supply. The river and its tributaries are still overdrawn by more than a million acre feet annually, an amount in consumption equaled by four cities the size of Los Angeles. ..." Source - The Dove Creek Express: <https://www.dovecreekpress.com/columns-opinions/opinion-heres-how-save-colorado-river-bruce-babbitt>