

# San Bernardino Valley Water Conservation District Community Strategic Plan 2017

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*Approved  
December 13, 2017*

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# 1 Introduction and History

## 1.1 Introduction

The Community Strategic Plan (CSP) for the San Bernardino Valley Water Conservation District (District) was first created in 2013. This Community Strategic Plan indicates that it is built on the Board's 2010 Strategic Plan with feedback from, and support for, the communities and partners we serve. With the approval of the original CSP in 2013, the Board indicated that a review and update should occur at regular intervals during the implementation phase. In late 2016, staff began preparing to work with the Board on this 2017 update. This update documents progress on the 2013 CSP and updates areas of focus and priorities as indicated by the four strategic planning sessions held with the Board in the first half of 2017.

## 1.2 District History

The District has a long history in water management in the east end of the San Bernardino Valley. A prolonged drought from 1898 to 1903 brought sustainable water supplies from the Santa Ana River to the forefront of attention for San Bernardino, Riverside, and Orange counties. A private Water Conservation Association (WCA) formed in 1909, led by Francis Cuttle, the manager of the Riverside Water Company. This group pushed for surface water flows to be stored underground for future use. In 1909, four entire sections were set aside by the Federal Government for water conservation.

Percolation ponds were dug, and the Cuttle Weir was completed in 1914. The current District was formed by the San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors on January 4, 1932. This formation occurred after a vote of landowners seeking to obtain water for conservation purposes created a special purpose District under §74000 of the California Water Code. The



Cuttle Weir Diversion Structure Dedication

District authorization happened under the Water Conservation District Act of 1931. Shortly after the formation of the District, the WCA dissolved. The District has fee ownership, water recharge easements, and permitted use on over 3,650 acres. The District, as an agency, serves a total of approximately 50,000 acres.

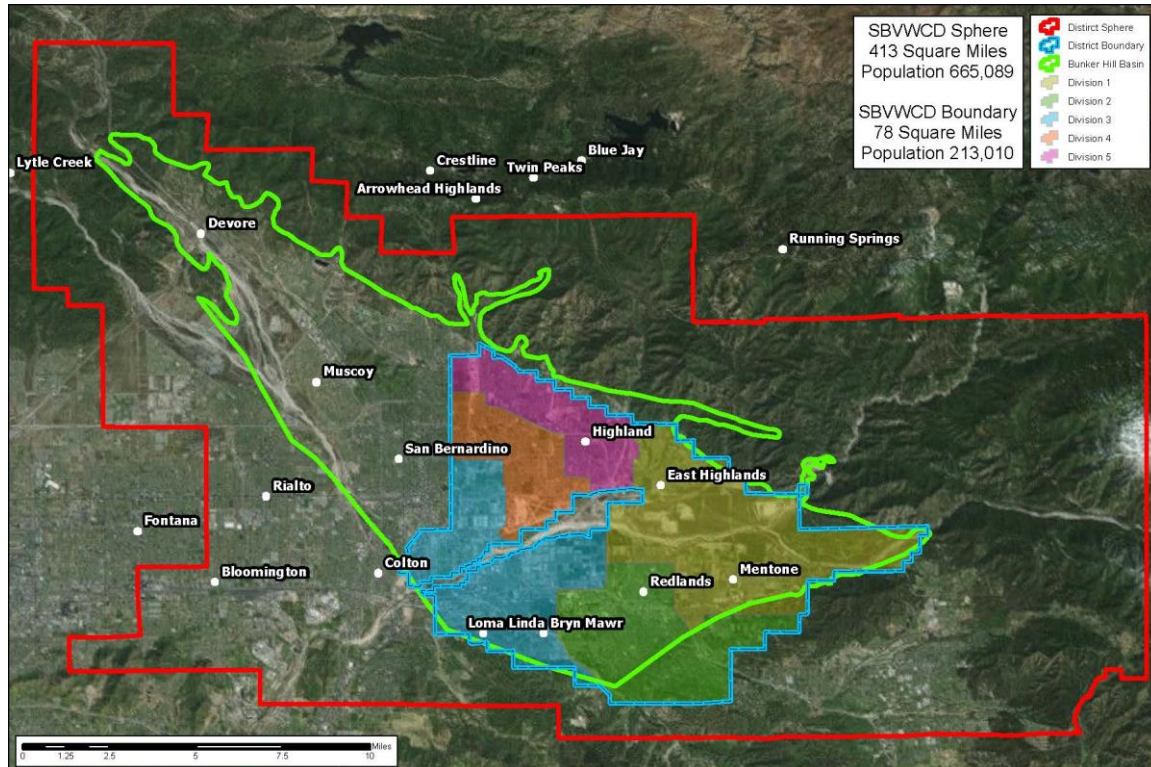
This water mission, which is the origin of the District, continues to be as critical to the groundwater basin, its farmers, communities, and the stakeholders of the region, as it was when the District began.

### 1.2.1 Recent History

Relevant to the history of the mission of the District is its interaction with the region. In 2005, the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) eliminated the District's Sphere of Influence signaling it intended to consolidate the District. In 2009, LAFCO proposed consolidation of the District into the



San Bernardino Valley Municipal Water District (SBVMWD), despite the objections of the Water Conservation District. The LAFCO Commission did not approve the consolidation, and the District operates today having implemented most of the recommendations made by LAFCO, short of consolidating. LAFCO again reviewed the District in 2015 as part of the municipal service review to reinstate the District's sphere of influence. LAFCO's report noted that the District has significantly improved its financial ability to provide recharge and related conservation services and that it cooperates with partners and communities for shared services and access to facilities. LAFCO accepted the proposed Groundwater Council as an alternative to consolidation as it more equitably allocated the groundwater charge to all agencies benefiting from the Bunker Hill Basin.



District Sphere, Basin and District Boundary

On October 21, 2015, the LAFCO Commission provided the District a sphere of influence which covers the Bunker Hill groundwater basin, shown above. Also, the District has continued to strengthen relationships and open lines of communications with water agencies, cities and its partners in the region.

