

DIRECTOR OF PLANNING & WATER RESOURCES

SANTA MARGARITA WATER DISTRICT | RANCHO SANTA MARGARITA, CALIFORNIA

ANNUAL SALARY: \$211,159 – \$291,084 DOE/DOQ* *An additional 3% COLA is anticipated for July, pending Board approval



CAREER OPPORTUNITY

THE SANTA MARGARITA WATER DISTRICT (SMWD) is seeking a visionary and innovative Director of Planning & Water Resources to build the District's water resources planning and regulatory strategy as it advances a significant capital program and strengthens its long-term service delivery capabilities. As a forward-thinking and complex water district, SMWD offers the opportunity to shape long-range water supply, sustainability, and environmental stewardship initiatives. This role consolidates key planning and water resources functions, and enhances the District's ability to assess emerging regulatory, environmental, and resource considerations that influence capital and operational priorities. Working closely with internal leadership, the Board of Directors, and regional partners, the Director will guide policy development and planning efforts that shape the District's future direction. The ideal candidate brings sound technical judgment, strategic perspective, and the ability to navigate complex water resource and regulatory environments. *Translate long-range vision into practical, actionable strategies that support the District's continued excellence and resilience; apply today!*



Santa Margarita
Water District

THE COMMUNITY

NESTLED IN THE CANYONS OF SOUTH ORANGE COUNTY and not far from the bustle of the Los Angeles metro area, Santa Margarita Water District is headquartered in beautiful Rancho Santa Margarita. The District serves ten distinctive communities, including the cities of Mission Viejo, Rancho Santa Margarita, and San Juan Capistrano, as well as the unincorporated communities of Coto de Caza, Las Flores, Ladera Ranch, Talega in San Clemente, and the Rancho Mission Viejo villages of Sendero, Esencia, and Rienda. With year-round temperate weather, proximity to ocean beaches, and set against breathtaking canyons, these communities offer a slower pace than the northern end of the County, while still providing easy access to all the amenities of the second-largest metro area in the U.S.

Residents enjoy access to parks, trails, and nearby natural areas that support an active, outdoor-oriented lifestyle year-round, along with highly regarded educational institutions and an engaged community culture. From the meandering streets, period architecture, and quaint historic downtown of San Juan Capistrano; to family-friendly Mission Viejo, with its excellent schools and beautiful recreational lake; and Rancho Mission Viejo's meticulously master-planned communities, incorporating thoughtful touches from wellness centers to summer camps, the District's service area reflects a diverse mix of historic neighborhoods and modern amenities. These communities are also characterized by responsible growth and a strong emphasis on environmental stewardship and long-term sustainability—values that align closely with SMWD's mission.

SMWD BY THE NUMBERS



1 Groundwater Treatment Plant



233 FACILITIES



1,700 MILES of Pipeline



Industry First Advanced Recycled Water Treatment Plant



2 ADVANCED WASTEWATER TREATMENT PLANTS



9,500 Acre-Foot of Recycled Water Reservoirs

[Click here for more details about SMWD's complex infrastructure](#)



THE ORGANIZATION

THE SANTA MARGARITA WATER DISTRICT (SMWD) is a fiscally healthy and sustainability-focused retail water district located in southern Orange County, California, providing high-quality drinking water, recycled water, and wastewater services to 200,000+ residents across a 111 square mile service area. Governed by a five-member elected Board of Directors and with an annual budget of approximately \$170 million, the District is at a pivotal moment as it works to build and align a new organizational structure focused on innovation, collaborative leadership, and long-term sustainability. With a mid-sized workforce of over 200 employees, the District has added a number of strategic new positions for this fiscal year, with the goal of centering operational agility and targeted growth to meet current demand and future needs. Leveraging meaningful regional, state, and federal impact in water policy and resource management, SMWD is recognized for its award-winning conservation efforts and campaigns, and places a strong emphasis on leadership development through a well-received internal leadership training program. As the District continues to grow as a cohesive, high-performing organization, it seeks team-oriented leaders who value accountability, collaboration, and service excellence in advancing SMWD's mission and public trust.

[LEARN MORE ABOUT THE DISTRICT](#)



CLICK BUTTON

PLANNING & WATER RESOURCES DEPARTMENT

THE PLANNING & WATER RESOURCES DEPARTMENT LEADS the District's long-range supply strategy, regulatory oversight, and water quality stewardship. Overseeing planning, water quality, and water resources functions, the department advances groundwater and recycled water initiatives, conservation programs, hydraulic modeling, and facilities planning while ensuring full compliance with federal, state, and regional requirements. It provides scientific and technical expertise through in-house laboratory services, manages environmental permitting and regulatory coordination, and works closely with the Engineering and Operations departments to align future resource needs with capital investment decisions. Through strategic planning and sound technical judgment, the department ensures safe water delivery today while positioning the District for long-term reliability and resilience.



