

October 25, 2023



WATER EDUCATION  
FOUNDATION

# Water Summit 2023: Taking On the Improbable in Western Water

## Speaker Biographies

### *Keynote Address - The Waters That Connect Us: A Changing Tide in Water Policy*

#### **Anecita Agustinez**

Anecita is an enrolled citizen of the Diné (Navajo) Nation, born to the Tó dích'íinii (Bitter Water Clan People) and born for the Ilocano Clan. As Tribal Policy Advisor to the California Department of Water Resources, she develops department policy and ensures the agency's compliance with AB52 Consultation and with initiatives implemented by the governor and the California Natural Resources Agency. She covers tribal engagement regarding climate change, Human Right to Water, flood and drought impacts, energy-related issues, regional water planning, ecosystem restoration and climate resilience. Anecita was also Assistant Director of the Office of Native American Affairs at the Department of Justice. She is an advocate for self-governance, respect for tribal sovereignty and incorporating tribal science as a best management practice in state management of cultural resources and water infrastructure planning. Agustinez studied political science at Stanford University.

### *Accelerating Change on the Regulatory & Policy Landscape*

#### **Alexandra Biering**

Alex joined the California Farm Bureau in March 2023 as a Senior Policy Advocate focused on water resources. She previously was the Government Affairs and Communications Manager for the Friant Water Authority and a Supervising Water Resources Planner and Public Affairs Specialist for the planning and engineering firm MWH Global (now Stantec), where she supported public agencies on flood management, salmon restoration, water storage and groundwater sustainability projects. She began her career in the Schwarzenegger administration in the offices of the governor and resources secretary. A graduate of the Water Education Foundation's Water Leaders Program, Alex holds a bachelor's degree in philosophy from the University of San Francisco and a master's in public policy from Duke University.

#### **Wade Crowfoot**

As California's Natural Resources Secretary, Wade leads efforts to conserve California's environment and natural resources and advises Gov. Gavin Newsom as a member of his cabinet. He oversees an agency of over 25,000 staff charged with stewarding California's forests and natural lands, rivers and water supplies and coast and ocean. Secretary Crowfoot is leading efforts to achieve Gov. Newsom's ambitious environmental vision, including a commitment to conserve 30 percent of California's land and coastal waters by 2030. He oversees billions of dollars of public investment to protect people and natural places from climate change impacts, and has led efforts to navigate California's record-breaking droughts, floods and wildfires. He previously served in Gov. Jerry Brown's administration as Deputy Cabinet Secretary and Senior Advisor to the governor, driving climate action.

**Chelsea Haines**

Chelsea is Regulatory Relations Manager for the Association of California Water Agencies (ACWA). She oversees a team that engages with the state on its development and implementation of water policies on behalf of ACWA's 470 public water agency members. She previously served as a Legislative Analyst at the State Water Resources Control Board, participating in legislation on the transfer of the board's drinking water program, funding for safe and reliable water projects, water rights reporting and Bay-Delta initiatives. Chelsea is a 2018 Water Leaders graduate, holds a master's degree in international environmental policy from the Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey and a bachelor's degree from California State University, Sonoma in environmental studies and planning.

**Eric Oppenheimer**

Eric is Chief Deputy Director of the State Water Resources Control Board. Appointed in January 2016, he oversees water rights, administration, planning and public affairs. He previously served as Director of the board's Office of Research, Planning and Performance. Eric has more than 20 years of experience in water resources management, including assignments with two of the state's regional water boards, the state water board's Division of Water Rights and the California Department of Water Resources. He holds a bachelor of arts degree in economics and a bachelor of science in environmental science and ecology.

