

Crowfoot



Wade Crowfoot

“One California”



Lisa Beutler

Local & Voluntary

Supply Reliability

Zero-Sum Limits

WADE CROWFOOT INTERVIEWED

INTERVIEW WITH CALIFORNIA’S SECRETARY FOR NATURAL RESOURCES

Conducted by Lisa Beutler (Stantec, Sacramento, CA)

Introduction

On April 24th, we had the much-appreciated opportunity to interview Wade Crowfoot, the Secretary for Natural Resources for the State of California. California Governor Gavin Newsom appointed Secretary Crowfoot to this position on January 11, 2019.

When asked about his priorities, California’s recently appointed Natural Resources Secretary quickly rattles off a range of topics: climate change; strengthening water supply resilience; and building water capacity for communities, agriculture, and the environment, among them.

We caught up with Crowfoot just days before issuance of the Governor’s Executive Order on water (see next page) and he enthusiastically explained that the Governor’s priorities were his priorities. He noted that even while California faces a plethora of pressing issues, Governor Gavin Newsom has made water management a high priority. As evidence he offered that Newsom made time on multiple occasions to convene the Secretaries of Natural Resources, Environmental Protection, and the Department of Food and Agricultural to meet with him personally and explore and define a course of action. Crowfoot found the Governor’s knowledge and commitment to water resiliency during these sessions impressive.

Talking about water is part of Wade Crowfoot’s DNA. A native son of the Great Lakes region he proudly recounts that his most formative years were spent exploring its vast reaches that encompass 20 percent of the world’s surface fresh water. These early years along with his extensive work experiences in planning and natural resources positions (and many subsequent hiking adventures) provide him with a solid integrated resource management framework. This makes serving as California’s Natural Resources Secretary an easy fit.

Crowfoot sees integration as the organizing principle for his approach to water management. He describes this as a “One California” portfolio approach that incorporates: conservation; continued improvements in water use efficiency; stormwater capture; recycling; and smart conjunctive water use. It also includes smart investment in green and built infrastructure and the full and fair implementation of California’s Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA).

In addition to leveraging a full toolkit of water management options, a portfolio approach embraces multiple time scales and plans for short, mid, and long-term actions and returns. He defined the longer term timeframe as generational investments that look out 80 years and beyond. As an example he noted that planning documents like the previous Governor’s Water Action Plan are directed more to immediate needs while other required planning processes — like the current California Water Plan — are focused on mid and long-term actions.

When asked how the state’s Integrated Regional Water Management (IRWM) Plans fit into this planning framework, Crowfoot saw an IRWM 2.0 in the future. He noted this was contingent on securing additional funding. Given 85% of water investment happens locally, Crowfoot felt the state could play a role in enhancing what is already happening.

Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta Voluntary Agreement Process

Crowfoot offered several examples of how encouraging local and voluntary action was working. Local and voluntary is his preferred option for addressing many water management issues. Foremost was the voluntary agreement process taking place as part of planning for the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta.

Crowfoot explained how the State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board) is in the process of updating its regulatory framework for protecting beneficial uses of water in the Delta and its key watersheds. At the same time, the California Natural Resources Agency in leading a separate but related effort to negotiate voluntary agreements with water users to support environmental objectives through a broad set of tools, while protecting water supply reliability. Further work and analysis is needed to determine whether the agreements can meet environmental objectives required by law and identified in the State Water Board’s update to the Bay-Delta Water Quality Control Plan. However, he felt the voluntary agreements could be a game changer in the overall approach for Delta Management and that significant progress had been made since January under the Newsom administration’s renewed focus.

In describing this process he reemphasized the importance of the “One State” ethos in water management planning. He believed that narratives pitting “North against South” or “Agriculture against Fish” are false and counterproductive. He pointed to the voluntary agreement process as an important step forward in reducing zero-sum thinking and bringing together diverse California water interests. To that end he was very complimentary of all the Delta parties at the table and their sense of urgency in addressing the state’s compelling needs.

Crowfoot

Broader Approach

Water Resilience Portfolio Elements

Regulators Working Group

Stakeholders Working Group

Integration

Delta Tunnel

Regional Investments

California Executive Order on Water

On April 29, 2019, California’s Governor Gavin Newsom signed an executive order directing his administration to think differently and act boldly by developing a comprehensive strategy to build a climate-resilient water system. The order seeks to broaden California’s approach on water as the state faces a range of existing challenges, including: unsafe drinking water, major flood risks that threaten public safety, severely depleted groundwater aquifers, agricultural communities coping with uncertain water supplies and native fish populations threatened with extinction. The Governor also explained that, “To meet these challenges, we need to harness the best in science, engineering and innovation to prepare for what’s ahead and ensure long-term water resilience and ecosystem health. We’ll need an all-of-above approach to get there.”

