A Year of Collaborative Achievements

Collaboration is oftentimes difficult in the water industry, especially where habitats are concerned. But by working thoughtfully together, we can more efficiently meet the water and habitat needs of our region. This year, our dedication to collaboration paid off for the communities we serve in new and powerful ways.

After more than 100 years of fighting over water rights, a dozen agencies in the region have formed a new entity — the San Bernardino Basin Groundwater Council — to work toward the greater purpose of storing water for our future. This, more than anything, signals the new wave of shared water management in the San Bernardino Valley.

We forged a historical new agreement with the Valley Municipal Water District to eliminate redundancies and to streamline and enhance groundwater recharge and habitat conservation.

And even after a California Supreme Court ruling prohibited water conservation districts from using State Water Code standards to set rates for agricultural uses, we were able to phase in a new fee structure that works for everyone because we had invested so deeply in our relationships.

There's more—much more—but let me just express my appreciation for our board of directors, our staff, and our strategic partner agencies in making this a new era in collaboration to the benefit of the communities we serve.

Daniel Cozad
General Manager
Partnership to Enhance Water Reliability

In September, in a rare joint meeting, the boards of the Valley Water Conservation District and Valley Municipal Water District developed a partnership agreement that will complete projects to recharge water into the Bunker Hill Basin for use during dry years. It will also eliminate redundancies and streamline and enhance groundwater recharge and habitat conservation as called for in the Upper Santa Ana River Wash Plan, and the Upper Santa Ana River Habitat Conservation Plan.

Details of the partnership provide that:

- The conservation district provide up to 295 acres of conservation easements to the San Bernardino Valley Conservation Trust, to help offset the environmental impacts of active recharge projects being undertaken to enhance groundwater recharge and storage.
- For each acre of conservation easement the conservation district transfers to the trust, Valley District will provide funding to the conservation district for building new recharge projects.
- Valley District will fund a permanent endowment with the conservation trust to support the management of habitat mitigation land.
- Valley District will transfer to the conservation district the implementation, management and eventual ownership of the following capital improvement projects:
  - Plunge Creek Basins 1 and 2 (construction and operations)
  - City Creek Basins (construction and operations)
  - Waterman Percolation Basins (reconstruction and maintenance)
  - East Twin Creek Basin (repairs and maintenance)
  - Mill Creek Diversion (expansion, construction, and operations)

Oversight and participation in the new partnership arrangement will be ensured through the establishment of a Partnership Agreement Policy Committee. The San Bernardino Valley Conservation Trust expanded its board to include a designee of the San Bernardino Valley Municipal Water District as a member.

“Both districts bring valuable resources and relationships to the table to accomplish recharge and species preservation. This partnership is a win-win for local tax- and ratepayers, and the sensitive habitats of our region.”

Douglas Headrick, general manager for the San Bernardino Valley Municipal Water District

L to R: Mark Bulot, June Hayes, Gil Navarro, T. Milford Harrison, John Longville, Melody McDonald and David Raley.
Win-Win for the Homeless and Endangered Species

Homelessness in the Upper Santa Ana Wash area and at district headquarters increasingly impedes the ability of our employees to do their job and to protect endangered species.

So, this year, we took a new approach to dealing with area homelessness and created a partnership with Redlands-based nonprofit, Steps 4 Life Community Services, to provide them with housing. In exchange, they will help us establish a homeless policy and employee training program.

We partnered with Steps 4 Life because it has a successful track record of providing transitional supportive housing in the Redlands area. Its goal is to make a difference in improving the self-sufficiency of its clients, and to reduce the recidivism that homelessness often presents to veterans, survivors of domestic violence, individuals in recovery, single parents, and individuals with mental health issues. We looked into working with county and state agencies, but Steps 4 Life provided the most cost-effective solution. And, like us, they make it work by being scrappy and collaborative.

The four-bedroom house provided through the agreement is located next to the district’s field office. Residents there will be able to take advantage of opportunities to work in the wash as a part of their transitional programming. That means if we need to hire someone to do something, we will have a pool of skilled workers right next door. And that makes it a win-win for everyone.

Win-Win for the Homeless and Endangered Species
Groundwater Council: Ensuring Water Availability for our Communities

In a state where fighting over water rights is as old as the state itself, this year we worked with a dozen agencies to from a new entity — the San Bernardino Basin Groundwater Council — with the express purpose of storing water for our future.

The Groundwater Council will make certain that funds are available to purchase water in wet years, and facilities are in place to store that water underground for use during dry years.

Participating agencies include: San Bernardino Valley Municipal Water District, San Bernardino Valley Water Conservation District, San Bernardino Municipal Water Department, East Valley Water District, Bear Valley Mutual Water Company, Yucaipa Valley Water District, Loma Linda University and the cities of Loma Linda, Rialto and Colton.

