

# SJV WATER

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## Proposed legislation would boost federal funding for recharge projects

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The Groundwater Recharge Technical Assistance Act and the Every Drop Counts Act were presented to the House of Representatives Jan. 13 by Congressman Jim Costa (D-Fresno), whose district covers parts of Fresno and Tulare counties.

Recharge, when water is captured and allowed to percolate into an aquifer, is a critical tool water managers use to navigate the whiplash of the drought-flood cycle typical of the San Joaquin Valley.

This is especially critical as the region adjusts to the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA), which mandates that aquifers achieve balance by 2040. Both bills are co-sponsored with bipartisan support from Valley representatives David Valadao (R-Hanford), Adam Gray (D-Merced), Josh Harder (D-Stanislaus), Zoe Lofgren (D-San Mateo) and Mike Thompson (D-Napa).

“Groundwater recharge is one of the most effective ways to build resilience against drought,” Costa stated in a press release. If passed, according to the release, the bills would provide “long-term solutions to safeguard the San Joaquin Valley from the impacts of extreme drought.”

The bills build upon the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, passed in 2021. The law is at the root of more than \$65 million in investments in San Joaquin Valley water infrastructure, and Costa’s bills propose to add to, or modify the legislation slightly.

Highlights of each bill include:

- Every Drop Counts Act — Modifies the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law's Small Storage Program to expand eligibility for groundwater projects by delineating differences between projects that use surface water and groundwater. It increases the groundwater recharge cap from 30,000 acre-feet to 150,000 acre feet on an annual basis over the life of the project. It adds aquifer stabilization efforts as an eligible criterion by which a project may apply for funding.
- Groundwater Recharge Technical Assistance Act — Provides \$3 million annually from 2026 to 2031 for technical and financial assistance. It empowers the Secretary of the Interior to use unobligated funds under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law Western Water funding for aquifer storage, clean drinking water and flood protection efforts.

The bills would be a much-appreciated injection of federal resources into local projects, such as those underway at Tulare Irrigation District and the Rosedale-Rio Bravo Water Storage District.

Tulare ID endorsed the bills, and manager Aaron Fukuda said they could continue the crucial work of developing new and innovative ways to conduct groundwater recharge.

"These dollars could help agencies identify, vet, and develop groundwater projects to provide flood protection and groundwater recharge," he said. "Tulare ID is currently working on various groundwater recharge projects, such as local groundwater banking projects not only in our service area but with other partners throughout the Kaweah Subbasin and assistance like this would be extremely helpful."

Rosedale-Rio Bravo Water Storage District is a partner in the Kern Fan Groundwater Storage Project, which endorsed the legislation.

Rosedale is in the midst of developing more than 150 acres of new recharge projects in its district, and assistant general manager Trent Taylor said access to additional funding and resources is invaluable especially as planning and construction costs continue to increase.

Additionally, it is becoming more difficult for Kern County agencies to depend on surface water as a reliable supply.

"We must utilize an adaptive management approach to providing drinking water and agricultural supplies to residents," he said. "Groundwater recharge projects allow local agencies to take advantage of time periods where surface water supplies are abundant and store them in the ground for use during times when surface supplies are insufficient to meet the needs of their communities."

Other endorsements for the legislation come from Self-Help Enterprises, a Visalia-based nonprofit that helps residents whose wells go dry, Fresno Irrigation District and the San Joaquin River Exchange Contractors. Two water agencies from Idaho also endorsed the Every Drop Counts Act, as it contains criteria that could help recharge efforts on the Eastern Snake River Plain Aquifer.