



Rebecca R. A. Smith

Partner / Recruiting Partner

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Sacramento, CA 95814

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rsmith@downeybrand.com

Practice Areas

CEQA / NEPA | Endangered Species | Flood Protection Law | Food & Agriculture | Food & Agriculture Litigation | Groundwater Law | Land Use | Real Property & Land Use Litigation | Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) | Water Law | Water Rights Litigation

Clients facing challenging, sensitive, or complex water law issues rely on Rebecca Smith's expertise to best map their path.

Rebecca provides thoughtful, careful guidance to both public agencies and private sector clients on water rights, groundwater management issues, and environmental compliance, among other topics.

Rebecca counsels both public and private sector clients on water rights, water supply, land use and development, and environmental compliance under state and federal law. She provides sophisticated, client-centric advice on water rights, groundwater management, and CEQA/NEPA compliance. She provides cutting-edge expertise in groundwater law and devotes significant time in her practice helping clients to understand their emerging issues, obligations, and opportunities under the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act. Rebecca is well-versed in administrative procedure, and counsels clients through the permitting and appeals processes at the State Water Resources Control Board, through local agency appeals, and before federal agencies including the Bureau of Land Management and the Bureau of Reclamation.

Rebecca is proactive in building creative, efficient solutions for her clients. A thoughtful and collaborative general counsel, Rebecca has special expertise counseling clients on California Public Records Act (PRA) issues, state and local elections, Brown Act compliance, assessment and fee practices, FPPC compliance, petitions for writs of mandate, and other matters of special concern to public agencies.

Rebecca is active both in the firm's Water Law practice and in its well-reputed Food and Ag practice. Because of joint involvement in these complementary practice areas, Rebecca lends a special understanding of food production and agricultural legal issues to her water law practice.

First Name

Rebecca

Middle Initials

R. A.

Last Name

Smith

Secondary Title

Recruiting Partner

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Main Office Phone

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rsmith@downeybrand.com

LinkedIn Profile

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Assistant

Dana Reeder

Assistant Phone

916.520.5473

Assistant Email

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Intro Text/Excerpt

Clients facing challenging, sensitive, or complex water law issues rely on Rebecca Smith's expertise to best map their path.

Professional Community Involvement

- American Leadership Forum, Mountain Valley Chapter, Class XXIX, 2025-2026
- Water Education Foundation, Board of Directors, 2019-present
- Water Education Foundation Water Leaders Fellowship, Class of 2018
- Center for Land-Based Learning, Board of Directors, Chair, 2022-present; Vice Chair, 2020-2021; Secretary 2018-2019
- Sutter Davis Hospital Foundation, Board of Trustees, 2018-present
- University of California at Davis Extension, Sustainable Groundwater Management Act, Instructor, 2017-present
- Sacramento County Public Law Library, "Lawyers in the Library" Pro Bono Project, Volunteer, 2011-2018
- Milton L. Schwartz - David F. Levi American Inn of Court, 2022-present
- Association of Women in Water, Energy and the Environment
- Groundwater Resources Association
- American Bar Association, 2010-present
- American Agricultural Law Association, 2012-present
- Sacramento County Bar Association, Environmental Law Section, 2010-present
- California Lawyers Association, Environmental Law Section
- Davis Chamber of Commerce
- University of California at Davis Block CA Society, 2010-present
- Notre Dame Public Defender Program, South Bend Juvenile Justice Center, Student

Attorney, 2009-2010

- *California Water Law Journal*, Advisor, 2013-present

Honors & Rankings

- Best Lawyers in America®, Natural Resources Law, Water Law, 2024-2026
- *Sacramento Business Journal*, 40 Under 40 Honoree, 2021
- *Super Lawyers*, Northern California Super Lawyers, Land Use/Zoning, 2023-2025
- *Super Lawyers*, Northern California Rising Star, Land Use/Zoning, 2021
- *SacTown Magazine* (formerly *Sacramento Magazine*), Top Lawyer, Energy & Natural Resources, Environmental, 2023-2024
- *Journal of College and University Law*, Editor-in-Chief, 2009-2010
- *Journal of College and University Law*, Staff Writer, 2008-2010
- Externship, Honorable William M. Skretny, United States District Court, Western District of New York, 2008