The Order directs the secretaries of the California Natural Resources Agency, the California Environmental Protection Agency and the California Department of Food and Agriculture to prepare a water resilience portfolio.

Highlights of the Order include:

The Portfolio:

- Must meet the needs of California’s communities, economy and environment through the 21st century.
- Will integrate and build on programs, policies, and investments already in place to build a climate-resilient water system.
- Will likely (details to be negotiated) include elements such as:
 - Approaches to fully leverage recycling and conservation programs;
 - Expanding stormwater capture and groundwater recharge to their full potential;
 - Modernizing water infrastructure — including in the Delta — to withstand climate pressures
 - Advancing multi-benefit projects such as floodplains that improve flood protection, enhance habitat, and recharge groundwater basins
- Emphasizes the need for:
 - Innovation and new technologies
 - Strengthened partnerships and regional approaches

The Process:

- The California Natural Resources Agency, the California Environmental Protection Agency and the California Department of Food and Agriculture will establish a working group to develop the water resilience portfolio.
- The working group will:
 - Inventory and assess current water supplies and the health of waterways
 - Assess projected future water needs
 - Anticipate climate-driven impacts on water systems, including more severe droughts and floods
 - Consider other known and potential challenges
 - Develop a water resilience portfolio to recommend to the Governor

The Stakeholders:

- The working group will:
 - Gather input through a variety of public workshops and listening sessions
 - Hold regular meetings to review work in progress
 - Consider public comment

Previous Work & Other Plans:

- The portfolio initiative will:
 - Build on previous work, including the California Water Action Plan released by the Brown Administration in 2014 and updated in 2016
 - Take advantage of new data and lessons learned since then to reassess priorities in the Water Action Plan
 - Identify potential new priorities for the Newsom Administration
 - Identify ways to improve integration across state agencies to implement those priorities

The Delta Tunnels:

- Modernized Delta conveyance is needed as part of a water resilience portfolio for California
- Executive Branch to take steps to advance a smaller capacity, strategically designed single tunnel to deliver water through the Delta
- The Department of Water Resources will begin taking those steps in the coming days and weeks.

Next Steps

- Agencies will establish the portfolio working group to begin to inventory and assess current supplies and conditions.
- Public input will be gathered through workshops and other venues.
- A draft portfolio is expected to be submitted to the Governor later this year.

In making this order the Governor has found there is widespread agreement that a coordinated portfolio of complementary actions is needed to build water resilience, ensure healthy waterways and meet long-term water needs. Five years of historic drought showed the importance of regional investments in a diverse water supply portfolio, including conservation, water recycling, groundwater storage and cleanup, and more. Pursuing a statewide portfolio of actions creates opportunities to build resilience, leverage past investments, and meet multiple objectives.

For Info: Executive Order at: www.gov.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/4.29.19-EO-N-10-19-Attested.pdf

Crowfoot
Sea Level Rise
Flexible Infrastructure
State Roll in Local Planning
SGMA Parameters
Conjunctive Management
Administrative "Silos"
Human Right to Water

Also central to the voluntary agreement discussions is the need to acknowledge requirements for a modernized Delta water conveyance system that will provide water security and protect drinking water for millions of Californians and restore and maintain health of the system. Crowfoot pointed out that sea level rise of five to ten feet is now expected and the potential for an earthquake to create catastrophic damage had to be acknowledged and included in plans. Specific details regarding the size and capacity of a conveyance project will be developed in the coming months. There is widespread agreement the status quo is not an option in the Delta.

Infrastructure

The need for modernized infrastructure extends to the entire state. Crowfoot noted that the most of the state was operating with aging infrastructure, some well past its design lifecycle. He felt there was a need for new thinking about infrastructure investment. Such investment should not just target fixing known problems or replicating the current system. Instead, he emphasized that investment should be strategic and generational. In contrast to investments in large centralized structures as in the past, future infrastructure improvements will require building more flexible and de-centralized facilities. Investments in headwaters and floodplains to leverage natural or green infrastructure will be a priority. He also saw a need for better intra-regional systems that support water conveyance among neighbors — again creating more flexibility. As with other topics, he found the state could have a role in developing frameworks and incentivizing action.

