

The Open and Transparent Water Data Act

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[Assembly Bill 1755](#) was adopted to increase awareness and use of existing water data in order to improve state agency operations through data-driven decision-making and to improve transparency and accountability. The act requires the Department of Water Resources (DWR), the State Water Board, and the Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) to coordinate and integrate existing water and ecological data from local, state, and federal agencies in order to, among other things, provide adequate information to implement the [Sustainable Groundwater Management Act](#), improve the management of the state's water resources, and bring greater transparency to water transfers and the market.

The Act also requires DWR, in consultation with the Water Quality Monitoring Council, the State Water Board, and CDFW, to “develop protocols for data sharing, documentation, quality control, public access, and promotion of open-source platforms and decision support tools related to water data.” These protocols are to be reported to the legislature by January 1, 2018 in collaboration with the Monitoring Council, State Water Board, CDFW, relevant federal agencies, and interested stakeholders, including, but not limited to, technology and open data experts and water data users. Once these protocols are developed, “[r]ecipients of state funds through grants or contracts for research or projects relating to the improvement of water or ecological data shall, as a condition of the receipt of a grant or contract, adhere to the protocols ... for data sharing, transparency, documentation, and quality control.” A grant or contract recipient that does not comply is not eligible for state funding.

Finally, the act requires DWR, in consultation with the Monitoring Council, the State Water Board, and CDFW to “create, operate, and maintain a statewide integrated water data platform.” DWR will release a strategic plan to guide implementation by January 2018. State agency water and ecological data are to be added to the platform by August 2019. Water and ecological data related to California water supply and management from the US Bureau of Reclamation, National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration, US Geological Survey, and US Forest Service are to be added by August 2010, along with other existing water and ecological data from federal, state, and local agencies and academia. Data sets are to be updated on a quarterly basis thereafter.

To help with the cost of implementation, the Act establishes the Water Data Administration Fund, with monies in the fund available, upon appropriation, to DWR, the State Water Board, or CDFW “for the collection, management, and improvement of water and ecological data for the purposes of this [Act].” The Department of Finance will develop a standardized agreement to allow voluntary donations to the fund “by any person, educational institution, government entity, corporation or other business entity, or organization.”

This new legislation establishes far-reaching mandates to foster better collaboration and data sharing between agencies and organizations that generate and use water and related ecological data in California. The ultimate goal is to make decision making about water more data-driven. Ambitious deadlines in the Act will necessitate concerted efforts by those agencies named in the legislation. Interagency discussions are under way.