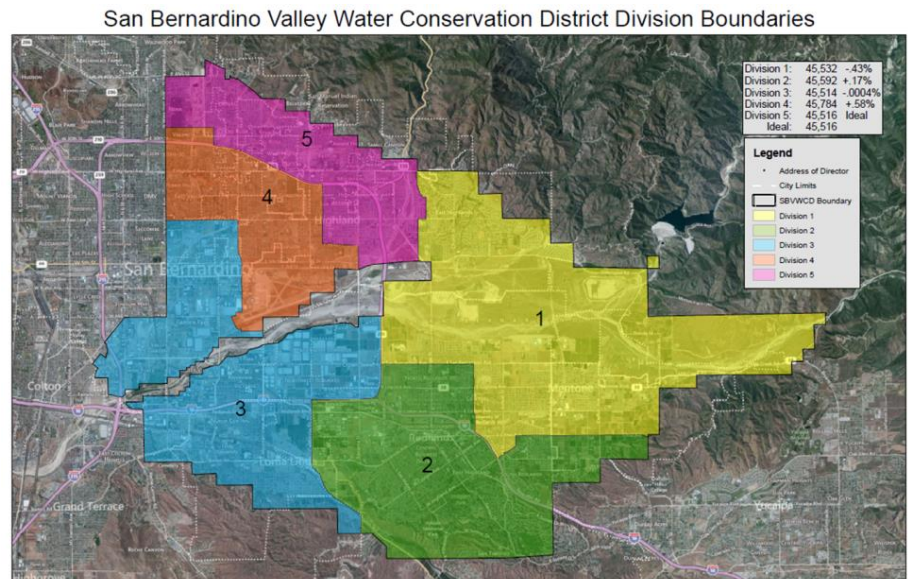
### 1.3 Changes and Accomplishments

Leading up to the 2013 CSP and following its approval, the District addressed several governance issues and developed an enterprise financial system to separate the District's activities into distinct enterprises, providing transparency and accountability in the District's business dealings. The District also implemented a concise reserve policy to give clarity to the development, maintenance and use of reserves. In 2012, the District completed the Enhanced Recharge Agreement with Western Municipal Water District (WMWD) and SBVMWD and subsequently, SBVMWD also joined the Wash Plan to permit these facilities. This agreement is a cost-effective method for additional recharge within the Basin for all three districts. Construction of these facilities began in August 2017.

The District also implemented SB-235 in 2012. This bill, sponsored by the District, allows it to reduce from seven to five the number of members serving on its Board. The Board subsequently adopted five new Division boundaries, based on the 2010 Census.

### 1.3.1 2013 CSP Accomplishments

In the past four years, the District has made significant progress in many areas.



The list below includes significant accomplishments related to goals in the 2013 CSP:

1. Aggressive Recharge – Staff implemented projects and operational changes to more aggressively recharge both local native rainfall and large flows of State Water Project recharge in 2017, following several years of drought.
2. Grant-funded support for innovative capital projects in Plunge Creek and reserve-funded improvements to the Mill Creek Diversion are under regulatory review for permitting.
3. Wash Plan Land Stewardship – The conservation strategy was completed and documents completed including Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP), Implementing Agreement, Memorandum of Agreement, approved Endowment Allocation and Issuance Costs, and an MOU with San Bernardino County Flood Control for independent implementation.
4. Wash Plan Implementing Legislation – HR 497 was unanimously passed by the House of Representatives in June 2017, and S. 357 was heard in the Senate Committee in July 2017.
5. Conservation Trust – To implement the Wash Plan with proper governance and appropriate fiscal management, the District developed a 501 (c) 3 nonprofit, the San Bernardino Valley Conservation Trust, which was approved March 1, 2017, by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife to hold endowments and conservation easements.
6. Cooperative Regional Agreements – Several critical agreements including the Enhanced Recharge Agreement were completed and are in implementation; others, such as the Groundwater Council, are developing through negotiation, and attitudes toward basin management are improving.
7. Recreational Trails – A trail masterplan was developed and approved by the Board, with implementation discussion with the cities of Redlands and Highland.
8. Fiscal Management – The District continued to improve its financial health and sustainability through stable groundwater charge and aggregate mining and management. Also, District budgets were approved on-time and clean audit opinions rendered.
9. Professional development efforts by limited staff and interns resulted in enhanced cost-effectiveness while achieving an extraordinarily high level of quality work.

The District has made substantial progress in every area identified in the seven 2013 CSP goals.

## 1.4 2017 CSP Planning Process

The Board began a staff-led update to the CSP in February 2017. After reviewing the strategic planning steps and the implementation of the 2013 CSP, the Board identified issues of priority to explore further. Three additional planning sessions were facilitated by the General Manager, covering the seven issues raised by the Board in the first offsite meeting. The Board discussed the following:

1. Additional Recharge
2. Service Boundary Expansion
3. Wildlands Trail Recreation
4. Expanded Habitat Management
5. Mining Area Reuse Planning
6. Public Outreach
7. Treatment Wetlands

The Board members ranked each of the issues, and all were evaluated and prioritized by the Board. The Board explored each of these issues following a staff presentation on current efforts, status and successes. Board members provided feedback and determined goals and objectives for the next five years. Shown below is a summary table of their conclusions:

1	<b>Additional Recharge</b>	Continue aggressive recharge on District lands, look for opportunities for community stormwater recharge outside of District-owned property, and potentially develop a Community Recharge project or a cooperative project within the District Sphere of Influence.
2	<b>Boundary Service Expansion</b>	Staff should seek opportunities for expanding service where appropriate within the Sphere of Influence. If projects are outside the District boundary, consider LAFCO application for contract or change in the boundary.
3	<b>Wildland Trail Recreation</b>	Continue to work with District Partners and Communities to open wildland trails on District-owned lands with at least one trail open by 2020.
4	<b>Expanded Habitat Management</b>	Passively work with partners to achieve habitat management in the Wash area and surrounding territory.
5	<b>Outreach PR</b>	Develop and implement a program for additional outreach, according to Board recommendations, benefiting the mission and projects of the District.
6	<b>Mining Pit Reuse</b>	Develop a conceptual planning document for mined area use and reuse.
7	<b>Treatment Wetlands</b>	Monitor long-term opportunities for aesthetic and water quality wetlands projects.

After initial discussions, the Board again prioritized the issues as discussed. Several issues were not carried forward as strategic issues. Treatment wetlands were determined to be an ancillary issue to be pursued in partnership with others should an opportunity arise. Mining pit reuse was determined to be premature except for ensuring that the mine plan and closure plans contain the provisions appropriate for groundwater recharge as they are updated. Public outreach was found to be an operational issue with staff working with the Public Outreach Committee to plan and implement improved outreach and consultant support in the current year.



Of the remaining issues, Additional Recharge was considered to be the highest priority with Boundary and Service Expansion being second. All of these issues are correlated and have significant overlap, but with the change in Sphere of Influence authorized by LAFCO and the developing Groundwater Council, the Board wanted to ensure that the District provides service wherever they are needed and appropriate.

With the Wash Plan HCP being virtually complete, the Board emphasized priorities for implementing the HCP elements including Regional Wildland Trails and Expanded Habitat Management. These issues are consistent with the full implementation of the HCP in partnership with the local cities of Redlands and Highland for trails, as well as the Inland Empire Resource Conservation District (IERCD), and San Bernardino Valley Conservation Trust for habitat management.

