

# Mountain Democrat

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## **A word about water: Water in El Dorado County — past, present and future**

By Supervisor Lori Parlin, EDWA board chair, and Rebecca Guo, EDWA general manager



Many of you are familiar with El Dorado County's rich history, starting with its first settlements long ago by Native Americans, remaining undiscovered by Europeans until the 1770s. Our county is also known for the start of the Gold Rush in 1848. It was at this time when the foundations of the water systems we know today were laid.

Even today, some water suppliers rely on portions of those historical systems to deliver their water to their customers. Yet, the county today looks very different from the 1800s. Today, residents and businesses in El Dorado County get their water from either one of the four urban water suppliers, the over 100 small water systems or the thousands of domestic wells.

As one can guess, that makes managing our water resources challenging, to say the least. Local water suppliers, municipalities and others were unable to economically develop an adequate water supply and control flooding in our county on their own. So, it was determined that a countywide perspective and response was needed. That's why in 1959, state legislators created the El Dorado Water Agency to address water-related challenges throughout the county.

For 65 years and counting, El Dorado Water Agency has remained committed to providing long-term water resources planning. What exactly does "water resources planning" mean? This means not only looking at water supply but also watershed health, stormwater management and more.

Our work falls into five programs:

**Governance and partnership:** We develop partnerships with government agencies, water managers, nonprofit organizations and others to help break down silos and increase collaboration. Water connects us all and we need to coordinate with those both inside and outside the county to address growing water demands, adhere to new regulations and adapt to our variable weather.

**Water security:** We focus on ensuring El Dorado County has a sustainable water supply as our region faces an uncertain water future. We also work to prepare our communities for when a drought hits and ensure residents and businesses have ample water.

**Watershed management:** We work to protect our watershed — that is, all the land in our county where rain and snow falls. We also coordinate with those responsible for maintaining our forests, rivers and lakes and help secure funding for projects that make our lands healthy.

**Assistance and innovation:** Innovation is the key to addressing growing and evolving water resource-related challenges in the county. In addition to incorporating innovative ideas into water resources planning and management, we work to increase awareness about the importance of sustainable water management. We provide technical assistance for small water systems in the county and pursue grant funding for drought preparedness.

**Communication and advocacy:** Each year we educate decision makers about the county's water-related issues and advocate for funding to address our geographic vulnerabilities. El Dorado County's rural and foothill landscape presents unique challenges and we promote creative solutions that will maintain our rural agricultural way of life.

So what does the future hold? While we wish we had a crystal ball, we know our weather is becoming more unreliable. In less than five years, we went from record-breaking droughts to record-breaking snow years. This unpredictability has had a serious effect on our water resources and has the potential to overwhelm our county's natural and built infrastructure. All of this could mean more water restrictions, localized flooding or other issues. As we look toward the future, El Dorado Water Agency remains forward-thinking and committed to providing comprehensive countywide water resources planning. This planning is essential to serve our county's diverse communities.

*Lori Parlin is the District 4 El Dorado County supervisor and EDWA board chair and Rebecca Guo is general manager of the El Dorado Water Agency.*

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