

THOMES CREEK WATER DISTRICT

Applicant Questionnaire — Responses

Drew Crane — Candidate for Director

1. How long have you been a resident/property owner in the Thomes Creek Water District?

I have been a property owner in the Thomes Creek Water District since 2015, when I became a shareholder of Crane Mills. Crane Mills has owned property within the District since 1994 and has held land along Thomes Creek outside the District boundaries since 1944. I am a native of Tehama County and currently reside in the City of Tehama. This background gives me a deep personal connection to the region and a direct financial stake in the responsible stewardship of its land and water resources.

2. What is your primary reason for wanting to revive the Thomes Creek Water District?

As a landowner and CEO of Crane Mills - which owns approximately 67,000 forested acres in the upper Thomes Creek watershed - I have a deep and direct stake in how this District is governed. My primary motivation is to ensure that landowners have an organized, credible voice in water governance, rather than having decisions made for us by outside agencies. Beyond protecting existing water rights, I am driven by a clear vision of connecting healthy forests with healthy watersheds and increased surface water. Well-managed forestlands reduce erosion, improve infiltration, and sustain streamflow. I believe the District can play an active role in advancing that connection for the long-term benefit of the entire watershed community.

3. What do you see as the primary responsibility of a board member for the Thomes Creek Water District?

The Thomes Creek Water District has been dormant for years, and it is being considered for revival at a moment when water users across California are anxious, and in many cases, genuinely frightened, about what SGMA means for their land, their operations, and their futures. In that context, I think the primary job of a board member is not just governance in the textbook sense. It is to build and establish trust. Trust with landowners who need to believe that the District is being managed transparently and in their interest. Trust with Tehama County and the GSA, so that the District is seen as a credible, constructive participant rather than an adversary. And trust in the process itself, that reviving this district is worth the time, cost, and effort it will require. Everything else, be it financial discipline, regulatory compliance, or strategic planning, flows from that foundation. If landowners don't trust the board, none of the rest of it works. I understand the anxiety that SGMA is creating, because I feel it too. That shared stake is part of what makes me want to do this, and part of what I would bring to the role.

4. What experience do you have with serving on boards, committees, or organizations where you need to make decisions on behalf of others?

I have extensive experience in governance and advisory roles across the forestry and agriculture sectors. I currently serve as the Chairman of the California Forestry Association, where I lead an organization representing forestland owners and timber operators statewide on

policy, regulatory, and industry matters. I am a former Treasurer of the Pacific Logging Congress, and I currently serve on Golden State Farm Credit's Local Advisory Committee (LAC). I have also served in various advisory committees and sub-committees for the California Farm Bureau. As CEO of Crane Mills, I make complex, consequential decisions daily on behalf of shareholders and employees. My background as a Chartered Accountant (CAANZ) with 20 years of experience in public and commercial accounting, forestry, natural resource management, and production agriculture has further honed my skills in financial oversight, multi-stakeholder decision-making, and organizational governance. In 2025, I was honored as the Tehama County Farm Bureau's Farmer of the Year at its annual Farm City Night, reflecting my active engagement in our agricultural community.

5. How do you see the future of the Thomes Creek Water District over the next 10–20 years?

Before talking about where the District should be in 20 years, it is worth being clear about year one because a district that cannot demonstrate basic competence in its first twelve months has no basis for anything that follows. The first thing the board does is get the house in order - establish legal standing, open a bank account, adopt/amend bylaws, and file every required document with the county. The second is to show up. It needs to be represented at every GSA meeting, every relevant Tehama County session, and every public forum where water is on the agenda. Not to demand anything, but to be seen as a consistent, prepared presence. Credibility with regulators is built through attendance and follow-through. The third is to hold a real landowner meeting and have a genuine conversation about what the District can and cannot do, what it will cost, and what the plan is. Success at the end of year one will be the District being in good legal standing, having a modest but functional budget approved by its members, a relationship with the GSA, and having held at least two public meetings. It does not need to have solved anything yet; but it does need to have demonstrated that it is serious, solvent, and trustworthy. Everything else builds from there.

Over the following years, I see the District evolving into an active, well-governed organization that engages strategically with the GSA and Tehama County, develops a long-term water management plan, and protects landowner rights while meeting sustainability obligations.

6. How do you see the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) affecting the Thomes Creek Water District?

SGMA is one of the most significant regulatory frameworks affecting the District; in all likelihood, it wouldn't be under consideration for revival today without its passage. SGMA requires basins to achieve groundwater sustainability, which can mean restrictions on pumping, mandatory monitoring, and potential curtailments if basins are deemed critically overdrafted. For the District, this makes active and effective representation essential. A functioning board *must* secure a strong seat at the table with the local Groundwater Sustainability Agency. By advocating for landowners, providing reliable data and input into sustainability plans, and working constructively with regulators, the board can help ensure that any restrictions or allocations are equitable and properly account for the District's existing water rights and historical beneficial use. Strong local advocacy is needed to prevent regulatory agencies from applying overly broad measures that fail to recognize site-specific conditions in the Thomes Creek watershed.

