

San Geronio Pass Water Agency

DATE: September 8, 2025
TO: Board of Directors
FROM: Lance Eckhart, General Manager
BY: Maricela V. Cabral, Exec. Asst./Clerk of the Board
SUBJECT: Association of California Water Agencies (ACWA) Region 9 Election for 2026-27 Term

RECOMMENDATION

Staff has no recommendation.

SUMMARY

Every two years, the Association of California Water Agencies (ACWA) elects a new Board of Directors, including a new Board for each ACWA region. For the upcoming 2026–27 term, there is one candidate for President, Ernesto A. Avila, and one candidate for Vice President, Carol Lee Gonzales-Brady.

ACWA has also presented a recommended slate of candidates for the Region 9 Board. SGPWA Board may cast their vote for President, Vice President, and either approve the Nominating Committee’s recommended slate as presented or vote individually for the Region 9 chair, vice chair, and three to five board members.

BACKGROUND

Region 9 Board members are elected to represent the issues, concerns, and needs of the region. The Region 9 chair and vice chair will serve on ACWA’s Board of Directors beginning January 1, 2026. In addition, the elected chair and vice chair will recommend Region 9 committee appointments to the ACWA president for the 2026–27 term. Either the chair or vice chair will also hold a seat on the ACWA Finance Committee.

The recommended slate includes one nominee for Chair, one nominee for Vice Chair, and five candidates representing the Arid and Western subareas within Region 9. The ballot, however, lists one candidate for Chair (consistent with the slate), four candidates for Vice Chair, and eight candidates for the five available board member positions. Please see the attached Region 9 ballot for details.

FISCAL IMPACT

No fiscal impact.

ACTION

The Board may vote for the ACWA President, Vice President, and the Region 9 Nominating Committee's recommended slate, or cast votes for individual Region 9 board members. Ballots must be submitted no later than September 19, 2025, and must be signed by the Agency's authorized representative, President Mickey Valdivia.

ATTACHMENTS

Region 9 Board Ballot



Board Officers' Election for President & Vice President and Region Boards for 2026-'27

Both questions below are optional.

Please vote for only **one** candidate for each seat.

To write-in your vote, select Write-in and then type out your choice. Write-in candidates must be an elected or appointed director of an ACWA member agency and must submit a nominating/support resolution from their member agency's board no later than September 19.

Deadline to submit ballots is 5 p.m. on September 19.

ACWA President

Ernesto A. Avila (Election Committee's preferred candidate)

As the current Vice-President of the Association of California Water Agencies (ACWA), I am most proud of the thought, energy and collaboration that went into developing the 2025-'29 Strategic Plan. I want to be the next ACWA President to continue the momentum we have built focusing on four primary goals of Advocacy, Connections, Education and Organizational Effectiveness. This Strategic Plan is about finding new ways to benefit the members of ACWA as we navigate the shifts in water policy at the state and federal level. My commitment is to unify our collective efforts and better assert ACWA's leadership in shaping California's water policy.



I have 42 years of experience with California water as a Civil Engineer, General Manager, Executive Director of three water coalitions involving over 50 water agencies, and I currently serve as CCWD Board President. I have led or supported over \$10 Billion in California water infrastructure serving over 5 million citizens and many industries today.

I have supported ACWA for over 20 years including serving as Vice President and on the Board of Directors, the Executive Committee, the Region 5 Board, the Federal Affairs Committee, the ACWA JPIA Executive Committee of the Board, the ACWA Foundation Steering Committee and Chair of the Local Government Committee.

I would be honored to represent our members as the next President of ACWA.

Learn more at: ccwater.com/AvilaForACWAPresident

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Write-in:

ACWA Vice President

Carol Lee Gonzales-Brady (Election Committee's preferred candidate)

I am pleased to offer my Statement of Qualifications as a Candidate for ACWA Vice President. I'm passionate about delivering prudent fiscal and environmental stewardship and advocating for sound policy. My philosophy: Protect our water, today and tomorrow, with a diversified portfolio of both immediate and long-range strategies and solutions.

