



Media Release

State Water Board announces new executive director

Veteran staff member Eric Oppenheimer brings deep policy, programmatic experience on top priorities for the board

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SACRAMENTO— Following a thorough and competitive process, the State Water Resources Control Board has selected Eric Oppenheimer as its new executive director to lead the board’s managerial, programmatic and administrative functions.

Oppenheimer currently serves as one of the State Water Board’s chief deputy directors, with over 25 years of experience, including with two regional boards. For the last eight years, his primary areas of responsibility have encompassed several of the board’s top policy priorities. These include planning solutions for the Bay-Delta, implementing the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act, advancing racial equity, promoting water conservation and administering water rights.

He will succeed Eileen Sobeck, who is retiring in December after seven years with the board and nearly 45 years of public service in a variety of federal and state government roles.

“We are deeply grateful for Eileen’s resolute and calm leadership through the pandemic, historic drought, and the launch of so many groundbreaking efforts that are now central to our work. She has guided the State Water Board’s policies and programs to advance racial equity, safe drinking water, water rights modernization, wetlands protections and sustainable groundwater management, among many other priorities,” said Joaquin Esquivel, chair of the board. “In sum, her contributions have been enormous, not only in terms of the work she led but the grace she led with. As we continue implementing these major priorities and facing the new challenges that climate change presents, Eric’s deep knowledge and practical experience with the regional boards and executive branch will guide our work effectively, equitably and with the urgency this moment requires.”

An environmental scientist by training, Oppenheimer’s career began with water quality protection roles in planning and regulatory programs with the Lahontan and Central Valley regional water boards, interspersed with positions at the Department of Water Resources and the California Coastal Commission. As chief deputy director, he has served as a principal policy advisor to the executive director and the five-member board and overseen more than 500 technical and administrative staff working in water rights, administration, planning and public affairs.



“Throughout my time with the boards, I have gained a deep appreciation for the breadth, complexity and importance of the work we do, but even more significantly, for the profound responsibility that comes with it,” said Eric Oppenheimer. “I am honored to serve in this new capacity and committed to helping the board advance its goals while balancing diverse perspectives and prioritizing racial equity. Active engagement by all stakeholders in the board’s decision-making processes will be key to its success in meeting the challenges of our 21st century climate.”

Oppenheimer will begin in his new role on January 2, 2024.

The State Water Board’s mission is to preserve, enhance, and restore the quality of California’s water resources and drinking water for the protection of the environment, public health, and all beneficial uses, and to ensure proper resource allocation and efficient use for the benefit of present and future generations.