



Photo courtesy of Ken James / California Department of Water Resources

Our Water, Our Responsibility

Upper District Delivering Record Supply for Future Dry Years

By Elizabeth Smilor
Special Sections Writer



“Our communities have done a tremendous job reducing demand in this region. Our water demands per capita are down about 40 percent over the last 15 years. We just need everyone to continue being water efficient.”

Jennifer Santana
Board President

Dry, parched landscapes have been replaced by new growth and running streams flowing from the San Gabriel Mountains into the urban valley. For Upper San Gabriel Valley Municipal Water District officials, it is a welcome sight.

“All the rainfall we received during this last winter has been tremendously helpful in recovering our groundwater supplies. The County of Los Angeles facilities do an amazing job capturing stormwater even in wet years like this, so almost all of the rainfall in the San Gabriel Valley was captured, never made it to the ocean, and is being stored in our groundwater basin,” said Upper District General Manager Tom Love. “But even with all that rain, it still will not completely refill the groundwater supplies because we drew down those supplies during the last three dry years. There’s a lot of empty space to fill.”

Upper District, which serves approximately 144 square miles and includes 18 cities and portions of unincorporated Los Angeles County with almost 1 million residents, is thrilled to have so much water to put into storage. Ninety-five percent of the snow and rainfall was captured in the San Gabriel Valley. Additionally, the State Water Project allocation increased to 100 percent for the first time since 2006. The Main San Gabriel Water Basin key well in Baldwin Park shows an increase of 53 feet since Jan. 6, 2023.

“We’re saving water for a dry year. It’s our local water and it’s our responsibility to protect those supplies. We want the public to recognize that. We continue to encourage our communities to use water efficiently and not waste it,” Love said. “If we can reduce the amount of water that we have to pump out to meet our demands, that water doesn’t go anywhere. It stays in that storage account. We don’t lose water to the ocean. We don’t lose water to evaporation. The San Gabriel groundwater basin is an ideal storage reservoir to help us meet our water supply needs.”



At left, an aerial view looking south shows the California Aqueduct (right) and the Delta-Mendota Canal (left) south of San Luis Reservoir near Los Banos in Merced County. The facility is part of the San Luis Joint-Use Complex, which serves the State Water Project and the federal Central Valley Project. Above, the Santa Fe Spreading Grounds, which are visible from the 210 and 605 freeways, is where water percolates into the Main San Gabriel Basin. Most of Upper District's water supply is from this groundwater basin with some imported via the State Water Project.

The Basin key well level dropped to about 175 feet last fall, nearing its historic low of 169 feet. The rain added more than 50 feet or 400,000 acre-feet of water. As of May 26, the level was 231.9 feet, according to the key well measurement by the Main San Gabriel Basin Watermaster.

"To put that in perspective, that 400,000 acre-feet is enough water to meet our needs for two full years, even if we didn't get any more rainfall," said Love. Upper District's service area includes the cities of Arcadia, Azusa, Baldwin Park, Bradbury, City of Industry, Covina, Duarte, El Monte, Glendora, Irwindale, La Puente, Monrovia, Rosemead, San Gabriel, South El Monte, South Pasadena, Temple City, and West Covina.



Tom Love

With the increased allocation from the State Water Project, Upper District has ordered 125,000 acre-feet from the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California. If received, it will be the most imported water delivered by Upper District to the Basin in a single year, Love said.

"It has been a very long time since that amount of water has been available, so we are going to take advantage and deliver as much water available from the State Water Project," said Love. "However, we always need to prepare for the next dry year."

As such, Upper District continues its level 2 water emergency contingency plan, asking users to conserve by 20 percent through educational outreach and incentives, including turf and water-efficient device rebates. For consistency, the district is considering a permanent recommendation for outdoor watering of three days per week in summer and two days in winter.

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per capita are down about 40 percent over the last 15 years. We just need everyone to continue being water efficient."

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Sanitation Districts would include a pipeline to the San Gabriel Basin, which could receive more than a third of the total capacity.

"That quantity of water has the potential to eliminate our region's dependence on imported water from Northern California," said Santana. "In doing so, it could move the region closer to being drought proof than we ever thought possible in the past." ○

For its part, the Upper District Board of Directors is investing in improvements that will bring in even more water to the region in the future. The district is working with the County of Los Angeles Public Works and Metropolitan to improve the connection below Morris Dam in San Gabriel Canyon to accommodate a greater volume of imported water transferred from there into the Santa Fe Spreading Grounds where water percolates into the Basin.

The Board of Directors has also expressed its strong support of the Pure Water Southern California project, which would produce up to 150 million gallons per day of purified wastewater upon completion. The joint project of Metropolitan and the Los Angeles County

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