In a final review of current strategies, goals, and objectives, the Board found significant consistency with the goals from the 2013 CSP and determined that the presentation of both sets of goals should be integrated.

#### 1.4.1 Summary of Community Strategic Plan Goals

This Community Strategic Plan provides background and context to the efforts and goals in the plan. The table below shows an overview of 2017 Community Strategic Plan Goals compared to the CSP Goals from 2013.

No.	2017 Strategic Planning Goals	No.	2013 Community Strategic Plan Goals
1	<b>Additional Recharge</b> - Consistent with CSPG 1, increase stormwater recharge through maximizing District-owned facilities (aggressive recharge) then expand to support distributed community recharge in cooperative partnerships 2017-2022	1	Increase and enhance basin water resources and conservation management through core mission efforts and enhancement projects
2	<b>Boundary Service Expansion</b> - Consistent with CSPG 3, and supporting the mission and services of the District expand the District Boundary or Service Contracts by 2020	3	Continue to develop and improve financially sound and efficient District organization with secure foundation to better serve District Partners and Communities
3	<b>Trail Recreation</b> - Consistent with CSPG 5, continue to work with District Partners and Communities to open wildland trails on District-owned lands with at least one trail open by 2020	5	Support Trails and outdoor recreation identified in the Wash Plan and in cooperation with District Partners and Communities where financially viable
4	<b>Habitat Management</b> - Consistent with SSPG 2 and working with the Conservation Trust, leverage the Wash Plan successes to expand habitat management support for Wash Area lands.	2	Provide effective stewardship of District lands for environmental, water conservation and habitat management through the Wash Plan
5	<b>Outreach</b> - Consistent with CSPG 4, expand efforts for opportunistic outreach and provide information to decision-makers (tactical issue)	4	Deliver services and programs to improve non-retail outdoor water use efficiency and new groundwater recharge in the valley watershed
6	Mining Area Reuse - Consider mining pit reuse and recharge needs (not a strategic issue)	6	Develop staff and District organization to support District Mission and regional projects and programs
7	Treatment Wetlands - Respond to opportunities for potential treatment wetlands areas compatible with the District's mission, (not found to be a strategic issue).	7	Support and lead regional efforts related to water conservation and management of natural resources with District partners and communities

## 2 Core Water Mission Activities

While the District has the tagline, “Our Name is our Mission,” the formally adopted mission of the District was approved in 2001. During the 2017 CSP process, some changes were recommended, and the revised mission is shown below:

*The San Bernardino Valley Water Conservation District ensures recharge of the Bunker Hill Groundwater Basin in an environmentally and economically responsible way, using its facilities as well as all sources of high-quality surface water, including imported and recycled water. We strive to improve the sustainable supply and quality of groundwater while protecting and enhancing our land resources as we balance ecosystem responsibilities with public access and aggregate resources uses.*

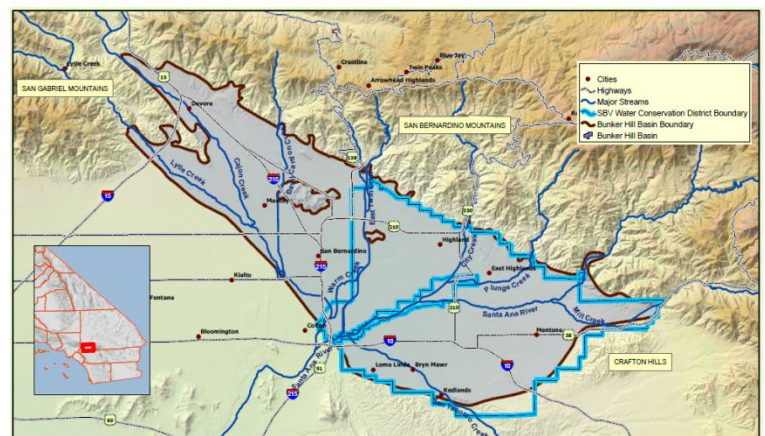
The core water mission is but one of the District’s significant endeavors. The Board developed Policy Principals in October 2014 to guide decisions in the absence of specific policy.

1. *Water recharge facilities and recharge management to benefit basin producers and the region’s water basin along with managing District land resources are Job #1!*
2. *Undertake all actions and efforts in an open, responsive, fair and transparent manner.*
3. *Continuously maintain open working relationships and communications with our communities, water entities, partners, and local, regional, state and federal agencies.*
4. *Operate and manage lands, properties, and facilities as safely, efficiently, and sustainably as possible.*
5. *Forecast and maintain fair and affordable groundwater charges, which maintain the overall financial viability of efficient District operations.*
6. *Seek, train, and retain excellent staff, utilize highly qualified consultants, contractors, and quality suppliers.*
7. *Seek to understand and support the needs and plans of the communities we serve related to our mission, including water, lands and public access.*
8. *Participate in regional and statewide water and habitat-related efforts of high value to the District, and support or oppose legislation and policy in accordance with these principles.*
9. *Continually evaluate our strategies, policies, technology, and performance to seek opportunities for improvement*

(The section below describes several ongoing core District activities.)

### 2.1 Water Conservation

Water conservation management and recharging the groundwater aquifer are the core business of the District. To maximize groundwater recharge, the District initiated the Aggressive Recharge approach, to divert and sink the maximum amount of water available in wet periods, under District licenses and partner agreements. This effort marked the beginning of facility improvements and changes that allow better management of sediment in the Mill Creek



Bunker Hill Groundwater Basin



spreading grounds and the expansion of facilities in the Santa Ana spreading ground. The expansion program in Santa Ana is a partnership with SBVMWD, and the District, using the facilities that are in an ideal location to recharge the basin. The District and its predecessor association have provided these services for over 100 years. Since its inception, the District has recharged over one million acre-feet of water, which equates to more than 325 billion gallons.

### **2.1.1 Water Facilities Operations and Management**

The District utilizes and maintains diverse types of facilities to accomplish its recharge mission:

- Three soft plugs made of erodible materials and three diversion structures
- Four weirs and flumes for measurement
- 18 miles of canals, 38 water control gates, and 31 road crossings
- 26 miles of roads and 11 access gates
- 73 basins (43 acres) with 92 overflows

Field operations personnel maintain not only these facilities but also the trucks, loaders, excavator and hand equipment needed for our mission. They are adept at utilizing and enhancing the capabilities of existing facilities. Because many of the District's field structures have been in service for many years, annual cleaning, maintenance, and upgrades are critical to achieving the Board's strategic goals in this area. The Aggressive Recharge approach pushed the facilities to sink more water and to take more State Project Water for an extended period during the summer when available.

The District regularly updates its Operations and Maintenance Manual, including detailed information about the facilities and their operations. The manual describes the field functions for all facilities, equipment, and operations. It also provides information on the many coordinated efforts and partnerships related to the District's services.



