

Colorado River Board of California  
**2023 STATE LEADERSHIP ACCOUNTABILITY ACT REPORT**

December 29, 2023

Mr. Wade Crowfoot, Secretary  
California Natural Resources Agency  
715 P Street, 20<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Secretary Crowfoot,

In accordance with the State Leadership Accountability Act of 2015 (SLAA), the Colorado River Board of California (Board) submits this report on the review of its systems of internal controls, risk-mitigation strategies and monitoring processes for the biennial period that ends on December 31, 2023.

Should you have any questions regarding this report, please contact Mr. Christopher Harris, Executive Director ([csharris@crb.ca.gov](mailto:csharris@crb.ca.gov)), or Ms. Jessica Neuwerth, Deputy Director ([jneuwerth@crb.ca.gov](mailto:jneuwerth@crb.ca.gov)), at (818) 500-1625.

## **BACKGROUND**

The Board was created in 1937, pursuant to Sections 12500 through 12565 of the Water Code, and is an independent headquarters agency, under the California Natural Resources Agency, and located in Glendale, California. The Board currently maintains twelve (12) authorized full-time staff positions; of those, five (5) are administrative, and seven (7) are technical. The Board's executive management team is currently made up of an executive director, deputy director and an administrative staff services manager. The Board's primary responsibilities include the following:

- Protecting and maintaining California's rights and interests in its Colorado River water and hydroelectric power resources;
- Representing California in discussions among the seven Colorado River Basin States, Native American Indian Tribes, the federal government and others in implementing joint cooperative programs to protect California's continued use of Colorado River water and addressing related environmental and water quality issues; and
- Representing California in negotiations and discussions associated with the on-going implementation of the 1944 U.S./Mexico Water Treaty through cooperative efforts with the U.S. International Boundary and Water Commission, the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation and the other six Colorado River Basin states.

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Board Members include representatives of the six water agencies and districts with Colorado River water rights and utilizing Colorado River water resources. These agencies and districts include: Coachella Valley Water District, Imperial Irrigation District, Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, The Metropolitan Water District of Southern California, Palo Verde Irrigation District, and the San Diego County Water Authority (Six Agencies). Additionally, the Directors of the Departments of Water Resources and Fish and Wildlife, or their designees, serve on the Board as *ex officio* members. There are also two members of the general public appointed by the Governor.

Finally, the Board is 100% funded and supported by annual contributions from the Six Agencies, and does not receive any general funds, bond funding, or special funds. Consequently, the sources or levels of annual funding for the Board and its operations and administration were not considered at risk during this biennial reporting period and are not considered at risk in the foreseeable future.

#### CONTROL ENVIRONMENT

As the executive director of the Colorado River Board of California, Mr. Christopher Harris, is responsible for the overall establishment and maintenance of the Board's internal controls system and monitoring processes. The Board has identified Mr. Christopher Harris and Ms. Jessica Neuwerth as its designated agency monitors.

The small size of the Board requires its executive management team to engage in monitoring of the Board's internal controls system on a weekly, if not daily, basis, through the review and implementation of the following internal controls protocols: (1) utilization of standard business practices associated with budgeting, payroll, accounting, purchasing, and contracting pursuant to State Administrative Manual (SAM) policies and procedures; and (2) utilization of standard human resources management practices, policies and procedures pursuant to the SAM for recruitment, retention, personnel management, including staff annual evaluations and individual development and training plans. Board executive, administrative, and technical staff continually strive to ensure that the Board's administrative and fiscal policies, procedures, and practices are compliant and up-to-date with current regulations, policies, and guidance contained in the SAM and the State Information Management Manual (SIMM). The Board's executive, administrative, and technical staff continue to engage in communication, coordination, on-the-job training and mentoring to ensure that established internal systems control protocols are appropriately followed and effectively implemented, including staff training in new procedures, and staff meetings. Finally, the Board executive management staff ensure that all probationary and permanent staff receive annual evaluations associated with work performance, and have current individual development and training plans in place.

Regular staff meetings and briefings are held to discuss the following types of information: (1) current assessment of workload and specific job task assignments and status; (2)

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review and provide updates regarding new policies and procedures developed internally by executive management, or new policies, regulations, or procedures emanating from outside of the agency, i.e., from other State government agencies. The hierarchical organization of the Board includes the executive management team comprised of the executive director, deputy director, and staff services manager. This core team meets on a nearly daily basis and continually reviews the progress and status of ensuring that the Board's critical core functions continue to be met effectively. This includes close coordination and communication with other state agencies that provide contract services related to human resources and personnel management, including personnel recruitment processes.

Resetting and maintaining normal Board operations following the COVID-19 pandemic period proved to be challenging for the Board and its staff. These ongoing challenges included the ability to perform the Board's mandated responsibility to provide regular monthly meetings for the Board members and general public; management and retention of the Board's civil service personnel; coordination and management of the day-to-day performance of technical and policy-related tasks associated with protection of California's Colorado River water and power resources; and ensuring the effective implementation of State administrative and fiscal rules and regulations. In response to these challenges, the Board has developed a telework policy, administrative staff have been hired to fill vacancies, and Board meetings, initially held virtually, have resumed to be held in person with travel to various member agencies.

