

## Lunch & Learn Recap:

# Understanding How Our Headwaters Impact All Californians

Hosted by Assemblymember Steve Bennett in partnership with El Dorado Water Agency



El Dorado Water Agency (EDWA) hosted a briefing on March 6, 2026 at the state Capitol about the importance of our headwaters, the challenges they face, and how headwaters-related policy and funding considerations impact people, farms, businesses, and the environment throughout the state.



**PPIC**

**Kyle Greenspan, Research Associate, Public Policy Institute of California, Water Policy Center** kicked off the event where he highlighted that the Sierra-Cascades and the North Coast mountains together provide about two-thirds of the state's surface water supply. On top of water benefits - storage, filtering, and supply - these headwaters provide many other benefits. At the same time these areas have been devastated by several recent high-severity wildfires.

Kyle discussed the importance of thinning vegetation and using prescribed fires to reduce wildfire severity and protect water resources. He said that preventing ignition, hardening homes, increasing defensible space, and using fuel breaks can be effective in limiting wildfire damage.



El Dorado  
Water Agency

**Rebecca Guo, General Manager, El Dorado Water Agency** highlighted how the state's headwaters benefit us all by providing a multitude of benefits including food, medicine, energy, water supply, flood control, recreation, air quality, and so much more. She shared findings from their study which found that the ability to provide these benefits decreases over 10-fold after high severity wildfires, resulting in increased costs and other negative impacts to Californians.

Rebecca shared that "putting a dollar figure on our natural resources is critical to understanding the magnitude of our headwater's value. As Californians, we've built our livelihood and economy depending on a healthy watershed and when it's degraded by high-severity wildfires we all feel the impact. Recovering from catastrophic wildfires is multi-generational task."



**Brittany Covich, Policy & Outreach Division Chief, Sierra Nevada**

**Conservancy** noted that while the northern headwaters supply a significant amount of water statewide, there are only about 880,000 people who live in that area, approximately 2% of the state’s population. This is a lot of acreage for a very small portion of the population to steward.

Brittany talked about the importance of building regional capacity and partnerships to accelerate the pace and scale of forest restoration. While she says the challenges are daunting, there are a lot of opportunities as “there is bipartisan support for forest health and for watershed protection projects.”



**Paul Mason, Vice President of Policy & Incentives, Pacific Forest Trust**

said we need more acres of fire in California, we just need more lower intensity and lower severity fires than what we’ve had in recent years. He emphasized the importance of collaboration and planning landscape-scale projects that will have a big impact.

Paul described the issue as a long-term commitment. He said, “This isn’t something that we can fix in a year or two. It’s going to take decades of sustained investment and effort. But it’s an investment that we have to make. The cost of doing nothing is just too high.”



**About El Dorado Water Agency**

For 67 years, El Dorado Water Agency has led water resource planning and management to ensure El Dorado County has adequate and affordable water now and into the future. The Agency convenes Headwaters Connect, a collaborative network focused on protecting the headwaters region of the American and Cosumnes Rivers.

If you would like to learn more please contact Rebecca Guo at [rebecca.Guo@edcgov.us](mailto:rebecca.Guo@edcgov.us) or visit [edwateragency.org](http://edwateragency.org).