**District Percolation Basins**

### **2.1.2 Facility Permitting**

The 2013 CSP documented the Board's commitment to permitting operations and maintenance activities in the Mill Creek and Santa Ana recharge areas. This permitting process was already underway in the Santa Ana area through the Wash Plan. The Mill Creek diversion project and the Santa Ana River HCP would provide additional permit coverage for District actions. Also, the District undertook modeling and engineering to implement the Plunge Creek Habitat and Water Conservation project with grant funds from Proposition 84 through the Santa Ana Watershed Project Authority (SAWPA).

### **2.1.3 Water Facilities Partnerships**

The District is an active participant in several regional partnerships closely aligned to the District's mission. The District links these separate interests with its local role in the watershed and its independent purpose. These partnerships and shared services assist the public and other agencies as much as they do the District. They enable all entities to operate more efficiently and to ensure adequate services are available to the public. The District has executed agreements with SBVMWD

and Western Municipal Water District (WMWD), East Valley Water District, San Bernardino County Flood and Water Conservation District, IERCD and others.

#### **2.1.3.1 Exchange Plan**

The Exchange Plan is an existing program between the District, SBVMWD, and WMWD for cooperative measurement and records of surface waters that are directed and divided above, on and near District lands. The District field staff monitors Santa Ana River and Mill Creek water diversions, transfers, exchanges, and the amount of water recharged for the benefit of the basin, on a daily basis. Daily and monthly flow reports provide water managers and the public, summarized information through email and the District website. These efforts support strategic goals for many agencies and ensure efficient surface flow deliveries.

#### **2.1.3.2 Facility Improvements**

In addition to annual cleaning and maintenance, the District has made many changes and improvements to its facilities. These changes increase the efficiency of operations and reduce the likelihood of injury and damage to facilities. Gates and other control structures are being improved and updated reducing overflows improving flow to the basins. Many of these improvements have been completed in coordination with partners to accommodate additional flows, such as State Water Project imported water that is recharged on behalf of the District's water partners.

Additionally, the Enhanced Recharge joint project with SBVMWD and WMWD will further improve and increase capacity and current capabilities of the District's facilities. In partnership, SBVMWD led the second phase of the project, developing a design for additional recharge of water that was demonstrated to be available through the water rights application approved by the State Water Resources Control Board.



**Basin Maintenance Activities**

### **3 Strategic Water Related Mission Efforts**

#### **3.1 Aggressive Recharge**

The Aggressive Recharge approach is a management and operations tactic to increase recharge even at the expense of higher operations and maintenance costs. Because the operations and maintenance costs are still significantly less than the value of the water, the strategy makes sense for groundwater recharge payees. Field staff mostly implements the changes needed for active recharge. They “turn out” water from the creek and river as soon as it begins to stabilize and clear rather than waiting for water carrying lower sediment and debris, and take all water that is available closer to the physical limits of the facilities. These efforts require more frequent and expensive cleaning and repairs.

##### **3.1.1 Resource Implications**

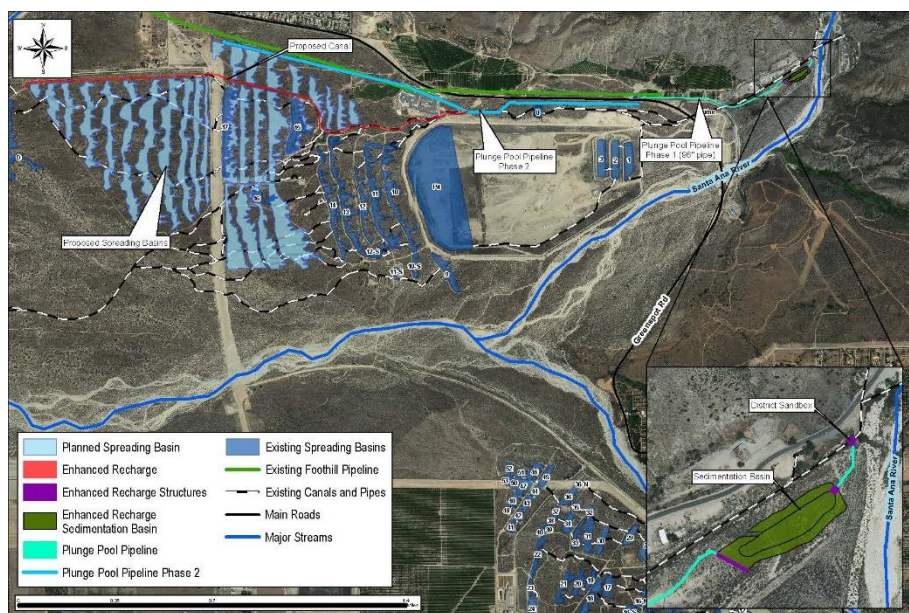
This approach has been undertaken with existing staffing but places a considerable additional burden on staff. Active recharge was not fully implemented in the drought years of 2014, 2015 and 2016. As the year of 2017 began, the approach was tested and resulted in recharge of water at the maximum capacity for the basins. Both natural river and State Project flows were high enough to wet areas of the spreading grounds that had been unused for over 25 years. These flows successfully provided

significant groundwater recharge—over 40,000 acre-feet—and also improved habitat in more remote channels. More attention and active management are needed when running the facilities near or above their traditional maximum flows and elevations. Furthermore, repairs, maintenance, sediment removal, and algae management increase in cost.

## 3.2 Enhanced Recharge Project

The joint cooperative project initiated in 2008 and codified in a three-party, 50-year lease agreement, is one of the District's most significant strategic goals. Additional capital and water rights from WMWD and SBVMWD, along with the District's ideally suited lands and operations capabilities, create great value for the San Bernardino Basin Area (SBBA). This effort expands recharge capacity on District lands by more than 100 acres of new facilities to support current reliability and projected growth.

Also, the new sedimentation basin in front of the spreading basins will reduce basin cleaning needs. The agreement also requires the District to efficiently maintain the facilities in the same manner as our existing recharge basins. Collaboratively developing this expanded capacity is a major accomplishment. Staff participated in the development of plans and designs for the project and supported the permitting process under the Wash Plan. Phase I A began construction in August 2017.



Enhanced Recharge Plans and Land Ownership

### 3.2.1 Resource Implications

The District allocates enhanced recharge funding toward the Groundwater Enterprise field efforts and Land Management Enterprise. The agreement also requires the District to hold, in reserve, money from the lease payment to prepare for future cleaning of constructed basins. This revenue is generated from annual payments as provided for in the lease agreement with WMWD and SBVMWD for the expanded facilities, with revenue also allocated to the Land Enterprise. This additional funding increased the financial ability of the District to provide these and other critical public services.

