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California Water Challenges Remain Despite Significant Precipitation in 2023: Latham & Watkins

State and federal officials move forward plans and policies for water conservation, conveyance, and climate resilience.

The winter of 2022-23 brought historic levels of precipitation to California after years of deep drought, dwindling reservoirs, and groundwater depletion. In the first quarter of 2023, most of the state received rainfall exceeding historic averages, with some areas experiencing 200%, or even 300% of average levels. According to the US Drought Monitor, the state is currently drought-free, although some regions are still considered abnormally dry. Despite heavy precipitation over the past year, California's drought resilience remains in question, as critical infrastructure projects face staunch opposition and climate change increases the likelihood of extreme and prolonged droughts. Regulators and water managers had a busy 2023 as they grappled with persistently low groundwater levels, planned for additional water storage and conveyance, and continued to advance water conservation initiatives.

This blog post summarizes key actions taken by state and federal officials in 2023 with respect to California's water supply and provides an outlook for 2024.

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