Experience

- Counsel clients on claims of riparian and pre-1914 water rights, investigate water rights, and advise clients in interactions with the State Water Resources Control Board.
- *Delaware Tetra Technologies, Inc. v. County of San Bernardino; Center for Biological Diversity v. County of San Bernardino*. Representing County in defense of six coordinated actions challenging the Cadiz Groundwater Conservation, Recovery and Storage Project under CEQA and the County's Desert Groundwater Management Ordinance. Prevailed at trial on all claims in all six actions.
- Prepare motion for summary judgment for community services district relating to a claim for tax refund, resulting in a \$2 million judgment for client.
- Draft legislation protecting landowner voting structure of irrigation district, and interface with legislative staffers to ensure the bill's passage.
- Counsel joint powers authority on matters relating to authority's powers and obligations under the California Joint Powers Authority Act, and provide advice regarding the restructuring of that authority.
- Prepare election materials and provide legal guidance regarding election procedures for numerous public agency clients, including California Water Districts, Reclamation Districts, Irrigation Districts, and Community Services Districts. During particularly contentious elections, provide valuable on-site legal advice regarding election challenges and voting procedures.
- Counsel clients on issues relating to U.S. Bureau of Reclamation water contracts, water allocation and shortage policies, and compliance with federal Reclamation law.
- Perform detailed CEQA analysis for private developer in connection with permit applications related to second phase of ongoing development project.
- Counsel farming and winery clients on land acquisition matters, including easements, title restrictions, water rights, and development restrictions.
- Assist clients in developing and evaluating water supply assessments and developing water supply

policies, for future development and current needs.

- Counsel public agency client through an election to change the rates and methods of apportionment of a special tax under the California Elections Code and the Mello Roos Act.
- Extensive experience responding to, drafting, and challenging requests for public records under the California Public Records Act and the Freedom of Information Act.
- Represent municipality in large-scale CEQA and groundwater litigation.
- Prepare and defend comprehensive administration record in advance of litigation.

Up Close

Born into a family of veterinarians and a lifelong California native, Rebecca has a deep appreciation for the land, history, and agriculture of California. Rebecca also understands the importance of tenacity and hard work to success: As an undersized freshman, Rebecca fought her way to a spot on UC Davis's 2003 Division II National Championship-winning rowing team.

Rebecca is a passionate water lawyer with a close connection to her clients and the people and land they serve.

Prior to her time at Downey Brand, Rebecca attended the University of Notre Dame Law School, where in addition to legal skills, she polished her talents as a member of the Notre Dame Women's Boxing Team and developed an on-going appreciation for Notre Dame football. Now, when Rebecca is away from the office, you'll find her back home in California, cheering on the Fighting Irish every fall with a glass of wine in hand.

Education

Degree	Honors	Major 1	Major 2	School	Distinctions	Year	Law School
J.D.				Notre Dame Law School		2010	Yes
B.A.				University of California at Davis		2006	No

Bar & Court Admissions

Degree	Honors	Major 1	Major 2	School	Distinctions	Year	Law School
J.D.				Notre Dame Law School		2010	Yes
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Year	State	Jurisdiction	District	Status
2011	California			
	California	U.S. District Court	Eastern District of	
	California	U.S. District Court	Central District of	

Related Blog

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Alternate Bio

Array

Alternate Bio Experience

- Advise winery on new compliance issues raised by the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA), and identify best practices for distribution of pumice, tasting room management, and restaurant garden management.
- Counsel clients on food safety compliance, including food safety protocols required by state and federal law and Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) compliance.
- Assist wine and alcoholic beverage distributor in negotiating distribution agreements and expanding supply network, including

Experience

- Counsel clients on claims of riparian and pre-1914 water rights, investigate water rights, and advise clients in interactions with the State Water Resources Control Board.
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Speaking Engagements / Events