Current efforts include coordinating engineering design, permitting, initial construction, and—in 2019—preliminary operations of the Enhanced Recharge facilities. The District will support these efforts with current field staff and an additional field technician as needed in 2018 to assist in the operations and maintenance of the new facilities.

## 3.3 Enhanced Facility Security

An important strategic goal is to increase the security of the facilities and lands the District owns or manages under easement. An increase in metal theft, illegal dumping, trespassing, homeless encampments, and off-road vehicle traffic damages the District's lands, facilities, and habitat.



Reducing unauthorized access is a long-term strategic effort of the District. This initiative will increase the reliability of services and safeguard the premises. Over the past five years, the District has installed new gates, replaced old gates, repaired fences, positioned boulders to discourage vehicles and cleaned up dumping. Further discussion of issues related to habitat occur in the Land Management Section below, but controlling access to sensitive habitat areas is critical to a successful Wash Plan implementation. Continued effort and new infrastructure are needed now and into the future.

### **3.3.1 Resources Implications**

The District currently budgets for security enhancements, primarily in maintaining fencing, destroying nuisance buildings and developing better perimeter controls to discourage illegal entry by vehicle. Funding is focused mainly on the groundwater facilities and provided by Groundwater Enterprise. The District's Land Enterprise provides funds for coordination with adjacent developments and agencies on resource issues. Field staff support this effort when time is available, or the need is critical. Wash Plan HCP implementation will require additional staffing and funding as discussed in Section 4.



**District Main Canal to Santa Ana Basins**

## **3.4 Water Use Efficiency and Communication Efforts**

The District has had a limited role in retail customer water use efficiency. As discussed, its primary purpose is in diverting surface water to recharge groundwater. The Board has a strategic goal to cost-effectively expand its water use efficiency efforts in order to implement its mission more fully. To provide this service, the District utilizes a partnership with IERCD to serve areas not served by retail water providers.

### **3.4.1 Groundwater Producer Communication**

Because retail water providers are the District's partners and pay the Groundwater Charge, it is more efficient for them to communicate with retail water users. The District can fulfill this part of its strategic goals by partnering with them to assist where needed in reaching their customers. Additionally, there are partners not currently served by retail water suppliers, communities or others providing conservation programs. Such producers are likely our non-governmental Groundwater Charge payees and may not always be receiving a message about conservation. Communication to this group is an area in which the District can assist and provide service.

### **3.4.2 Educational Outreach**

The Board has approved District participation with the Inland Empire Resource Conservation District in its Elementary School Education efforts. This mature program needs additional support to reach more students. By partnering with the IERCD, the District can convey messages about conservation and the success of its programs. This cost-effective program shares staff and facilities and achieves multiple goals at a low cost.

### 3.4.3 Cooperative and Focused Outreach

The District participates in a regional water use/efficiency conservation program with other regional agencies and its retail water agencies. This program has used print, radio, and additional awareness outreach to the entire Inland Empire for the past three years. Because the state's drought emergency was withdrawn, the program is being revised to continue at a lower level in the future.

As part of the 2017 CSP, the Board agreed to expand outreach and retained a firm to assist with limited, focused outreach to local, regional, state and federal officials. This effort will be targeted to entities and organizations that may depend on the District or have connection or interactions with the District now or in the future. The September 2017 Little Hoover Commission on Special Districts encouraged Special Districts to "tell your story" and ensure your community leaders know you work for the public and the fees collected to serve the community. Enhanced and focused outreach planning is ongoing and will continue throughout 2017. As such, this issue is not considered a strategic action.

### 3.4.4 Conservation Education and Outreach

The Board identified an opportunity to help develop and provide conservation education to landscapers and gardeners who manage water at the many facilities they maintain. This unmet conservation gap could have a significant impact on outdoor water usage from municipal sources, but more importantly from small agricultural groves and other users that obtain water from mutual water companies or private wells. This sector is not currently served or targeted for education in the District's area. After working with the Basin Technical Advisory Committee's

subcommittee on conservation, the District agreed to license and help provide the Qualified Water Efficient Landscaper (QWEL) program with the conservation coordinators in the Inland Empire. Chino Basin Water Conservation District also supports this program in Western San Bernardino County.



QWEL Class Graduates

### 3.4.5 Resources Implications

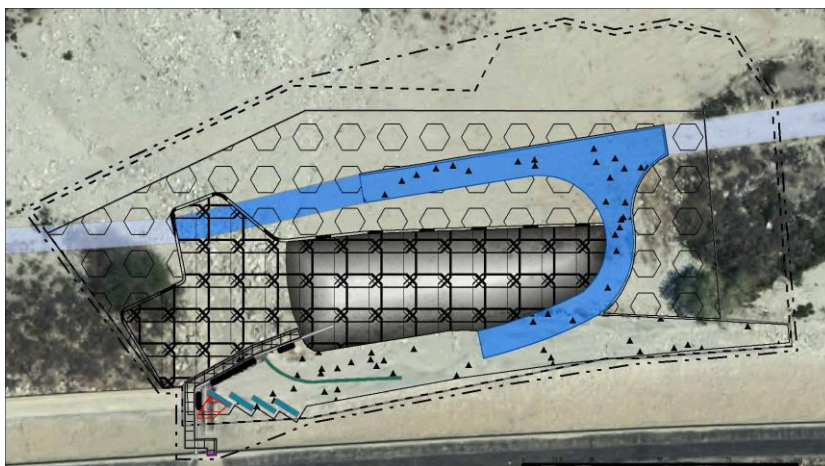
The District currently budgets about \$50,000 toward conservation education and outreach efforts. The strategic goal of increasing water use efficiency is to reduce the water demand on the basin and the amount of water recharge needed to maintain the groundwater basin. By cooperating with others for shared services, and with our groundwater producers that do not have existing programs, we can cost-effectively reach groups who do not otherwise get these messages. The QWEL program is viable as implemented for the area. Focused outreach to District partners and community leaders is also cost-effective and will not require augmenting staff.

### 3.5 Expanding Recharge Efforts

While identified as a goal of the 2013 CSP, Board members affirmed that the District's core mission of recharge is the key strategic action central to their work. They also identified opportunities to expand recharge in several areas listed below in priority order.

