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Joseph D. Hughes | Partner

Joe Hughes is a water lawyer with 30 years of practical, hands-on experience tackling real-world water issues, and leads the Water and Public Agency practice group. With a background in civil litigation, he brings a comprehensive perspective to strategically advise clients in navigating complex water-related transactions and disputes.

Joe's clients include water agencies and private entities seeking to obtain, develop, manage, and transfer water and water rights. He has extensive experience advising a wide range of water districts, including those reliant on the State Water Project and Central Valley Project, regarding water rights, water supply planning, and regulatory compliance. He excels at negotiating and drafting complex water transfer and exchange agreements, achieving successful outcomes for his clients.

As General Counsel for one of the largest water rights holders in California, Joe possesses extensive experience with both pre-1914 and post-1914 surface water rights. He also has significant experience representing clients in groundwater adjudications, protecting their water rights in those complex legal proceedings. He provides expert guidance to several Groundwater Sustainability Agencies and landowners navigating the complexities of SGMA implementation, including GSA formation, plan development, and compliance.

Joe has demonstrated leadership in the community and the profession by service as managing partner of one of the largest law firms in the Central Valley, a Trustee by appointment of the Board of Supervisors for the Kern County Employees Retirement Association, a \$5 billion pension fund, and past President of the Kern County Bar Association.

Recognized for his expertise, Joe holds an AV® rating from Martindale-Hubbell, the highest level of distinction.

Practice Focus

Water and Public Agency Law

Bar Admissions

State Bar of California, 1993
U.S. District Court Northern District of California, 1993
U.S. District Court Eastern District of California, 1994
U.S. District Court Central District of California, 1998

Education

Bachelor of Arts, University of California at Santa Barbara, 1990
-Political Science and Communication Studies
Juris Doctor, Santa Clara University School of Law, 1993

Community Involvement and Leadership

Kern County Museum Foundation
-Member of the Board of Trustees, 2013-2021
-Chairman, 2017-2021
Alta Sierra Mutual Water Company
-Member of the Board of Directors, 2014-2021
-President, 2017-2021
Kern County Employees Retirement Association
-Member of the Board of Trustees, 2004-2012; 2021- Present
-Chairman, 2009
Kern County Law Library
-Member of the Board of Trustees, 2002-2017
Greater Bakersfield Legal Assistance, Inc.
-Member of the Board of Directors, 2000-2011
Judge Pro Tem, Small Claims, Kern County Superior Court, 2001-2004

Professional Experience

Klein, DeNatale, Goldner, Cooper, Rosenlieb & Kimball, LLP, 2006-Present
-Managing Partner, 2014-2018, 2019-2024
Kuhs, Parker & Hughes, Associate & Partner, 1995-2005
Kern County Counsel, Deputy County Counsel, 1994

Klein · DeNatale · Goldner
ATTORNEYS AT LAW