- *Water Rights Enforcement in California*, 2024 California Water Law Symposium - 1913 to Now: Diversifying Solutions to Water Governance in California, February 24, 2024
- *Protecting Local Ratemaking Authority*, ACWA 2023 Fall Conference & Exhibition, November 29, 2023
- *2023 Water Law Institute*, The Foundation for Natural Resources and Energy Law, November 2-3, 2023
- *Considerations for Demand Management: Creative Approaches to Complement Supply Augmentation*, Panelist, 2023 SGMA Implementation Summit & Workshop, June 7, 2023
- *Dividing the Waters: Focus on States' Approaches to Groundwater and Recent Developments*, Presenter, Western Agricultural and Environmental Law Conference, May 5, 2023
- *Conflicting Interests Between Agriculture & Species Conservation*, 2023 California Water Law

Symposium – Diverse Needs: Species Protection & Water Supply, February 4, 2023

- *California Water Management, Policy, and Regulation in This Time of Extremes*, Argent Communications 36th Annual California Water Law & Policy Virtual Conference, May 17 & 19, 2022
- *Waterside Chat*, Panelist, Center for Land-Based Learning Event, April 21, 2022
- *Water 101 Workshop: The Basics and Beyond*, Presenter, Water Education Foundation Workshop, April 8, 2022
- *Innovations in Water Storage As A Response To Climate Change*, 2021 California Water Law Symposium, Climate Change: Adapting to a Warming Climate, January 30, 2021
- *Restarting the Machine: A Roundtable Discussion About Issues Facing Local and State Government Agencies as They Reopen*, SCBA Public & Environmental Law Sections, Webinar, June 1, 2020
- *Sustainable Groundwater Management Act*, Co-instructor, UC Davis Extension, April 22, 2020
- *COVID-19 Webinar No. 5: Considerations for Businesses & Employers in the Food & Ag Industry*, Downey Brand COVID-19 Webinar Series, April 17, 2020
- *COVID-19 Webinar No. 1: Considerations for Businesses & Employers*, Downey Brand COVID-19 Webinar Series, March 20, 2020
- *Legal and Institutional Management Framework*, Presenter, Water Education Foundation Water 101 Workshop, February 20, 2020
- *Ethics Training: Conduct and Ethics Training for Water Agency Officials: A Primer on AB 1234*, Co-Presenter, ACWA 2018 Spring Conference & Exhibition, May 10, 2018
- *AB 1234 Ethics Training for Local Agency Officials*, December 13, 2017
- *Too Much Water Too Fast: Conjunctive Management of Ground and Surface Water in Wet Periods*, Presenter, Law Seminars International 5th Annual Conference on Tribal Water Law in California, October 26-27, 2017
- *Groundwater Rights: Management, Regulation, and Exercise*, Presenter, HalfMoon Education Seminar on California Water Laws, Regulations and Recent Developments, October 3, 2017
- *Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) Update*, Moderator, Bay Planning Coalition Annual Energy and Water Nexus, September 22, 2017
- *Navigating the Prop. 218 Minefield*, Presenter, NCWA Groundwater Task Force, September 2017
- *California's Water Law, Policy and Regulation: Coping with Drought, Floods and the New Federal Administration*, Argent Communications 32nd Annual California Water Law & Policy Conference, June 12-13, 2017
- *A Local Perspective on Aging Flood Control Infrastructure*, Presenter, Argent Communications 32nd

Annual California Water Law & Policy Conference, June 12, 2017

- *Financing SMGA Implementation: Navigating the Prop. 218 Minefield*, Presenter, Argent Communications 32nd Annual California Water Law & Policy Conference, June 12, 2017
- *Sustainable Groundwater Management Act*, Co-instructor, UC Davis Extension, April 21, 2017
- *Ethical Considerations for Water Agency Attorneys in SGMA's Brave New World*, Co-presenter, ACWA 2016 CLE Conference, September 15-16, 2016
- *Introduction to California Water Law and Water Right Valuation Issues*, Industry Presentation, April 15, 2015
- *Water Rights 101*, ARE 145 Guest Lecturer, UC Davis, February 12, 2015
- *Public Agency Ethics 101*, Speaker, Association of California Water Agencies (ACWA), December 2013
- *Wineries and the Food Safety Modernization Act*, Speaker, American Society for Enology and Viticulture Conference, June 2013
- *Public Agency Ethics Training*, Speaker, Downey Brand Training, December 2012
- *Groundwater 101*, Speaker, California Department of Public Health, April 2012