#### 3.5.1 Expanded Recharge

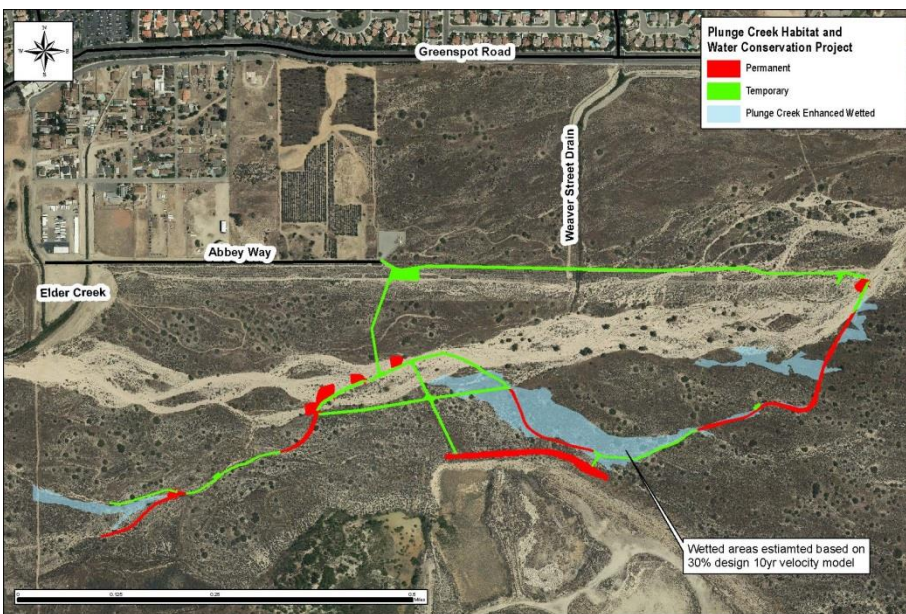
Expanding recharge activities on District lands or newly acquired lands in the Wash Area was the top priority for this strategic issue. The staff has been working on more aggressive operation facilities and has identified capital efforts to expand recharge capacity on the existing facility footprint. The District can implement expanded recharge capacity in some areas as distinct maintenance projects that improve operating flexibility.



Mill Creek Diversion Improvements

However, this category also includes the Mill Creek Diversion Sediment Improvement project initiated in 2015, which requires design and permitting. Finally, the District acquired approximately 16 acres referred to as the Mendoza Trust property. This property has the opportunity to provide both increased recharge of imported water or local natural surface flow, in a meandering channel. This potential California gnatcatcher habitat may be useful for District mitigation needs or to offset one or more partners' mitigation requirements.

In 2012, the District received a grant under the SAWPA Integrated Regional Water Management Planning program. This project is currently in permitting and will increase water recharge and endangered habitat in the Upper Plunge Creek. This project is a partnership between San Bernardino County Flood Control District, San Bernardino Valley Municipal Water District and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. This restoring of the braiding of Plunge Creek occurs on District lands and can be expanded to



Plunge Creek Habitat and Water Conservation Project

other lands to increase the benefits of the project. As a collaborative project, its shared benefits efficiently provide services to the region, and it is an opportunity to work together with the resource agencies and habitat managers in the region.



### 3.5.2 Community Recharge

Also identified in the 2017 CVP process was the goal of seeking Community Recharge projects which could occur on District or non-District lands in partnership with the communities the District serves. The development project could partner wherever there is a stormwater quality requirement for retaining water onsite in an area with recharge potential. Such a project could bring long-term management and recharge benefits to the basin and new recharge facilities to the District. Alternatively, several parcels in development could cooperate with the District to aggregate stormwater into a recharge facility outside of the land under development.

### 3.5.3 Resources Implications

The District expends significant funding and resources to expand recharge. The Plunge Creek project and other aggressive recharge efforts occur within the existing budget and staffing. Future Community Recharge and Enhanced Recharge will require additional capital resources and staffing. In the District staffing plan, a new field staff position would support Wash Plan and Enhanced Recharge implementation. A Community Recharge project, if identified, would require contracted or additional staff. The Groundwater Recharge Enterprise Reserve and Capital Improvement Reserve will fund the identified capital projects in Mill and Plunge Creek.

### 3.5.4 Big Bear Watermaster

The District is one of the three court-appointed Watermaster members with Big Bear Municipal Water District and Bear Valley Mutual Water Company. The District's primary role is as an unbiased representative of the groundwater basin to ensure the basin is kept whole in the operations of the Big Bear Dam facilities and water management activities. This strategic partnership supports the working relationships between the mountain communities, their water supply, and the water supply for the valley and its users.

## 4 Land Resource Management

In 2011, the District established a Land Management Enterprise fund to clarify District priorities better and to provide better accountability for the sources and use of funding available in the various areas of the District's efforts. Components and tasks are described below along with several relevant and strategic goals.

### 4.1 Land Management Enterprise

The Land Management Enterprise funds District property costs not directly related to current water recharge activities. Revenue related to this enterprise includes mining royalties, land leases, commercial property leases, and easement payments for encroachments and encumbrances. These funds enhance the District's financial position through one-time and recurring revenue opportunities. These revenues can support the District's core functions and augment reserves to stabilize rates and allow funding for improvements.



Blooming Santa Ana Woolly Star, an endangered species

A critical planning and management endeavor that is related to the land enterprise is Plan B or the Santa Ana Wash Plan. This plan is a long-term management approach that creates a comprehensive program to manage the Wash Area shown below. The development of this HCP is challenging and requires the participation of the Wash Plan Task Force, made up of stakeholder communities and partners, as well as resource agencies such as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Bureau of Land Management and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife.

**Santa Ana River Wash Habitat Conservation Plan:  
Combining Species Protection and Project Development**

The map displays the Santa Ana River Wash area, highlighting various land uses and conservation efforts. Key features include:

- Habitat Areas:** Shaded regions representing proposed conservation areas owned by SBFCFCD, woolly star preserve areas, and other designated habitats.
- Wash Plan Projects:** Indicated by different colors and patterns, including existing and new mining areas, regional transportation, flood control maintenance, storm water capture facilities, wells and water infrastructure, and planned trails.
- Protected Species:** Specific species like Coastal California Gnatcatcher, Woolly Star, Cactus Wren, Slender-horned Spineflower, San Bernardino Kangaroo Rat, and others are mapped within their respective habitats.
- Infrastructure:** Major roads like SR-78 and SR-91, and the Santa Ana River are clearly marked.

**Coordinate System:**  
NAD 1983 StatePlane California V FIPS 0405 Feet  
Projection: Lambert Conformal Conic  
Datum: North American 1983  
Source: SBVWCD GIS  
GIS Contact: Katelyn Schulte  
May 31, 2016

#### 4.2.1 Wildland Trails in Wash Plan HCP

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among the cities on the form of governance and cost sharing and other issues needed to open the trails. After an acceptable agreement is signed, the group can apply for habitat coverage from USFWS to open some or all trails to limited or full use, depending on preferences and funding. The goal related to this 2017 CSP is to have one or more trails open by 2020.

