City of Riverside/Western Partnership Delivers More Local Water, Savings

Riverside, Calif. – Since executing a historic agreement in 2017, the City of Riverside (City) and Western Municipal Water District (Western) have made significant strides to boost the city-wide use of local water supplies instead of more expensive imported water.

The cooperative agreement was possible thanks to the collaborative spirit of the leadership at both agencies who sought to solidify the long-term partnership between Riverside’s two water providers on behalf of all water customers.

“Customers in both service areas benefit from this agreement. It is the result of City of Riverside Councilmembers, the Mayor, and Western Directors working together for the collective benefit of Riverside and Western customers,” said Western Board Member Thomas P. Evans.

Last year, the two agencies struck a Regional Water Partnership deal that allows Western to purchase Riverside groundwater that is surplus to its current demands—supplies that are part of the City’s Court-adjudicated water right in the San Bernardino Basin Area.

Because of lower demands resulting from increased efficiencies in the areas served by Riverside Public Utilities (RPU), surplus supplies are available that can be sold to Western. The agreement also allows Western to transport groundwater through Riverside’s system that it acquires through other arrangements in the basin.

“This partnership really is a win-win,” added Jo Lynne Russo-Pereyra, Chair of the Board of Public Utilities in Riverside. “It has allowed the City to make good use of the water rights we acquired in 1969 and the available system capacity that otherwise would be unused. The agreement also reduces our neighbor’s dependence on imported water. Most importantly, it provides the customers of both agencies a more economical water rate.”

In the next 20 years, this partnership is estimated to bring approximately $100 million in new revenues to the City of Riverside and a cost savings of approximately $45 million to Western when compared to the cost of imported water. Western will purchase “surplus water” and transport other water supplies through the city and will pay for the use of Riverside’s distribution and treatment system as well as the associated energy costs to move groundwater to the Western service area.

“The City of Riverside and Western celebrate the one-year anniversary of the historic water agreement that has saved customers of both agencies millions of dollars and provided Western customers with a more reliable
water supply,” said Western’s Board Vice President Bob Stockton. This innovative, long-term agreement capitalizes on local water sources at costs that are considerably less than imported water from northern California. This agreement was the result of superb cooperation between the agency’s staffs, who worked tirelessly to make it happen.

In its first calendar year, the Regional Water Partnership has resulted in a $2.6 million savings for Western and $4.5 million in revenue to the City, which will help keep water rates as low as possible in the years to come. It has also brought an additional 2.4 billion gallons of local groundwater to Western’s customers, which is enough annual water supply for about 15,000 single-family homes.

Though the Regional Water Partnership is still relatively new, it is on track to deliver even more local groundwater and more savings than last year.

“When it comes to providing essential services, both to our residents and our neighbors in western Riverside County, we really are better together,” Mayor Rusty Bailey said. “I applaud these efforts to find savings that help us keep water rates as low as possible for everyone.”

For more information about the Regional Water Partnership, visit https://riversideca.gov/utilities/WMWDandRPU/.