Each member of the council contributes water and/or funding to purchase and recharge groundwater using calculations that ensure that there is always ample water storage for the region. The allocation and cost is determined according to use, historic rights, conservation, water recycling and other factors developed over a year of open exchanges of concerns and information. Those that need more water, pay more. It’s a method that ensures capacity for each entity, but does not penalize those who conserve.

Water Year Ends with 4.9 Billion Gallons Recharged

The Water Year is based on rainfall and runs from October 1 to September 30. Considering the dearth of rainfall, this was a lean recharge year for the District and the Bunker Hill Groundwater Basin. Cooperation among the future Groundwater Council members including the District and the SBVMWD made possible reasonable recharge of State Project Water into the District facilities on Mill Creek and the Santa Ana River. This imported water combined with local rainfall provided our field staff with a considerable challenge to improve the groundwater basin this year.

Recharge totals for the Water Year ending September 31 total approximately 15,101 acre-feet (AF). Of this total, 2,618 AF was recharged from the Santa Ana River and 1,992 AF from Mill Creek. Imported State Project Water recharge totaled 10,439 AF which was much greater than native streamflow of 4662 AF. Put another way the 4.9 billion gallons recharged in the District facilities will provide 29% of the demand for the nearly 392,000 people living in the East Valley.
Staff Accomplishments

We are only as good as our team. As a matter of policy we support ongoing staff training and education and continued staff development. This past year, in addition to ensuring that our field staff completed pesticide applicator recertification, we have two staff members who made noteworthy achievements.

Manuel Colunga honored with CalPERS ‘Spotlight on Excellence’ Award

Manuel Colunga, or Manny as we call him, the field operations supervisor for the San Bernardino Valley Water Conservation District, was awarded this year’s CalPERS Spotlight on Excellence Award—an honor bestowed each year on one outstanding public servant in state of California.

In his role at the District, Manny keeps watch over the 18 miles of canals, 26 miles of roads and 73 recharge basins he patrols daily with his small team within the San Bernardino Valley Wash. As a steward of the land and the water, it’s his job to watch the skies, anticipate water flows, reshape contours of the earth and capture water — recharging it into the groundwater basin that serves the San Bernardino Valley region.

Manny Colunga received CalPers Spotlight on Excellence Award in October

Katelyn Scholte, Assistant Engineer, Earns M.S. in Environmental Engineering

Katelyn Scholte, Assistant Engineer earned her Masters in Environmental Engineering, with an emphasis in water, from UC Riverside this year. She previously earned her undergraduate degree in the same from UC Riverside, as well.

We rely heavily on Katelyn when it comes to wrangling critical data of all kinds. She maintains all of the necessary datasets such as Seven Oaks Dam data, Daily Flow Report data, species databases, field camera photos, sharable data, Survey123 data and more. She also develops and coordinates work with other agencies for regional efforts such as the development of the Groundwater Council and annually updates its Equitable Allocation Model.

Katelyn Scholte, MS
Summary of Fiscal Stewardship

- Received a clean financial audit for Fiscal 2018, the 6th year with no management recommendations
- Approved a balanced budget for Fiscal 2018-19 including capital projects funded under multiyear capital budget
- Expanded investment in the Conservation Trust to $2.8 million
- Contributed operations savings and aggregate management funding to reserves
- Funded all required District Reserves under 2017 Reserve Policy
- Fully funded annual OPEB (Retiree Health Benefit) Trust and CalPERS actuarial liability for District staff pensions

Other Collaborative Highlights in 2018

- Conducted a cultural resources inventory for the Bureau of Land Management land exchange.
- Continued the Inland Empire Resources Conservation District invasive removal projects & school education programs.
- Continued to work with the City of Highland and development interests near the Wash Plan for community mitigation needs.
- Continued cooperative work with CalFIRE for brush management on District lands.
- Cooperated with the San Manuel Band of Mission Indians for cultural collection of plants.
- Completed Plunge Creek seed collection for Wooly Star for the second time.
- Entered into agreement for a Habitat Quality Assessment in Mill Creek.
- Accepted the role as lead agency for biological baseline studies of 430 acres of land for the Mill Creek Operations Study.
- Continued working with the Basin Technical Advisory Committee (BTAC) group on Conservation Outreach efforts
- Hosted a three-mile stretch of trail as part of the annual Highland Trails Day event, which led past the Foothill Pumping Station, Cone Camp Road and returned east on the north edge of the percolation basins which feed water into the Bunker Hill Basin.
- Continued conservation and outreach efforts in three Qualified Water Efficient Landscaper QWEL Program Training classes for the region.
- Participated with Inland Empire Resource Conservation District on native plant seed collection.
What Drives Us...and Why

For more than a century, we have cultivated our relationship to the community, to one another, and to the land itself. We are stewards of the San Bernardino Valley water basin and the native species of the wash above it. We protect the land that cradles our region’s water by being proudly scrappy and fearlessly creative. We take a fiscally prudent, pragmatic approach towards fulfilling our mission so that the water supply and the environment it depends upon will be forever protected and available for the community's use.