THE JOB

THE DIRECTOR OF PLANNING & WATER RESOURCES LEADS THE DISTRICT'S long-range water resources planning, water quality and regulatory strategy, sustainability initiatives, and planning-related programs that inform future capital and operational decisions. This is a newly-created position, bringing with it the opportunity to consolidate all related District functions. At present, it's expected that the Director will oversee between 10-15 staff. Responsibilities include evaluating emerging regulatory requirements, environmental considerations, funding opportunities, regional supply trends, and the ability to translate these factors into clear organizational priorities. In coordination with the Director of Engineering and the Director of Operations, this role ensures that long-range planning is practical, financially viable, and aligned with implementation capacity. The Director serves as a key advisor to executive leadership, implementing the Board's strategic direction, and represents the District in regional, interagency, and regulatory settings.



THE IDEAL CANDIDATE

THE IDEAL CANDIDATE IS AN EXPERIENCED WATER RESOURCES PROFESSIONAL with substantial expertise in infrastructure planning, water resource planning, and regulatory policy. They possess the technical depth and judgment to evaluate complex resource and environmental issues and guide informed decision-making. Familiarity with Southern California's regulatory environment and water supply conditions is highly valued, particularly the ability to understand how changing policies and regional constraints affect long-term planning. The successful candidate demonstrates strong analytical skills, financial awareness, and the ability to translate technical information into clear, practical recommendations for executive leadership and the Board of Directors.

Santa Margarita Water District is building an intentional culture of collaboration, innovation, and forward momentum. Leaders who combine vision with execution will thrive in this environment, and those with the genuine desire to work together, communicate, and build consensus will find a like-minded team, and the opportunity to shape the future of water resource management in this dynamic region.

Core Competencies of the Ideal Candidate will include:

Strategic Thinking: Anticipates long-term organizational needs, aligns operational goals with larger priorities, and creatively approaches problem-solving.

Team Orientation: Approaches challenges and day-to-day tasks as an opportunity to collaborate with talented colleagues and staff.

Communication: Listens actively and seeks to understand; maintains an intentionally high-volume, real-time communication flow with executive leadership team to ensure shared context and strategic alignment.

Relationship-Building: Builds trust and credibility with executive leadership, the Board of Directors, staff, and external partners.

Talent Development: Prioritizes mentorship and knowledge-sharing to empower staff and foster growth; actively promotes leadership development and succession planning.

Change Agility: Remains adaptable to evolving organizational needs, builds change-resilient teams, and cultivates a solutions-focused mindset.

Innovation: Acts as a driving force advancing service excellence, forward-thinking projects, and thoughtful organizational change; creates space for new ideas, risk-taking, and out-of-the-box thinking.

Vision: Employs big-picture thinking, works collaboratively with the executive leadership team to take cutting-edge ideas to execution, and communicates organizational vision compellingly to staff to build alignment and buy-in.

Mission Focus: Believes in and models SMWD's mission, vision, and values including service excellence, environmental sustainability and resource stewardship, fiscal responsibility and transparency, and strengthening communities through inter-agency and regional relationships; creates an inclusive environment where employees feel supported and connected to the District's mission.



Employment Standards

Any combination of experience and training that would likely provide the required knowledge and abilities is qualifying. A typical way to obtain the knowledge and abilities would be:

Education: Equivalent to a Bachelor's degree (Master's degree desired) from an accredited college or university with in civil or environmental engineering, urban or regional planning, environmental science, public administration, or a closely related field.

Experience: 10+ years of progressively responsible experience in water utility planning, infrastructure development, environmental review, or land use planning, including at least three (3) years of managerial level experience.

Please Note: Possession of a valid certificate of registration as a Professional Civil Engineer issued by the California State Board of Registration for Civil and Professional Engineers is desired, but not required.



SALARY & BENEFITS

This position will receive an annual salary of **\$211,159–\$291,084 DOE/DOQ**, with an additional **3% COLA** is anticipated for July, pending Board approval.

PLUS an attractive benefits package that includes:

CalPERS Retirement: The Classic members' formula is 2.7% at 55 with an employee contribution of 8%, while Public Employees' Pension Reform Act (PEPRA) members have a formula of 2% at 62 with an employee contribution of 7.5%.

Medical: Multiple plans, including PPO and HMO options, are available. The District pays 100% of the cost for the employee's coverage (not to exceed the amount of the highest HMO plan); the District will additionally contribute 50% of the premium cost for dependents.

Dental Insurance: Both HMO and PPO plans are available. The District covers the employee at 100%, regardless of the selected plan; dependent coverage is available at the District's rates.

Life Insurance: A term life insurance benefit is provided.

Vision Insurance: The District offers a Vision Service Plan (VSP) and pays the full cost for employees and their dependents.

Paid Time Off: The District has a generous combined program for time off, with a typical starting accrual rate of 140 hours annually, which increases with years of service.

Holidays: The District observes 11½ holidays per year.

Social Security: The District does not pay into Social Security and provides a private disability program at no cost to the employees.

Other Benefits: Other employee benefit programs are available, including deferred compensation with partial matching and a flexible spending program for medical expenses.

HOW TO APPLY

For first consideration, apply by **APRIL 2** at:

WBCP JOB BOARD

SAVE THE DATES.

Round one virtual interviews will take place on **APRIL 15**. Finalists will move forward to round two in-person interviews on **APRIL 25 (SATURDAY)**. *Selected candidates must be available for both dates.*

QUESTIONS?

Please contact your recruiter, **Levi Kuhlman**, with any inquiries:

866.929.WBCP (9227)

toll free

541.664.0376 direct

levi@wbcpinc.com

