

TUWaterWays

Water News and More from the Tulane Institute on Water Resources Law & Policy
January 28, 2022

Hope Springs Eternal

But does water? It will, if [Los Angeles](#) Mayor Eric Garcetti's plans come to fruition. Faced with the daunting realities of pervasive drought and climate change, Mayor Garcetti is pushing plans to greatly expand water storage, water conservation, and recycling in order to make L.A. master of its watery destiny. [The goal of locally sourcing 70% of the city's water by 2035 is part of a broader Green New Deal resilience plan](#) (Not to be outdone, neighboring Santa Monica has [similar plans](#)). That is a bold vision, one that will cost billions and billions of dollars in upgraded water treatment, water recycling, and water storage.

Is this literal pipedream also a figurative one? It could be; if the funding and political will to follow through are not found—a concern that is quite real if the reaction to Governor Newsom's call for greater water conservation last year are an indication. [In the depths of last year's drought \(which is still ongoing\), the Governor asked that water use be cut by 15% only to see actual water use increase slightly](#). That could matter because when it comes water, the easiest way to improve water availability is to conserve it when you have it. All of the cool infrastructure in the world won't help you save water that is no longer there.

SCOBY Doby Doo!

Clean, pure water is a wonderful thing, but it is not so easy to find. [Every backpacker knows even a clear mountain stream can carry nasty things](#) which is why they carry filters and water purifiers. Every city knows that, too, which is why they use filters and water purifiers to make your tap water safe. Every last one of us should be thankful for that, but the trouble with chemicals is that, well, they are chemicals and can be tricky—even dangerous—to use. Filters are great but they tend to clog and become less effective. It is enough to raise your stress levels to the point that you could really use a cup of soothing kombucha tea. Maybe kombucha can do more than soothe (and provide a mild [buzz](#)). Maybe it can help water filters be better water filters. That is because the symbiotic culture of bacteria and yeast (SCOBY) that makes kombucha, kombucha tea. [A growing body of research suggests that SCOBY films \(not the movies\) can be used to detect and remove certain pollutants without becoming clogged in the more conventional filters](#). If you have a home water filter system you know that you have to replace them with frustrating frequency and expense. If this really works maybe something like Gummi Bears, whatever they are made of, could be the key to even bigger and better things.

The **Tulane Institute on Water Resources Law and Policy** is a program of the Tulane University Law School.

The Institute is dedicated to fostering a greater appreciation and understanding of the vital role that water plays in our society and of the importance of the legal and policy framework that shapes the uses and legal stewardship of water.

Coming up:

[WOTUS Rule Comments Due](#), February 7

[Native Plant Academy Applications Due](#), February 14

[UF Water Institute Symposium](#), February 22-23

[Tulane Environmental Law Summit](#), March 11-12

[Coastal Law in Louisiana \(CLE\)](#), April 21- 22

Water jobs:

[Ocean and Coastal Law Fellow](#), National Sea Grant Law Center, Oxford MS.

Louisiana Bucket Brigade; [Campaign Director](#), New Orleans, LA; [Economic Development Manager](#), River Parishes, LA

[Sustainability/ESG Director](#); PwC; multiple locations

[Research Associate](#); University of New Orleans; New Orleans, LA

[Research Associate 1](#); University of Louisiana Lafayette; Lafayette, LA

[Organizing Representative](#); Sierra Club; New Orleans, LA

[Staff Attorney](#); Save Our Springs Alliance; Austin, TX

[Request of Interest](#); Restore Mississippi River Delta; deadline: Feb. 14

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Water Infrastructure—Everybody's Doing It. Well, Almost Everybody. Okay, At Least Some Folks

Infrastructure is not just for cool Los Angelinos (see above). With the passage of the federal infrastructure bill in 2021 and growing awareness of just how worn out and tired our roads, bridges and water and electrical systems are, it seems every state and community is ready to build a shiny new tomorrow. For those needing a little help the Biden administration just released its [“guidebook”](#) for the \$1 trillion infrastructure program. Here in Louisiana, the legislature has [approved \\$274 million for community water and drainage system upgrades](#). The scale of these commitments is truly impressive and welcome. The only trouble is they do not match the scale of the need. Even in committing funds for improvements, Louisiana noted that the state's drinking water systems—many in cash strapped cities and towns— will need around \$7 billion over the next 20 years. Compounding that problem is the fact that factors like [flood risk and water supply security are expected to get much worse which will put those communities with fewer resources and less political clout at disproportionate risk](#). In short, the resources and the risks are not being equally or equitably shared. Unless that is addressed the ties that bind us together will likely become looser and the consequences of that will go way beyond water management.

Out of Sight, Out of Mind—Sea Level Rise and Ground Water

For most of human history (and pretty much still the case in Texas) ground water was thought to be something beyond human understanding but not human use. As our science, technology, and laws have improved, so has our understanding of ground water and our ability to manage it. Kudos to the largely uncelebrated heroes and heroines who have been making that happen. The job is still not done and nowhere is that more apparent than in the realm of sea level rise planning. Most of that planning has been two dimensional, focusing on the extent a given level of sea level rise would express itself on surface lands and waters. There is no doubt that it is important but it leaves out the important roles water tables and ground water flows play in the real world. How important? [An article in the January 2022 issue of MIT Technology Review explains it better than we can in this space](#). Suffice to say that rising sea levels can lead to rising water tables. Suffice it further to say that sea level rise and efforts to manage for it (think seawalls, especially those with below ground foundations) can impede groundwater flows, which typically run to the sea. The net effect is coastal lands can be much more saturated which in turn means more surface flooding since all of that water has to show up somewhere. Of course, that water can be pumped somewhere but that just shifts that problem to someplace else and if not done very, very carefully that pumping can lead to subsidence that sinks structures and, at some point, futures. Conjecture? Hardly. How do you think [New Orleans became the most sung about below sea-level community](#) in the world? There are lots of things New Orleans gets right and others might want to copy. This is not one of them.

In the Good Old Summit Time (Yes, the Summit Blurb)

The highlight of the New Orleans social calendar is upon us once again. That's right, it's time for the 27th Annual Tulane Environmental Law & Policy Summit! Final details are still being finalized, but we can tell you that it will be held March 11 and 12, attendance will be virtual, CLEs will be available, and Governor John Bel Edwards is slated to give a keynote address. That address and a will be the in-person cherry on the sessions' virtual sundae! Get your best summiting gear ready now!