Resources are required from the District as well as from the cities and mining entities to allow trail usage by the public. The trails master plan documents the support needed for trails. Also, District operational resources or facilities need to be isolated from trail users for safety and to reduce liability. Additionally, homelessness on the Santa Ana River Trail has recently become an epidemic in Orange County, causing residents nearby to resist the construction of trails and parks in their neighborhoods. Because of a significant amount of open land and remote areas, Wash Area homelessness is only an intermittent problem. If better access roads, food, and water are made available, the area will have increased homeless encampment usage, particularly since adjacent areas may push them out.

#### **4.2.2 Conservation Trust and Resource Implications**

In 2016, a tax-exempt 501 (c) 3, public benefit nonprofit corporation was initiated to hold the conservation easements and the endowment for Habitat Mitigation required by the Wash Plan implementation. The San Bernardino Valley Conservation Trust (SBVCT) has a three-member Board of Directors made up of District-elected and public members. This State-approved conservation trust is staffed by District employees reimbursed by the trust under an agreement

#### **4.2.3 Habitat Coordination and Management**

Wash Plan implementation includes not just the projects and mitigation land management. Staff will assist District partners and communities with their covered projects through the Certificate of Inclusion process, working closely with the SBVCT. Additionally, the District and the SBVCT will need to participate with the Cities and adjacent landowners to ensure compatible land uses and development as it occurs. Current resources are implementing the Wash Plan efforts, with additional field staff planned for management efforts, and contract support for annual efforts.

### **4.3 Mining, Land Use, and Development**

Responsibly planning, managing and developing the District's lands are crucial to the sustainability of the District and its land holdings.

#### **4.3.1 Mining**

An example of development proposals are the aggregate mining leases which pay royalties to the District. Additionally, they make sand, gravel, and rock available to the local communities at a lower cost and a smaller carbon footprint than what would be produced by hauling aggregate from longer distances. Furthermore, these mining efforts also pay tax or royalties to the surrounding communities. In 2011, the District negotiated a revised agreement with CEMEX to provide a minimum annual guaranteed revenue to the District if they did not mine the resources. The District also has contracts with Redlands Aggregate for permitted aggregate mining. Even in the mining area, the District holds an agreement with CEMEX and the County of San Bernardino to provide an easement allowing the County to cooperatively operate on District lands for processing sediment from flood control facilities. The District continues to maximize opportunities for new amenities for District community partners and better use of the property that is not currently in mining or when mining is complete. Mining efforts and aggregate management benefit the local community in providing local jobs, concrete, and aggregate materials.



Also, the District has a contract with Robertson's Ready Mix, which provides for mining on District property when permits are issued. The District holds a prepaid royalty as a deposit until permitting is completed under the HCP. The mining activities are well buffered from the community and are expected to be ongoing for up to 60 years. At the conclusion of mining in one or more areas, the areas will undergo restoration according



**Mining in the Santa Ana River Wash see from the air**

to Surface Mining Reclamation Act requirements. At that time the lands will be returned to a shallow slope to accommodate groundwater recharge according to mining lease closure requirements.

#### **4.3.2 Land Use, Development, and Community Mitigation**

In any year, numerous proposals may be presented to the District to participate in related development on District lands or in nearby communities. These projects, if consistent with the HCP and District policy, can be accommodated if they are in best interest of the District or its communities and partners. Easement and fee proposals to develop District lands unneeded for water conservation may be received or solicited under certain conditions. A strategic goal related to this area is to continue to improve alternative long-term funding mechanisms for the District to mitigate rates for groundwater producers and to fund District land management needs.

#### **4.4 Sustainability and Resource Management**

The District is also committed to sustainably managing the properties it owns and uses with its partners and communities. Consolidating land ownership near District facilities has value to the District as a buffer. It also serves as an asset to the community as well as helping to separate noisy or dusty operations from residential or commercial use. In the 2013 CSP, the District provided a vision for community parks and recreational amenities. Wetland areas were also suggested for water quality issues. Presently, there is no driving need or funding to support these projects, but the Board believes that these amenities may fit into broader future resource management efforts with partners in the region. It is essential to keep these aims in mind when discussing resource management for the area.



**District Lands and Native Habitat**

## 5 Agency and General Fund

Most of the strategic goals are related to projects of the District, but some goals from the 2013 CSP were primarily associated with the District operations. They are described in this section.

### 5.1 Annual and Short-Term Efforts

The 2013 CSP contained several actions which were short-term, generally less than one year. Beginning in 2011, the Board started setting priorities at the beginning of its calendar year to allow these priorities to be implemented during the calendar year. Some of these items were regular District efforts that required particular attention or were infrequent projects. Other priorities are being tracked and reported upon to provide direction and accountability to the staff and Board. This process continues, although the 2017 CSP no longer contains these near-term financial issues.

### 5.2 Organizational and Financial Improvement

The District has the strategic goal of continuing to develop a more efficient District governance and organization with a secure governmental and sound financial foundation. Enhancing this status and continuing to build relationships are a strategic goal intended to provide better, more reliable service to the District's partners and communities.

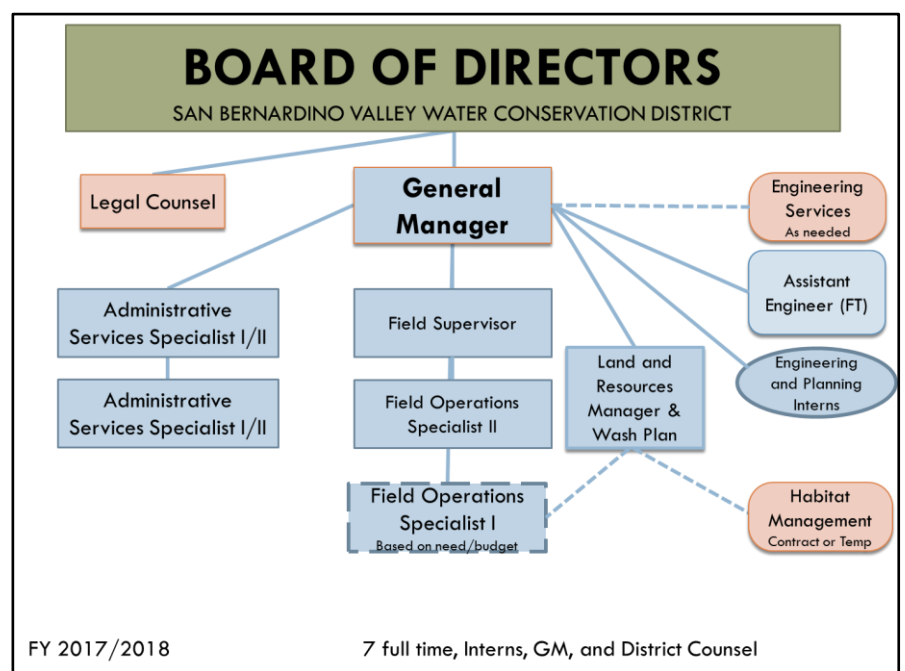
An example of this strategic goal, accomplished in 2012, was development of the groundwater charge rates which are adequate to fund the District's groundwater recharge services.