7. What is your opinion of how the Thomes Creek Water District's allocation of water should be utilized?

My view is straightforward - you cannot manage allocation responsibly without first managing for the long-term health of the basin. That has to come first — not as a constraint on agricultural use, but as the foundation that makes reliable agricultural use possible at all. A basin in decline has no good allocation policy. That perspective comes naturally to me as someone whose company has managed the forested headwaters of Thomes Creek since 1944. We have seen firsthand how the health of the land upstream directly determines the reliability of water downstream. Conservation and productive use are not competing values here — they are the same value, viewed across different time horizons.

On allocation specifically, the District's water should serve the legitimate agricultural and land-use needs of its members, tied to documented beneficial use on the land, and governed by clear, transparent rules on distribution, carryover, and transfers. Where surplus exists, the board should have flexibility to allow exchanges or transfers, but only where doing so does not compromise basin sustainability or existing member rights. Under SGMA, the districts that will fare best are those that can demonstrate responsible stewardship. That is the standard I would hold us to.

8. If the District requires meetings, filings, and administrative costs to maintain legal standing, where would that money come from?

Maintaining the District's legal standing will require a reliable source of funding for administrative costs. While no one welcomes new expenses, we need to be realistic; the most equitable and sustainable mechanism is landowner assessments or fees, levied proportionally based on water entitlements and/or actual use. This is the standard approach used by most water districts across California. I am offering to serve on this board not only because of my direct interest in water issues, but also because my 20 years of experience as a Chartered Accountant and my business background can be put to immediate use in minimizing those administrative costs. In the near term, unavoidable startup expenses can likely be covered through voluntary contributions from interested landowners while the board develops and publicly approves a formal, fair fee schedule. Over time, any revenue generated by the District (for example, through the sale or exchange of excess water) could help offset or reduce the burden on individual landowners. Every aspect of the funding model must remain fully transparent and receive board approval through an open public process.

9. How would the District interact with Tehama County Administration, the Groundwater Sustainability Agency (GSA), and local landowners?

The answer to this question flows directly from how I think about the board's primary responsibility, which is building trust. Each of these relationships requires a different expression of that same commitment. With Tehama County, the expectation is simple - be a compliant, low-maintenance partner. Meet every filing deadline, satisfy every administrative requirement, and coordinate proactively on land use matters so the county never has cause to view the District as a problem. That baseline of reliability is how you earn goodwill for the moments when you need something. With the GSA, the goal is to be a genuinely useful participant in groundwater sustainability planning, not a reluctant stakeholder dragged to the table, and not an adversary looking for fights. The District should arrive to every GSA engagement prepared, with real data

and a clear understanding of our water rights and historical use. I would also bring something to those conversations that is not easy to replicate: Crane Mills has stewarded approximately 67,000 forested acres at the headwaters of Thomes Creek since 1944. That upstream perspective, the direct connection between forest health, infiltration, and surface water reliability, is something the GSA is genuinely trying to understand better, and the District can be a meaningful contributor to that work. With local landowners, the obligation is the most important of the three and the easiest to get wrong. People are anxious about SGMA and skeptical of institutions right now. The only way to earn their confidence is through consistency, showing up, reporting honestly, and making decisions that are visibly in their interest rather than in the board's convenience. I would prioritize regular, accessible communication from day one, because trust lost early in a revival is very hard to recover.

10. What are your plans for construction of District infrastructure?

Any infrastructure investment must be driven by a thorough needs assessment and a clear, financially sound business case. In the near term, the priority must be establishing strong administrative and governance foundations before committing District resources to capital projects. Once the District is on stable legal and financial footing, potential early priorities could include water measurement and monitoring equipment to meet SGMA reporting requirements, as well as basic conveyance or storage improvements that increase the reliability and value of the District's water supply. Longer term, I am interested in exploring infrastructure that supports integrated watershed health — for example, projects that enable capture and managed recharge of high-flow events on Thomes Creek, improve surface water reliability, or complement forest restoration efforts that enhance overall watershed yield. Crane Mills' 67,000 forested acres in the upper watershed represent a meaningful opportunity to pursue such projects, potentially in partnership with state and federal programs or coordination with the Tehama County Groundwater Sustainability Agency's ongoing recharge feasibility work. This measured approach ensures that any infrastructure spending delivers real, long-term value to District landowners while aligning with regional sustainability efforts.

11. What types of water can be available to the District beyond its base allocation, and how could excess water create revenue for the District?

This question is one I think about differently than most District landowners, because Crane Mills sits at the top of the watershed. We see the water before anyone else does, in heavy snow years, wet years, in flood events, in the seasonal pulses that move through the upper creek before they ever reach the District's administrative boundary. That vantage point shapes how I think about what is possible beyond the base allocation.

The District's realistic options for additional water include transfers or exchanges of unused member allocations, recaptured return flows, and groundwater to the extent the GSA's sustainability plan permits. In wet years - and we do still have them - there are meaningful opportunities to capture flood and stormwater under temporary permits or existing water rights. Those high-flow events are currently running through the watershed largely uncaptured, and managed recharge projects could change that significantly.

On the revenue side of the ledger, excess water, handled correctly, is a potential asset. Water sales or exchanges with agricultural users, municipalities, or water agencies, groundwater banking arrangements, and participation in the water markets that have developed under SGMA all represent real income potential for the District. But I would approach all of it with one constraint: no revenue-generating activity that compromises the basin's long-term health or

existing member rights. The District's water is not a commodity to be optimized. It is a resource to be stewarded. Those are different jobs, and I would not confuse them.