Regional Jurisdictions

We asked how climate adapted land use might fall into this framework given the state’s experience with catastrophic fires in the headwaters and regularly occurring flood episodes. As a planner, he was well aware of the importance of allowing communities to direct their own land use. At the same time, he offered that it was unrealistic to think communities could build their way out of flooding and fire. He believed the state may have a role in setting some standards and offering incentives. As an example he pointed to the state’s General Plan Guidelines and the “show me the water” laws that require new developments to prove adequate future water supply for residents.

He noted that, in many respects, SGMA is one strong example of how allowing local jurisdictions to have control over their own destinies was working. While it is important for the state to set parameters for action and have the backstop of regulatory action by the State Water Board if necessary, the actual groundwater users have the tools and authority to make decisions for their own communities.

During this discussion he also noted that the legal separation of surface and groundwater management would have to somehow be addressed. This would require reducing barriers to water trading and rethinking recharge as a beneficial use. Crowfoot was well aware that these issues raise some sticky issues related to water rights. He did not think it would be a good use of time to discuss fundamental change to the water rights system. However, he felt that some limited, negotiated, useful options might be possible.

Institutional Fragmentation

Crowfoot pointed out that much of our earlier discussion pointed to the need to break down administrative “silos” and move beyond compartmentalized approaches. He said this fragmentation extended beyond just the water world. The nexus between energy and water needs better integration as does the management of the wildland-urban interface. Fragmentation occurs at multiple scales of governance from federal and tribal to the multiplicity of very small water and resources districts. Simply bringing every one of these institutions into a single conversation would be a monumental task. He offered that most other states and even countries did not have such a complexity of institutional issues.

In addressing fragmentation, Crowfoot felt an important state role is the articulation of a working water management framework that would allow the institutions to align actions. He did not see massive consolidations of small districts as a preferred overall approach, though the type of consolidations being directed by the State Water Board to ensure safe and reliable water for communities obviously served a purpose. He stressed the need for self-destiny and for regional planning scales.

Conclusion

The importance of fair and equitable water security for all Californians was threaded throughout Crowfoot’s entire discussion. He noted the state’s policy on the human right to water and touched on the need to consider this in every water management decision. This means: addressing existing adverse impacts; preventing unnecessary impacts; and minimizing economic disruption. He also felt that accomplishing these goals would require ensuring some form of representation of impacted communities.

Crowfoot**Integrated
Approach**

Crowfoot was sober in understanding that the Resources Agency and state government alone could not address every water management need. In considering topics like water security and public health for the homeless population, he pointed to the need for integrated approaches led by social service agencies and a continuum of responses. Even so, he felt the state did have a role in defining standards, providing technical assistance, and incentivizing actions.

In closing Crowfoot offered his optimism and excitement in working to address the state's water management challenges. He was fully aware of the magnitude and breadth of work undertaken by the California Department of Natural Resources and expressed appreciation of the hour we had to focus just on state water management.

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

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Lisa Beutler specializes in helping organizations and communities reach decisions and create effective public policy. After a decade as the Associate Director of the Sacramento State University Center for Collaborative Policy she moved to Stantec, a global design and engineering firm. At Stantec she helps clients with strategic thinking, collaborative policy, and water resources and other planning. Earlier in her career she was a state park ranger and served in special offices of two governors. As an elected leader for the American Water Resources Association, her water management expertise and passion for excellence is well known. In addition to being the California Water Plan Executive Facilitator, she is also a nationally recognized practitioner in large group processes and continues to explore the use of technology to improve collaboration, transparency, and decision making. Her expertise has also led to key roles in California's implementation of the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act. Internationally, she helped lead the team that engaged 400 global leaders of religious and spiritual communities to address the obligations of the faith community in providing clean, safe water to the people of the world at the 2004 Parliament of World's Religions in Barcelona, Spain. A popular presenter at professional conferences, her work is and has been studied extensively and as far back as reviews in the *Public Productivity & Management Review* (1996). She has also been featured in a variety of publications and books including *Planning in the Face of Conflict* by John Forester. With a proven track record leading numerous complex, high profile projects ranging from water, land-use, and energy planning to off-highway vehicles, technology, substance abuse, and religious conflict resolution, she is a go-to resource for agencies with wicked problems.

**American Water Resources Association
2019 Summer Specialty Conference
Improving Water Infrastructure through Resilient Adaptation
June 16-19, 2019
Nugget Casino Resort, Sparks, NV**

**Keynote Speaker: Wade Crowfoot
California Secretary of Natural Resources**

Agenda includes:

- **Water Infrastructure and Resilience**
- **Natural Hazards and Climate Risks**
- **Food-Energy-Water Nexus**
- **Water and Society**
- **Regional Themes:**
 - Colorado River Management
 - California Delta
 - Western US Drought Management Plans
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 - Sustainable Groundwater Management Act

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