Publications

- *Class Action Challenges Public Agencies' Retail Water Rates Under Proposition 218*, California Water Law & Policy Reporter, Volume 30, Number 7, April 2020
- *California Groundwater Management Milestone Looms*, Daily Journal, December 11, 2019
- *Private Emails, Texts, Not Immune From Disclosure*, Sacramento Business Journal, March 17, 2017
- *Addressing the California Department of Water Resources' Draft Emergency Regulations on Groundwater Sustainability Plans*, California Land Use Law & Policy Reporter, Vol. 25, No. 8, May 2016
- *California Water Law and Policy Reporter*, Contributing Author, 2010-2015
- *Upgraded Conservation Pricing: Proposition 218, Smart Meters, and the Step Beyond Tiered Rates*, California Water Law Journal, January 2014
- *Food and Drug Administration Proposes New Rules for Agricultural Water*, California Water Law & Policy Reporter, Volume 24, Number 1, October 2013
- *Food Safety: Inspections, Compliance Strategy and Opportunities for Comment*, Practical Winery & Vineyard, September 1, 2013

- *Legal Issues in Vineyard Development and Expansion*, California Association of Winegrape Growers, August 2012

Legal Alerts

- *State Water Board Issues Sweeping Water Right Curtailment Order in 2022 for the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta Watershed*, June 9, 2022
- *FDA Announces Proposed Changes to Agricultural Water Requirements Under the Food Safety Modernization Act*, December 9, 2021
- *State Water Board Issues Emergency Regulations for Curtailments in Delta Watershed*, August 17, 2021
- *Sacramento County Health Officer Extends Stay at Home Order through May 1, 2020; Additional Clarifications for Essential Businesses*, April 8, 2020
- *UPDATED: Additional Guidance Provided on Critical Infrastructure Worker Designations in Wake of Statewide Order to Stay Home*, March 23, 2020
- *Statewide Order to Stay Home Prompts Questions Regarding Critical Infrastructure and Worker Classifications*, March 20, 2020
- *UPDATED: In Response to Concerns Regarding COVID-19, Governor Newsom Grants Additional Flexibility for Public Agency Teleconference Meetings*, March 18, 2020
- *In Response to Concerns Regarding COVID-19, Governor Newsom Suspends Some Requirements applicable to Public Agency Teleconference Meetings*, March 12, 2020
- *New Law Mandates That Special Districts Maintain Public Websites by January 2020; Limited Exemptions Available*, February 13, 2019
- *AB 2257: New Brown Act Requirements for Meeting Agendas on Local Agency Websites Effective for Meetings Held on and after January 1, 2019*, September 13, 2018
- *California Supreme Court Confirms Certain Groundwater Pumping Charges are Outside Scope of Prop 218*, December 4, 2017
- *WaterFix EIR Certification and NOD Client Alert*, July 24, 2017
- *California Supreme Court Rules Public Officials' and Employees' Personal Accounts Do Not Escape Reach of Public Records Act*, March 3, 2017
- *Update: California Supreme Court Holds Inadvertent Production of Attorney-Client Privileged Documents under a Public Records Act Request Does Not Waive the Privilege*, March 18, 2016
- *Showdown at California Supreme Court over Waiver of Attorney-Client Privilege in Public Records after Inadvertent Disclosure*, August 18, 2015

- *California Supreme Court Delivers Long-Awaited Ruling In Berkeley Hillside*, March 4, 2015
- *Orange County Trial Court Upholds Cadiz Valley Groundwater Project*, May 6, 2014

Blogs

- *DWR Certifies EIR for WaterFix, Triggering 30-Day Deadline for Opponents to File Suit*, July 25, 2017
- *CEQA Implications of California Supreme Court Decision Finding Public Officials' and Employees' Personal Accounts Do Not Escape Reach of Public Records Act*, March 6, 2017