#### **Information and Communication**

The monitoring is conducted by the Board's executive management team through regular staff meetings, communications among Unit supervisors, and robust information sharing among all staff members responsible for ongoing activities within the agency. The Board has documented the internal process to be followed in the event the executive director is not available, or the position is vacant. For example, the deputy director is authorized to perform the executive director's duties in the event of his absence. This internal process is practical and effective due to the small size of the Agency and limited number of Board staff persons available.

External communications are not particularly common, and typically involve questions from another state agency regarding a specific issue that the Board is dealing with. Examples, include queries for information from the Department of Finance, State Controller's Office, or California Human Resources Department, etc. All external communications are conducted appropriately and professionally. Periodically, various Board technical or administrative staff receive requests for information from other governmental organizations that the Board works with (local agencies, or other agencies from other states, or federal agencies), or from members of the general public seeking information about the Colorado River. All of these information requests are directed to the

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subject-matter experts according to the type of information, and as appropriate standardized and consistent factually correct responses are provided.

## **MONITORING**

The information included here discusses the entity-wide, continuous process to ensure internal control systems are working as intended. The role of the executive monitoring sponsor includes facilitating and verifying that the Colorado River Board of California monitoring practices are implemented and functioning. The responsibilities as the executive monitoring sponsor(s) have been given to: Chris Harris, Executive Director. The small size of the Board requires that its executive management team engages in monitoring of the internal controls system on a weekly, if not daily, basis through the review and implementation of internal controls protocols associated with the program activities of the Board's administration and technical operations, including procurement, payment of invoices, and budgeting and accounting procedures; payroll; human resources; and employee training, including that of new employees. Staff continue to ensure that the Board's administrative policies, procedures and protocols are compliant and up-to-date with current regulations, policies and guidance contained in the State Administrative Manual (SAM) and the State Information Management Manual (SIMM). Finally, Board staff continue to engage in communication, coordination, on-the-job training and employee mentoring activities to ensure that established internal controls procedures are followed and implemented appropriately.

In the event that internal control deficiencies are identified during ongoing monitoring, the Board's executive management team would initiate a process to evaluate, develop and implement appropriate remedial strategies.

Through the Board's ongoing executive management team monitoring processes and mandated reporting requirements, the Board continuously reviews, evaluates, and improves its systems of internal controls and monitoring processes. As such, the Board has determined that it complies with California Government Code sections 13400-13407.

## **RISK ASSESSMENT PROCESS**

The following personnel were involved in the Colorado River Board of California risk assessment process: executive management, middle-management, front-line management, and staff.

The following methods were used to identify risks: brainstorming meetings, ongoing monitoring activities, audit/review results, other/prior risk assessments, and performance metrics.

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The following criteria were used to rank risks: likelihood of occurrence, potential impact to mission/ goals/objectives, timing of potential event, potential impact of remediation efforts, and tolerance level for the type of risk.

Pursuant to guidance provided by state law and regulations, the Board's executive director, deputy director, and administrative staff services manager have reviewed the Board's current system of internal controls and have identified three risks described below. The Board's executive management team meets regularly to review and identify any potential risks to the agency and its operations. This includes a review of the following: (1) effectively meeting the Board's goals and objectives through the use of strategic planning, both short- and long-term; (2) effective management of human resources and personnel, including recruitment of highly qualified candidates and retention of valued staff persons; (3) annual budget planning, and utilization of up-to-date and appropriate procurement and accounting policies and procedures; (4) maintenance and implementation of effective information technology applications and security practices pursuant to state policies and guidance; and (5) ensuring that up-to- date disaster, operations and information technology recovery planning processes are in place. The Board currently has procedures and controls in place to address potential risks.

The three risks identified by the Board include the following:

- Operations-Internal-Staff: Key Person Dependence and Workforce Succession Planning;
- Operations-External-Staff: Recruitment, Retention and Maintain Staffing Levels; and
- Operations-External-FI\$Cal Implementation, Maintenance, Functionality, and Support.

As potential risks were identified, mitigating controls were developed. The Board's executive management team determined the most significant risks based upon severity of impact as well as probability of occurrence. For the risks identified, the corresponding control, working as intended, would provide reasonable and adequate mitigation for that specific risk. Because of the small number of Board staff, it was relatively straight-forward to examine the risks and controls that need to be put into place to address those specific risks.

## **RISKS AND CONTROLS**

### **Risk: Key Person Dependence, and Workforce Succession Planning**

The Board continually strives to maintain experienced and knowledgeable professional staff that address both the technical and administrative functions and needs of the Board. The expertise maintained by the Board is extremely specialized making it very difficult to

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recruit staff with the necessary knowledge and skills already in place. By necessity, the Board employs on-the-job training to bring new staff up to a proficient level of expertise.

