



The Metropolitan Water District of Southern California

NEWS RELEASE

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NEW GROUNDWATER PROGRAMS BOOST METROPOLITAN'S WATER STORAGE CAPACITY TO CAPITALIZE ON WET YEARS

Metropolitan invests in Antelope Valley water banking, local storage programs to help withstand future drought

With California out of drought and Sierra Nevada snow levels still growing, the Metropolitan Water District continues to develop pioneering ways to store more water in wet years for use during future dry years.

Metropolitan's Board of Directors today voted in separate actions to approve a new groundwater banking agreement that will allow the district to store up to 280,000 acre-feet of water in the Antelope Valley and to modify a cyclic program that offsets costs for local water agencies that capture surplus water locally.

"It's not a question that drought will return to California; it's only a matter of time," Metropolitan board Chairwoman Gloria B. Gray said. "Although our reservoirs are nearly full now, we're not letting up on our efforts to capture and store as much water as possible. We must be prepared for the future."

In a partnership with the Antelope Valley-East Kern Water Agency, Metropolitan is funding up to \$131 million in capital costs for a new groundwater banking program along the State Water Project. The program includes construction of recharge basins to store water and groundwater wells to recover the water. The district also will fund costs for AVEK's operation and maintenance of the facilities. In exchange, Metropolitan can store up to 280,000 acre-feet of water in the basin.

Under the program, Metropolitan can access up to 70,000 acre-feet of the stored water each year, pumping it directly back into the East Branch of the California Aqueduct, the State Water Project infrastructure that delivers water from Northern California. (An acre-foot of water is nearly 326,000 gallons, about the amount used by three typical Southern California households a year.)

"A huge benefit of this partnership is that it's not an exchange program in which we would have to rely on the State Water Project's allocation levels to get this water back," said Metropolitan General Manager Jeffrey Kightlinger. "Instead, we will directly pump the water up when we need it."

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The AVEK program is Metropolitan's latest groundwater banking agreement. The district's five existing storage programs, primarily in the Central Valley, have provided more than 1 million acre-feet of water in the last 25 years, helping to get the region through recent droughts.

The modification to the cyclic program will immediately allow more water to be captured locally. Under the new program, Metropolitan would pre-deliver water to member agencies to manage in their groundwater basins and surface reservoirs, while providing up to \$225 per acre-foot in credits to offset costs incurred to help capture the water.

For example, Metropolitan could issue credits to a member agency that accepts its treated water, instead of opting for the less costly option of pumping and disinfecting its own groundwater, or one that incurs evaporative losses from storing imported supplies in a surface water reservoir. The agencies would have the option to pay for the water over a period of up to five years.

"By offsetting costs, we're making it more attractive for our member agencies to bank water where storage is available, in turn increasing our region's water reliability and resiliency to drought and emergency events," Kightlinger said.

"As water agencies that are dedicated to promoting reliability throughout the region, we're all in this together," he added. "By collaborating with our member agencies and a fellow State Water Project contractor, we're generating big benefits for the region that will be invaluable in the coming years."

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The Metropolitan Water District of Southern California is a state-established cooperative that, along with its 26 cities and retail suppliers, provide water for nearly 19 million people in six counties. The district imports water from the Colorado River and Northern California to supplement local supplies, and helps its members to develop increased water conservation, recycling, storage and other resource-management programs.