

Less than three weeks from now, Yuba County voters will choose whether to support or oppose Proposition 1, “The Water Quality, Supply, and Infrastructure Improvement Act of 2014.” If passed by the voters, this \$7.5 billion bond would provide funding to assist local agencies throughout California to upgrade their water systems for the benefit of cities, farms and the environment. As voters think about their position on the bond, it may be helpful to know more about this bond, and how past water bonds have been used in Yuba County.

Earlier this summer, California’s State Legislature passed this new, smaller water bond by a near-unanimous vote. In explaining the bond’s purpose, the Legislature wrote, “Safeguarding California’s supply of clean and safe water for homes, businesses, and farms is an essential responsibility of government, and critical to protecting the quality of life for all Californians.”

The bond authorizes the State’s use of grants and loans for conservation and recycling projects, watershed protection and safe drinking water measures. The bond also includes \$2.7 billion for the construction of new surface reservoirs, like the proposed Sites Reservoir on the west side of the Sacramento Valley. Over the years, YCWA has worked well with the State of California to leverage bond funds for various projects to benefit the people of Yuba County.

YCWA’s groundwater management program is a good example. Responsibly managing our groundwater and surface water is one of YCWA’s primary missions. After the 1970 construction of New Bullards Bar Reservoir and a new canal system to the south county in the 1980’s, water supply reliability for both local farmers and municipal uses improved dramatically. This new infrastructure reduced irrigation demands on groundwater in this area and actually restored the aquifer to historic levels. In conjunction with this recovery, YCWA now actively manages these resources.

Everyone who lives or works in Yuba County’s valley uses groundwater. To protect this resource, our program integrates surface water use with groundwater. This “conjunctive use” enables better management of these resources, especially in extended drought conditions like this year. The Department of Water Resources (DWR) has previously awarded YCWA several grants for groundwater assistance. Funds from Proposition 50, 84, and 204 allowed YCWA to set up a groundwater management program, construct several groundwater-monitoring wells, start more-advanced analysis and modeling of Yuba County’s groundwater aquifer, and extend the YCWA canal system to Wheatland. These grants have enabled our community to provide a more responsible level of stewardship for our groundwater resources.

Proposition 1 includes approximately \$1 billion to cost-share local and regional groundwater management measures. These competitive grants could be used for cleaning up contaminated groundwater basins and improved modeling and monitoring of aquifers so they can be better utilized during drier periods, like California is experiencing this year.

Reducing our flood-risk is also a priority for YCWA. Over the years, the agency has utilized bond funds in partnership with DWR on several projects, including the Forecast Coordinated Operations (FCO) program. This collaborative effort by YCWA, DWR, the Army Corps of Engineers, and National Weather Service improves our community’s ability to anticipate and respond to our region’s flood risks. Using new gauges and modeling, we’re able to better predict storm flood flows and manage reservoir flood releases to minimize peak flood flows and provide advanced warnings to the region’s emergency response organizations. Compared to 1997, we have significantly enhanced

our ability to make quicker, better informed decisions about the safe operation of these reservoirs to reduce this region's flood-risk.

Proposition 1 includes funding for flood protection. Nearly \$400 million would be available for reducing the risk of flooding in the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta, and elsewhere in California.

These past investments by YCWA, using State bond funds, have been a real benefit to the responsible management of our region's water resources. Greater water reliability has strengthened our agricultural sector, maintained reliable groundwater supplies for municipal water demands, helped protect people and property from flooding, and improved habitat for salmon, steelhead and other wildlife species. Proposition 1 could provide a new source of funds for similar actions and programs.

Whether you choose to support or oppose Proposition 1, we urge you to read it:
<http://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/ballot-measures/qualified-ballot-measures.htm>.

John Nicoletti and Tib Belza, Yuba County Water Agency Board Members