Because of the small size of the agency, each employee's duties and responsibilities are important and therefore having a vacancy poses a risk that certain key or core functions will not be completed unless the vacant position's duties are reassigned to another staff member. Based upon that risk, it is necessary to ensure that there is a high degree of cross-training, sharing of historical and subject-matter knowledge, and familiarity with the Board's technical and administrative programs, and mission goals and objectives.

**Control: A**

The requisite control currently being implemented is that Board staff are trained to perform multiple functions on a day-to-day basis. The implementation of this control is further supported by weekly staff meetings and status and task reviews and assignments within both the Board's Technical and Administrative Services Units. Frequent and consistent opportunities for communication and information sharing continues to result in staff maintaining up-to-date knowledge regarding the status and priorities of the Board's policies and procedures and primary programs and activities.

Furthermore, in the event an employee is planning to retire, transfers to another position, or separates from State service, an effort is made to obtain as much notice as possible, and ensure an effective transfer of knowledge and transition to the designated replacement staff-person. While a very small state agency, the Board endeavors to facilitate upward mobility by maintaining an organizational structure that provides promotional and training opportunities for all levels of staff, including entry level through executive management.

**Risk: Recruitment, Retention, and Staffing Levels**

Because of the Board's unique role in representing the State of California and the Six Agencies in protecting California's rights and interests in Colorado River water and hydroelectric power resources, the Board requires highly specialized expertise and recruitment for technical positions can be challenging. Consequently, as vacancies occur, planned or otherwise, it is a very significant challenge to find, recruit, hire, and retain the highly qualified and specialized policy-level and technical expertise required to conduct the Board's important technical functions or protecting and representing California's rights and interests in its Colorado River water rights and resources.

Without the necessary policy-level and technical expertise and those unique skill-sets associated with management of complex Colorado River issues, the immediate result would be a significant increase in workload for senior technical staff and the executive management team and/or an inability to meet all necessary and required day-to-day work objectives, thus degrading the ability of the Board to perform its primary responsibilities.

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The Boards' Administrative Unit is composed of highly professional staff. Recruiting individuals with the necessary expertise and retaining administrative positions can be very challenging. Maintaining the quality of the Board's ongoing administrative functions operations coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic period also proved challenging, and required significant coordination and communications among the the Board's staff and executive team members. Due to the small size of the Board's Administrative Services Unit, staff need to be trained on multiple areas of responsibility as opposed to subject matter experts in administrative functions. In addition, it is significantly important to maintain the required staffing levels as employee turnover causes an increase in workload that might result in inability to meet all necessary as well as mandatory day-to-day administrative operations and functions as required by the State of California.

#### **Control: A**

The current control in place to address the periodic need to hire and retain qualified staff, is for the Board to identify and maintain contact with individuals, both within and outside of California state government, who have specialized knowledge regarding Colorado River operations and policy- level and technical issues and who may be eligible to be hired by the Colorado River Board as vacancies become available.

In 2021, the Board received approval from the California Department of Water Resources (DWR) and CALHR to use DWR's Engineer, Water Resources Classification, which will expand our ability to recruit from that classification. Finally, the Board periodically makes use of the expertise and skill-sets of retired annuitants as appropriate and as necessary.

The current internal control in place for the Board's Administrative Services Unit is to periodically address and review the workload for each staff person and make a determination based on the evaluation if there is a need to restructure, reorganize and/or develop a Budget-Change-Proposal to hire more staff. The Board hires permanent and/or limited intermittent and retired annuitant employees who have the administrative and/or technical expertise to provide administrative and/or technical support as necessary and appropriate.

#### **Risk: FI\$Cal Implementation, Maintencane, and Functionality**

The transition of the Board's financial management system to the State's FI\$Cal System has required significant coordination and consultation with the Department of Finance and the FI\$Cal Service Center to address compatibility issues associated with the funding and business relationship between the Board, Department of Finance, and State Controller's Office.

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**Control: A**

The Board's current control to address the on-going challenges associated with the successful transition to the new FI\$Cal system is to ensure that the Board's administrative staff effectively cross-train and share information, and continue to develop and maintain good working relationships and effective lines of communication and coordination with Department of Finance and staff in the FI\$Cal Service Center. In fact, some of the issues encountered during the transition process have required the development of unique "work-arounds" by Board staff in collaboration with the FI\$Cal Service Center.

**CONCLUSION**

The Colorado River Board of California strives to reduce the risks inherent in its work and accepts the responsibility to continuously improve by addressing newly recognized risks and revising risk mitigation strategies as appropriate. I certify that the Board's internal controls and monitoring systems are adequate to both identify and address current and potential risks facing the organization.

In conclusion, I certify that the Board's current systems of internal controls and monitoring processes and risk-mitigation strategies are adequate to identify and address any material risks facing the organization.

Christopher Harris  
Executive Director

cc: California Legislature [Senate (2), Assembly (1)]  
Californian State Auditor  
California State Library  
California State Controller  
Director of California Department of Finance  
Secretary of California Government Operations Agency