Western Secures Local Water from Riverside Public Utilities

District purchasing surplus water from the Utility during the drought, a benefit for all customers

Riverside, Calif. – “As the ongoing drought continues to impact the state’s water sources, Western Municipal Water District has entered into a forward-thinking partnership with Riverside Public Utilities to purchase some of their unused water,” said Western’s General Manager John Rossi. “Maximizing the beneficial use of local water supplies is a win/win for both Western and RPU customers.”

As part of the partnership, Western is purchasing up to 2,500 acre-feet of water from Riverside Public Utilities (RPU) at a cost of $1.6 million. The 2,500 acre-feet is enough water to provide roughly 5,000 homes with water for a year.

By purchasing local water from RPU, Western will net a savings of approximately $400,000 versus having to purchase the higher cost State Water Project water from Metropolitan Water District (which supplies the majority of Western’s water). RPU’s revenue from the water sale will go toward either backfilling the reduced revenue that has resulted from the mandatory water conservation or providing some type of rebate to customers. The Riverside City Council unanimously approved the item at last evening’s meeting; Western’s board is expected to ratify the item at its Nov. 18 board meeting.

The water purchase is a mutual benefit to both agencies as RPU cannot store a surplus of its annual 55,000 acre feet of water at the Bunker Hill Basin in San Bernardino County per terms in a decades ago established court agreement.

“Riverside customers have really stepped up in the fourth year of the historic drought and saved nearly 28 percent of water, and, as a result, we will have a surplus of water that we cannot bank at Bunker Hill,” said RPU General Manager Girish Balachandran. “Selling the water to Western benefits our region as water stays local, including city of Riverside residents in Western’s service area.“

In late 2008, RPU’s Board of Public Utilities approved the Water Production and Conveyance Agreement with Western where RPU operates its excess production, transmission and distribution facilities to deliver potable and nonpotable water that Western owns, leases or controls in the Bunker Hill as well as other groundwater basins to Western’s service area. In 2015, RPU has conveyed approximately 5,000 acre-feet of Western-controlled groundwater from the Bunker Hill Basin.

“An agreement like this is also an opportunity to invest in the region. Western can spend water-purchasing dollars in Riverside instead of sending water supply dollars to entities outside of the city and county region,” Rossi further explained.

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