Other ongoing examples include:

- Managing costs and expenses to ensure cost-effective services
- Operating reserves and revenue opportunities which stabilize District costs and service levels
- Working with regional partners and supporting projects, shared needs and shared facilities
- Developing cooperative agreements to support mutual needs
- Continuing to demonstrate the high value of District services by promoting and enhancing community and partner goals and efforts.

### 5.3 Develop Staff and Organizational Capacity

In the 2013 CSP, the Board recommended a strategic goal of developing staff and the District's capability to support vital regional programs such as the Wash Plan, and water and natural resources management in cooperation with the District's partners. This effort, as accomplished, was financially viable. The 2017-18 organizational chart is shown here. Expansion of training for existing staff, use of interns and consultants, and collaborative staff



District Organization Chart as shown in the approved 2017 staffing plan

sharing with neighboring agencies and communities will continue. Based on the strategic goals of the 2017 CSP, District staffing may need revision in the next review. Also, in 2016, the Board requested a succession and transition plan for the organization, which the Board may implement along with these strategic goals.

## 6 Strategic Revenue Initiatives

During the planning phase for the 2013 CSP, the District had weathered difficult financial times starting in 2008 and continuing through 2011. This situation mirrored the overall economic slow-down; however, the effect on the District was more severe because all sources of the District revenues declined at the same time. Since that time, the District revised its financial structure, reduced costs, and implemented various policies that are intended to reduce the impact of these occurrences in the future. These changes give the District the financial ability to adequately provide its core public services even in the case of a future downturn. The District also implemented cost-cutting measures that are documented in the annual budgets. An example is the reduction from seven to five Divisions for the Board of Directors as allowed by the District-sponsored Senate Bill 235. The District also adopted the Enterprise Financial structure and reserve policies to limit the future impact of general economic conditions on the District, since drought happens in good and bad economic times. The District revenues are described briefly below, categorized as renewable and non-renewable.

### 6.1 Renewable Revenue

Renewable revenues are generated every year at varying levels based on the source and conditions.

Groundwater Charge - The District sets the Groundwater Charge with the support of the District's partners and communities. The District established a rate stabilization reserve to reduce the need for significant rate increases in any given year. The Board of Directors authorized the use of the rate stabilization reserve in 2017 and increased the groundwater charge by four percent. These rate increases were needed because rate increases were forestalled in 2015 and 2016 to allow retail agencies to recover from the emergency conservation regulations during the drought. The rates per acre-foot are still minimal and affordable to the water producers in the basin.

The District embarked on the formation of a Groundwater Council with regional agency support, and has continued to convene meetings and prepare legal and technical materials to allow the producers from the basin to have a more equitable method of paying groundwater charges to support the O&M of regional recharge facilities:

Investments - The District reserves are adequate to ensure future operations and the variability of the District's revenue sources. The District's investments include significant funding provided as a prepayment of royalties. Placement of these cash reserves offers a small but sustainable amount of income to the District.

Rental/Lease Income - The District owns and leases lands and office and residential space beyond the current needs of the District. The



Collaborative Use of District Lands



District manages these investments to reduce its operating cost and provide public opportunities for local communities.

Service Fees and Miscellaneous Income - The District provides several services and allows the use of its land for compatible purposes. Recharge and other services performed for others are ongoing sources of relatively stable revenue. Also, the District gains additional income from the sale of materials that result from the cleaning of basins or placement of materials for storage or processing on District lands.

Property Tax - The District receives minimal General Fund property tax that is related to its share of county collected taxes. The annual property tax for past few years is about \$85,000.

## 6.2 Extractive or Non-Renewable

Some of the District's funding sources are not renewable, and when used or spent are no longer available to the District for future revenue.

### 6.2.1 Mining Royalties

Mining royalties from the extracted material are priced based on a market rate negotiated with the company mining the lease. The aggregate that will be permitted and minable is finite and cannot easily expand. The Wash Plan conservation strategy provides for a significant increase in minable area and although increased, will be limited. Moreover, the lands after mining are less



CEMEX Mining On District Lease

useful and may be harder to reclaim for productive purposes. In the 2017 CSP, the Board discussed planning for reuse of the mining pits. After discussion, they determined such an effort would be premature, except for a review of the modified mining or closure plans. Staff should review to be sure they contain the needed criteria to sustain groundwater recharge after mining ends.

### 6.2.2 Property Easement or Community Mitigation Revenue

District lands can be sources of revenue to the District, if well managed. Various public and private organizations seek easements which are compatible with the use of the property for recharge and habitat. However, once a pipeline or road is developed, that precludes other use of the location. Additional mitigation areas are available on District lands, due to the HCP. In partnership with IERCD and the SBVCT, the District may be able to assist with offsetting mitigation for community projects where appropriate with District requirements. These Community or Partner Conservation Easements for habitat are likely to generate revenue and endowments to care for the lands but limit the future of the property for uses incompatible with the easement. Acceptance or use of these funds should be considered carefully due to the loss of alternative opportunities for the property.



Slender horned spineflower

## 7 Community Strategic Plan Input and Feedback

Like the 2013 CSP, a Board-led, community-based process begins with the elements identified and developed by the Board and incorporates community and partner feedback to establish the final Community Strategic Plan. This draft CSP will benefit from the input of water partners, community partners, and wash plan stakeholders. Incorporating the feedback of these partners creates a shared vision for the 2017 CSP.

### 7.1 Process and Feedback

The District uses an open process to solicit feedback and better understand the community's needs on this Community Strategic Plan. The District circulates the draft document and offers summary presentations for water, community and other partner's feedback. During development of the CSP, staff and Directors will meet with:

- Groundwater Recharge Partners and Water Agencies
- Land Stakeholders and Wash Plan Task Force Members
- Mining Partners
- Resource Agencies
- Districts, Cities and the County of San Bernardino
- Community Stakeholders and legislators

### 7.2 Approvals Implementation and Revision

The Board of Directors will review the Circulation Draft Community Strategic Plan and accept it for distribution and comment. Staff will modify the document to reflect the recommended changes, community feedback and comments to produce the final draft. The Board will then consider the final CSP for implementation.

Staff will implement the Community Strategic Plan with direction from the Board of Directors and in cooperation with the District's partners and communities. The Community Strategic Plan will assist with the development of the Annual Priorities List and the Annual Fiscal Budget for the District. Staff and the Board review the Community Strategic Plan when considering critical decisions. Every three to five years, they formally review and consider revising the plan if needed.

Please feel free to contact the District with any questions or comments.

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