

This week, the Senate Natural Resources and Water Committee held an informational hearing to hear from a variety of speakers on the state's chronically underfunded water needs.

An overview was provided by Lester Snow, Executive Director of the California Water Foundation, and Ellen Hanak, Director of the Water Policy Center of the Public Policy Institute of California. Snow commented that constitutional reforms have made it more complicated to fund water needs, and a stable revenue stream (such as a public goods charge) is needed, especially to meet the needs of disadvantaged communities. Hanak discussed the need to go beyond bonds to close funding gaps for "fiscal orphans" such as safe drinking water (small rural systems), flood protection, stormwater management, aquatic ecosystem management, and integrated water management.

Specific underfunded needs discussed were safe and reliable drinking water in disadvantaged communities, stormwater management, flood protection, water infrastructure, and ecosystem restoration and stewardship. Laurel Firestone of the Community Water Center stressed the need for affordable rates for disadvantaged communities, and funding assistance for water and wastewater operations and maintenance. Kenneth Farfsing from the City of Carson spoke to the lack of funding for stormwater, the inability to level fees and charges, and the need to remove procedural barriers. Melinda Terry with the Central Valley Flood Control Association discussed funding needs and funding challenges, including evaporating federal funding. Xavier Irias with the American Society of Civil Engineering (ASCE) discussed the ASCE report that identifies national and state water infrastructure needs, and was followed by Brian Stranco with the Nature Conservancy, who discussed the need to fund ecosystem restoration.

The hearing agenda and presentations can be accessed here (<http://sntr.senate.ca.gov/2014informationaloversighthearings>).

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