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WESTERN WATER DISTRICTS PARTNER WITH FEDERAL AGENCIES TO EXPLORE NEXT GENERATION OF WATER-SAVING DEVICES, PROJECTS

Innovative Conservation Program grants focus on water/energy nexus projects

A project using thermal cameras to analyze and adjust water needs and another venture evaluating water-efficient dipper wells for restaurants and ice creams shops are among the latest to receive competitive grants focused on discovering the next generation of water-saving devices and technologies in the West.

The Metropolitan Water District of Southern California partnered with the Central Arizona Project, Southern Nevada Water Authority, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation to help fund 10 projects in the most recent round of Innovative Conservation Program grants. The program—which includes Southern California Gas Co. and the non-profit conservation group, Western Resource Advocates—seeks to advance water-saving efforts by finding new and innovative methods for using water more efficiently.

"Western states need to build and sustain resilience to droughts," said Tomás Torres, EPA's water division director for the Pacific Southwest. "By supporting the ICP, we're investing in innovative solutions to help communities meet the challenges of tomorrow—today."

This $560,000 ICP cycle focused on water-saving devices, technologies and strategy proposals that address the water/energy nexus. Awards were given in two funding categories: up to $30,000 and between $30,000 and $100,000. A total of 96 proposals were evaluated through a competitive review process based on project innovations, a water/energy saving and research plan, market impact potential, cost effectiveness, ICP focus and project preparedness.

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While California's drought has ended, Metropolitan General Manager Jeffrey Kightlinger noted the West continues to grapple with drought in the Colorado River Basin, which has now stretched into a 17th year.

"You don't need a crystal ball to predict that our future depends on using water wisely and efficiently today," Kightlinger said. "This program fosters fresh and innovative approaches and inspires creative ideas and strategies to reduce water use."

Ted Cooke, general manager of the Central Arizona Project, said, "There's no better time than the present for innovation in conservation. As the Colorado River continues to suffer, and the Southwest lives under constant threat of shortage—we hope these grants serve as the impetus for change in our communities, as well as the launching pad for inventive solutions."

Since Metropolitan and Reclamation began the ICP in 2001, the program has awarded 57 grants totaling $1.85 million during the first five two-year funding cycles. Overall, the ICP has yielded 358 proposals totaling $33.4 million in funding requests from public agencies, community-based organizations, private companies, entrepreneurs, research institutes and equipment manufacturers.

"As water managers, we are always interested in new strategies and tactics that can be utilized to increase water efficiency," said John Entsminger, SNWA general manager. "With this program's platform, we work directly with the innovators to help foster new water-saving technologies or research aimed at reducing water demands and increasing efficiency of Colorado River water use."

Inventive approaches funded in previous cycles include an analysis of plant sensor-based irrigation in vineyards for both wine quality and yield and several projects on soil amendments that maintain the health of grass while significantly minimizing the amount of water applied. Additional past projects include the development of a pressurized water broom that replaces the need to use a hose to clean patios, driveways and other large surface areas, saving up to 250,000 gallons of water over its lifetime, and an X-ray film-processing unit that recycles more than 90 percent of the 1 million gallons of water a typical machine uses in a year in a hospital or medical center.

"Water conservation is the largest new supply available to bring water security to the Colorado River Basin. This program looks to accelerate cutting-edge techniques that produce water savings for the benefit of all," said Bart Miller, Western Resource Advocates' Healthy Rivers Program director.

More information on the Innovative Conservation Program, including lists of past projects, is available at bewaterwise.com/ICP.

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Innovative Conservation Program Projects

Frontier Energy, Inc (Oakland, CA)—Dipper wells replacement study

Evaluation of water and energy savings potential of replacing dipper wells in restaurants and ice cream shops with more efficient technologies. Analysis will normalize water and energy use to metrics including site square footage, operating hours, number of seats, and any other appropriate metrics.

Frontier Energy, Inc (Oakland, CA)—Pre-rinse operations in commercial kitchens

Evaluation of water and energy use of pre-rinse operations in commercial kitchens including the use of scrappers, troughs, hand scrapping, disposers, pulpers, hose use or a combination of several practices. Monitoring will include analysis of staff operations to identify opportunities to reduce waste.

Cal Poly Pomona (Pomona, CA)—Solar decentralized graywater treatment unit

Development of a low-cost, robust, decentralized, and solar-driven graywater treatment unit for non-potable use for single-family residential dwellings.

Cal State Long Beach (Long Beach, CA)—Effective water reuse in cooling tower systems

Evaluation of cooling tower wastewater treatment by ion exchange. Cost analysis on water savings from cooled water reuse will also be performed.

Watershed Conservation Authority (Azusa, CA)—Cocoon technology for California native trees and shrubs

Evaluate the water savings achieved using the Cocoon technology in the establishment of southern California native trees and shrubs.

University of Arizona (Tucson, AZ)—Landscape drip schedule app for the Southwest

Continue the previous project that developed and evaluated a landscape drip schedule app (http://cals.arizona.edu/dripirrigation) adding more features to enhance user options and improve flexibility.

Cal State Fullerton (Fullerton, CA)—Measuring sap flow in avocado to reduce irrigation

Evaluate water savings of using sap flow measurement to establish the actual water needs of 4-year-old Hass avocado trees.

Biolargo (Westminster, CA)—Wastewater re-use in food industry

Evaluate disinfection and decontamination capabilities of advanced oxidation reactor for water re-use in poultry processing plant.

APANA (Bellingham, WA)—Data driven cooling tower optimization study

Evaluate water savings by using prescriptive analytics in cooling towers.

EyeOn18 (Beaverton, OR)--Drone imagery utilization in golf courses

Investigate the use of drones to optimize irrigation management practices in golf courses.