I was elected to the Rancho California Water District (RCWD)'s Board of Directors in 2017 and re-elected in 2022, serving two terms as Board President. I joined ACWA in 2017 and became a Region 9 Director in 2019, serving as Vice Chair for the 2024-25 term. I represent the Region on ACWA's Board of Directors, and in 2024 was honored to be elected by the Board to the Executive Committee.

Other committees and task forces include:

- Water Policy Task Force - Vice Chair
- Membership and Communications Committees
- Region 9 Membership Engagement Work Group - Chair
- Strategic Planning Task Force (past)
- Election Committee (past)



Committed to building alliances and cultivating partnerships, I also am a past Director of ACWA/JPIA and serve on other industry Boards including Urban Water Institute (UWI) and Southern California Water Coalition (SCWC) - Legislative Task Force co-Chair.

I earned my BS (magna cum laude) in Business Management from Pepperdine University. My professional career in procurement, contracts, and strategic management has spanned federally

regulated industries including water and electric utilities. A native Californian and vineyard owner, I have given back to my community as an appointed Director on a Resource Conservation District Board and through charities, associations, and local advocacy groups such as the Southwest California Legislative Council.

It has been my honor to serve alongside my dedicated colleagues on the ACWA Board. I look forward to continuing to build upon ACWA's work to promote and advance the priorities, initiatives, and interests of our members.

Please visit RanchoWater.com/ACWAVP. Thank you for your support.

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Write-in:

Region 9 Election Ballot for 2026-'27 Term

Submitted board candidate bios and headshots are available on <https://www.acwa.com/elections>

You may either vote for the slate recommended by the Region Nominating Committee or vote for individual region board members (please note rules & regulations for specific qualifications).

View full rules and regulations [HERE](#)

Region 9 Nominating Committee Recommended Slate

Chair:

- Joseph Grindstaff, Board of Director, Eastern Municipal Water District (Western)

Vice Chair:

- Paul Ortega, Board President, Desert Water Agency (Arid)

Board Members:

- Brenda Dennstedt, Director, Western Municipal Water District (Western)
- Russ Martin, Director, Mission Springs Water District (Arid)
- James Morales Jr., Chairman of the Board, East Valley Water District (Western)
- G. Patrick O'Dowd, Executive Director/GM, Salton Sea Authority (Arid)
- Harvey R. Ryan, Board Member/Director of Division 2, Elsinore Valley Municipal Water District (Western)

Nominating Committee's Recommended Slate

You may select **one** of the following.

I concur with the Region's Nominating Committee's recommended slate above.

I do not concur with the Region's Nominating Committee's recommended slate. I will vote for individual candidates below as indicated.

Candidates for Chair:

You may select **one** of the following.

Joseph Grindstaff, Board of Director, Eastern Municipal Water District (Western)

Candidates for Vice Chair:

You may select **one** of the following.

Joseph Grindstaff, Board of Director, Eastern Municipal Water District (Western)

G. Patrick O'Dowd, Executive Director/GM, Salton Sea Authority (Arid)

Paul Ortega, Board President, Desert Water Agency (Arid)

Harvey R. Ryan, Board Member/Director of Division 2, Elsinore Valley
Municipal Water District (Western)

Candidates for Board Members:

You may select **up to 5** of the following.

Brenda Dennstedt, Director, Western Municipal Water District (Western)

Joseph Grindstaff, Board of Director, Eastern Municipal Water District
(Western)

Russ Martin, Director, Mission Springs Water District (Arid)

James Morales Jr., Chairman of the Board, East Valley Water District
(Western)

G. Patrick O'Dowd, Executive Director/GM, Salton Sea Authority (Arid)

Paul Ortega, Board President, Desert Water Agency (Arid)

Harvey R. Ryan, Board Member/Director of Division 2, Elsinore Valley
Municipal Water District (Western)

Lona M. Williams, Director of Division 2, Beaumont - Cherry Valley Water
District (Western)

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