

TUWaterWays

Water News and More from the Tulane Institute on Water Resources Law & Policy

[December 11, 2020](#)

It's [Trading Places](#) Meets [Chinatown!](#)

Quick! Someone get our agent on the phone. We've got a boffo idea for a script: all the hijinks and comedy of commodities futures trading AND the life-and-death stakes of California water!

What on earth are we going on about? The addition of California water futures to the Chicago Mercantile Exchange! Now, those who support this development point to the [increased certainty large-scale municipal and agricultural water buyers will have](#) when planning for water prices. They can lock-in today the prices they're going to pay next year. In a vacuum, sure, that sounds useful.

However, for there to be buyers, there also have to be sellers. So, [now there will be a class of people who are literally invested in raising the cost of water for Californians](#). Detractors will point to the fact that, despite everyone's shared fondness for porkbellies and frozen concentrated orange juice, water is different. Water is special. Water is [a human right](#). People's basic daily lives and very survival aren't tied to other commodities like they are to water. After all, this kind of system has already seen [abuse in Australia](#) – [repeatedly](#), and there are [one million people in California who currently lack access to clean water](#). How many already wealthy people will get richer by making clean water less accessible? Like we said, we've got a [boffo socko](#) idea for a script.

[Issue Number One: Is Wastewater is Water or a Waste? Jack Germond... WRONG!](#)

Do you ever think about wastewater? What it is, where it goes, how it's dealt with? The thing is, just because it's traditionally been wasted, doesn't mean it's a waste. Wastewater is water that was (hopefully) clean before it came to our homes and businesses and then left carrying... other stuff. Sometimes that other stuff is [genetic material](#) that can help public health officials spot viral outbreaks before symptoms appear.

Often, that other stuff is a bunch of compounds containing nitrogen or phosphorous. Nitrogen and phosphorous are [what plants crave](#), so they are the bulk of the fertilizer farmers put in their fields and a large part of the stuff that used to be plants the people add to the wastewater mix. Because it's also what bacteria crave, bacteria are used to take phosphorous and nitrogen out of waste water. Usually, that's done with two different types of bacteria – one that craves nitrogen, and one that craves phosphorous. However, a [new breakthrough](#) by researchers at University of Singapore ('sup, [LiNUS the Lion?](#)) has [isolated a strain of bacteria](#) that loves to chow down on both. Hopefully this leads to cheaper and less-energy intensive treatment at wastewater plants around the world.

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:

[Building Resilience in American's Coastlines](#) webinar; December 15

[Environmental Law Institute: Single-Use Plastics and the Pandemic](#); December 15

[Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement v. Iowa Oral Arguments](#); December 16

[American Water Works Association: 2020 Regulatory Update](#); December 16

[The Water Collaborative: State of the Sector](#); December 17

Water jobs:

[Operations Manager](#); National Wildlife Federation; St. Petersburg, FL

[Associate Attorney](#); Earthjustice; Seattle, WA

[Water Conservation Administrator](#); City & County of San Francisco; Bodie, CA (no, not really)

[Assistant Director](#); Virginia Coastal Policy Center, William & Mary Law School; Williamsburg, VA

[Director of Conservation, Texas](#); The Nature Conservancy; *Insert-City-Here, TX*

[Senior Specialist \(Water Stewardship\)](#); Gap, Inc.; San Francisco, CA

[Watershed Specialist](#); Bayou City Waterkeeper; Houston, TX

[Environmental Specialist](#); Metropolitan Water District of Southern California; Parker Dam, CA

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But what to do with the leftovers after the bacteria have done their job? Usually, it goes to a landfill ([boo!](#)), but sometimes it can get used as fertilizer, and a new treatment method developed by researchers on the other side of the planet from Singapore at Aalto University (Finnish universities don't need mascots, it seems, so here's some [live cams of Finnish wildlife](#)) aims at improving the reusability of the nitrogen and phosphorous collected by treatment plants. Their end goal is a cycle where the nutrients are applied to plants, those plants grow, people eat those plants, people pee and poo those nutrients into the wastewater, the treatment plant collects those nutrients and sell them back to the farmers to apply to plants again. [Genius!](#) Too bad an awful lot of those [nutrients applied to the fields never make it into the plants](#).

Who'da Think it? Flood Protection "On Demand" Only Works When It's Demanded

Ah, Venice. It floods, or it has flooded for over a thousand years, anyways. That stopped [back in October](#) when [the most amazing system](#) came on line to provide flood protection when tidal surges demand it and to stay the heck out of the way when it's not needed. But like a henhouse doesn't protect the hens from the fox if the door is left open, MOSE doesn't stop flooding if it's not turned on. Well, this week the tide was higher than expected, so the system wasn't activated, and [Venice flooded again](#). Just like old times! The lesson here must be something about it not mattering how strong the tool is if you don't know when to use it.

[Movin' on Up!](#)

This sure has been a week for [surprise releases](#) – recently Congressional negotiators pared down the House of Representatives version of the [Water Resources Development Act \(WRDA\) 2020 bill](#) that was passed by the House in late July, and fast-tracked it for a full Congressional vote. The [new version of WRDA 2020](#) contains some key [provisions for Louisiana](#), that with adequate funding could mean better flood management on the Mississippi River and throughout the state. The bill also includes language that would authorize crucial coastal and environmental restoration studies and projects. Despite those exciting features, it [leaves out](#) vital clean water funding and PFAS regulations, to the dismay of many. Congress suspended chamber rules and the [House of Representatives passed](#) this version of the bill on Tuesday, and it will likely also be quickly moving on to the Senate. However, it's [still just a bill](#). Whether or not it will pass the Senate, make it through President Trump's veto power, and whether the necessary funding will be appropriated for all of its water infrastructure projects and studies are separate matters completely, so we remain cautiously skeptical.