**Erick Orellana**

Erick currently serves as a Senior Policy Advocate for the Community Water Center where he focuses on clean and safe drinking water program implementation. He engages community leaders and members in water policy development and advises state agencies on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion initiatives to achieve the Human Right to Water. Previously, Erick worked in the California Assembly and with NextGen Policy advocating for protection of immigrants in detention centers, stronger agricultural workplace safety guidelines and closing inequitable education gaps for students of color. Erick is also a member of the Safe and Affordable Fund for Equity and Resilience's advisory group. He graduated with a bachelor's degree in political science from California State University, Sacramento.

***Pursuing Sustainability in California Groundwater***

**Tina Cannon Leahy**

Tina is a Staff Counsel IV with California's State Water Resources Control Board Office of the Chief Counsel where she serves as lead attorney in the implementation for the state's landmark Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA). She was previously the Principal Consultant for the California Assembly Water, Parks and Wildlife Committee where she helped draft SGMA. Earlier in her career, Tina was Senior Staff Counsel at the California Department of Fish and Wildlife and an associate attorney in private practice counseling clients and litigating water, environmental quality and endangered species matters. She received her law degree from UC Davis School of Law.

**Paul Gosselin**

Paul joined the California Department of Water Resources as Deputy Director for Sustainable Groundwater Management in July 2021. He oversees the agency's groundwater management activities statewide, including implementation of SGMA. He previously served as Butte County's Director of Water and Resource Conservation where he oversaw the development of three groundwater sustainability plans. Earlier in his career, Paul was Chief Deputy Director at the California Department of Pesticide Regulation and Director of Regulatory Services for the Massachusetts Department of Food and Agriculture. He received a bachelor's degree in biochemistry and a master's degree in chemistry from the University of Massachusetts.

**Ann Hayden**

Ann is Vice President of Environmental Defense Fund's Climate Resilient Water Systems Program and leads implementation of sustainable water management approaches in the arid U.S., including California and the Colorado River Basin. She focuses on advancing incentive-based approaches that ensure adequate water for ecosystems, improve agriculture's resilience to climate change and address the water needs of disadvantaged communities. She is board chair of the San Francisco Estuary Institute and a member of the Water Education Foundation's board of directors. She received a bachelor's degree in marine biology from the University of California, Santa Cruz and a master's degree in environmental science and management from the University of California, Santa Barbara.

**Matt Hurley**

Matt is General Manager of the McMullin Area Groundwater Sustainability Agency in Fresno County. As an attorney and CEO of Water Management Professionals Inc., Hurley has extensive knowledge of SGMA and was heavily involved in the development of the law's regulations and implementation. He previously was General Manager of the Angiola and Green Valley water districts and the Deer Creek Storm Water District, and organized and managed the Tri-County Water Authority Groundwater Sustainability Agency in the Tulare Lake Subbasin. He also served as board chair for the Fresno Slough and Atwell Island water districts among other local water agencies.

***Pivoting to a Dynamic Future in the Colorado River Basin*****JB Hamby**

JB is the 12th Chairman of the Colorado River Board of California and the state of California's Colorado River Commissioner, a post he assumed in January 2023. In those roles, JB works to safeguard the rights and interests of California, its agencies and residents concerning the Colorado River. Since 2020, he has served on the board of Imperial Irrigation District (IID) representing Division 2, which includes southeast El Centro, Heber, Holtville and Seeley. A fourth-generation resident of the Imperial Valley, JB grew up immersed in water and agricultural issues in the Lower Colorado River region. At IID, he led the formation of the Coachella Valley Energy Commission and served as its chair to help develop long-term solutions to complex energy matters and modernize the policies, processes and culture of the organization for the benefit of IID's residents and ratepayers. JB is a Stanford University graduate with a bachelor's degree in history and is an alumnus of the Water Education Foundation's inaugural Colorado River Water Leaders Program.

