

CASA Conference Report – Aug 2026 – Napa, California

Carter; 7 Oct 2026

The CASA conference provided an extremely valuable opportunity to learn about current wastewater issues and to exchange ideas with other water and wastewater professionals.

One of the most valuable aspects of the conference was **making connections with other agencies and their staff and Board members**. I had the opportunity to connect with staff and Board members from **Goleta and Carpinteria**, providing an opportunity to compare experiences, discuss common challenges, and learn how other agencies in our region are approaching wastewater operations, infrastructure, funding, and regulatory issues. These relationships can be valuable as we encounter similar issues and look for practical solutions.

A major theme throughout the conference was the **growing financial challenge of maintaining and replacing wastewater infrastructure**. Many agencies are dealing with aging treatment facilities, collection systems, pumps, pipelines, and other critical assets while construction, energy, labor, and regulatory costs continue to increase. The conference reinforced the importance of long-term capital planning and maintaining adequate financial resources to address infrastructure needs before they become emergency problems.

Funding opportunities were another significant topic. Agencies need to be prepared to take advantage of state and federal funding programs and have projects sufficiently developed to compete for grants or low-interest financing. Given the cost of wastewater infrastructure, outside funding can be an important part of a District's long-term financial strategy.

Another important takeaway was that **wastewater treatment can no longer be viewed simply as the process of treating and disposing of wastewater**. Water recycling and energy are increasingly important components of the wastewater equation. Wastewater contains resources that can potentially be recovered and reused. Looking at wastewater, recycled water and energy use/recovery together provides a more complete picture of the opportunities and challenges facing wastewater agencies.

This broader approach also affects infrastructure planning. Decisions about treatment processes and capital improvements should consider not only wastewater treatment, but also **water recycling opportunities, energy efficiency, operating costs, resource**

recovery, and long-term sustainability. The conference reinforced the idea that these issues are interconnected and should not be considered independently.

An interesting discussion involved the wastewater challenges associated with **data centers**. Although this is not currently relevant to our District, I found it noteworthy that the wastewater industry is still working to understand and develop effective approaches for treating wastewater generated by some data-center operations. It is an example of how rapidly changing industries can create new challenges for wastewater agencies and treatment systems.

Overall, I found the conference extremely valuable not only for the technical and regulatory information, but also for the opportunity to **build relationships with other water and wastewater agencies**. The conference reinforced the importance of looking at wastewater as part of a much larger water, energy, and resource-recovery system.