Watershed Connect

Achieving resilience through integrated infrastructure

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

WATERSHED CONNECT is a regional infrastructure program, a network of forward-looking projects designed to achieve water supply reliability, climate resilience, and long-term ecological health of the Upper Santa Ana River (Upper SAR) Watershed. **WATERSHED CONNECT** is a multiphase program comprised of interconnected water capture, recharge, storage, treatment, and conveyance projects. This comprehensive package of infrastructure projects will collectively maximize the use and reuse of local water resources, while attaining a healthy, functional river ecosystem that supports 22 federally and state-protected species. **WATERSHED CONNECT**'s innovative approach maximizes program value and offers synergistic benefits to the watershed and its people.

The Upper Santa Ana River Watershed Infrastructure Financing Authority (USAR WIFA) is a Joint Powers Authority comprised of San Bernardino Valley Municipal Water District, San Bernardino Valley Water Conservation District, Western Municipal Water District, Western Entities, City of Colton, City of San Bernardino Municipal Water Department, Big Bear Area Regional Wastewater Agency, and the Yucaipa Valley Water District. The participants, all of whom rely upon the highly connected tributaries, groundwater basins, and natural ecosystems of the Santa Ana River, have come together as stewards of the watershed to ensure funding is available to secure a reliable and sustainable water future for nearly 1 million people in the San Bernardino and Riverside Counties.

The program reflects the region's long-standing commitment to integrated water resource management. Through efforts such as the Upper SAR Watershed Integrated Regional Urban Water Management Plan (IRUWMP), the Upper SAR Habitat Conservation Plan, the Regional Recycled Water Concept Study, and the Upper SAR Integrated Groundwater/Surface Flow Model, water agencies in the Upper SAR Watershed continue to collaborate across traditional boundaries to build much needed water infrastructure, create and support jobs and the local economy, care for shared resources and accomplish a common goal; a secure, equitable, and reliable water supply for the region.

PROGRAM PURPOSE

The purpose of the program is to achieve regional water supply security, resilience to extended drought and the effects of climate change and holistically enhance the health of the Upper SAR Watershed.

The Upper SAR Watershed, spanning over 850 square miles in San Bernardino and Riverside Counties in southern California, is a highly connected system of surface water, groundwater, and rich habitat that the region depends on for its local water supply. For many years, the San Bernardino Valley has been challenged by prolonged drought, increased wildfires, and climate uncertainty. In response, the region, which relies heavily on imported water, is investing in collaborative solutions to diversify its water supply portfolio, recharge its groundwater basins, restore critical habitat and secure a sustainable water future.

WATERSHED CONNECT will capture over 38,000 AFY of stormwater runoff, produce and distribute over 25,000 AFY of recycled water for groundwater recharge, restore over 870 acres of habitat, create 830 acres of open space, and generate over 1,300 kW of renewable energy within the Upper SAR Watershed.

BENEFITS

This integrated program offers the following benefits to the region:

Resiliency in the face of climate change: The collection of forward-looking recycled water, stormwater capture, groundwater storage, alternative energy, and ecosystem restoration projects will improve water supply security. Investments in alternative water supplies, emergency storage, and system redundancies enhance the region's resilience to climate threats.

Infrastructure Enhancements: Modernization of existing infrastructure combined with new conveyance systems are planned to create enhanced water resources. Upgrades, including pipeline protection initiatives and solar energy projects, will reduce climate-related vulnerabilities and ensure reliable services during natural disasters.

Drought Resiliency: The program's ambitious stormwater capture, groundwater recharge, and water reuse projects position the region to sustain short and long-term droughts.

Improved Water Quality: Advanced treatment upgrades will improve regional water quality by reducing the amount of salt, nutrients, and emerging contaminants introduced to surface waters and groundwater basins. Proposed stormwater capture and treatments projects will produce high-quality water for blending with groundwater supplies high in total dissolved solids.

Ecological Health: Planned habitat mitigation and restoration initiatives will holistically enhance the ecological health of the Upper SAR Watershed, supporting the region's urban, environmental, recreational, and economic needs.