***Breaking Through: Obsolete Dam Removal in the West*****Brian Johnson**

Brian is the President of the Klamath River Renewal Corporation, a private non-profit guided by 14 board members with diverse experience and shared interest in seeing the economy and environment of the Klamath Basin thrive. Brian is also the longtime California Director for Trout Unlimited, the nation's oldest and largest nonprofit working to conserve, protect, and restore North America's trout and salmon rivers, with about 15,000 members in Oregon and California. Brian and his colleagues at TU have long worked to settle the fisheries, water and power issues in the Klamath River with its partners in tribal government and irrigated agriculture, including the Klamath Hydropower Settlement Agreement. In January, 2020, Governor Newsom appointed Brian to the Central Valley Flood Protection Board. Brian grew up in Iowa and graduated from Duke University and Stanford Law School.

**Robert Lusardi**

Robert is an Assistant Professor of Freshwater Ecology in the Department of Wildlife, Fish, and Conservation Biology at the University of California, Davis, Associate Director at the university's Center for Watershed Sciences and the California Trout-UC Davis Coldwater Fish Scientist. His research has largely focused on river food webs; fish passage and reintroductions; and the integration of temperature, flow and food webs as habitat for salmonids and other native fishes. He has conducted research in the Klamath Basin since 2007, working extensively on the Klamath River and its key tributaries, such as the Shasta River. He leads several research projects involving Klamath River dam removals and has authored numerous peer-reviewed publications.

### **J. Aman Gonzalez**

Aman has served as a Senior Project Manager at California American Water, a subsidiary of American Water, since 2004. He oversees dam management and removal projects, including the 106-foot-tall San Clemente Dam from the Carmel River. He is also on a technical review committee that is evaluating removal of Los Padres Dam. Aman is a certified construction manager and holds a bachelor's degree in civil engineering from California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo. He is a licensed professional engineer.

### **Meghan Quinn**

Meghan joined American Rivers in 2022 to increase American Rivers' regional capacity for dam removal by working with partners to develop and implement fresh, innovative strategies for building consensus across diverse communities impacted by existing dams. Meghan brings a wealth of experience and legal knowledge regarding the Clean Water Act, Endangered Species Act, in-water infrastructure and complex multi-party negotiations, gained through nine years of practice in California environmental law. Meghan strives to use her experience building consensus among diverse stakeholders, negotiating with public regulators and translating the complex into the comprehensible to develop and implement win-win solutions in the byzantine California water policy and multi-benefit project arena. Meghan has a bachelor's degree in international relations from Boston University and a law degree from Pace University School of Law.

## **Water Summit Moderators & Hosts**

### **Jenn Bowles**

Jenn was named Executive Director of the Water Education Foundation in March 2014. A veteran journalist, Jenn worked as a reporter and editor at *The Associated Press* in the Los Angeles bureau for 10 years. She later became the environmental reporter at *The Press-Enterprise*, garnering awards for her coverage of water issues in California during a nine-year stint. In December 2016, she led an international journalism workshop on water issues for UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) in Iran. Jenn has a bachelor's degree in journalism and history from the University of Southern California and completed a year-long Scripps Fellowship in Environmental Journalism at the University of Colorado, Boulder.

### **Nick Gray**

Nick Gray is the Programs Director for the Water Education Foundation. He manages many of the Foundation's workshops, conferences and tours of key water regions across California and the West, bringing attendees up close to dams and other water infrastructure, wildlife areas, farms and other sites involved in water. Before joining the Foundation in 2018, Nick spent 15 years as a science teacher and education director of a science museum. He has also been involved with regional science communication organizations, including Capital Science Communicators. Nick has a bachelor's degree in biology from the University of Dayton.

### **Nick Cahill**

Nick is the Water Education Foundation's Staff Writer, working with the rest of the journalism team to produce *Western Water* news stories, Layperson's Guides on key water topics, the Aquaforndia daily newsfeed and social media posts. He also updates and adds new entries in our online water encyclopedia, Aquapeddia. Nick joined the Foundation team in early 2022. He previously reported for Courthouse News Service, covering water, the environment and California politics. Nick graduated from California State University, Chico with a journalism degree.