

A New Colorado River Pilot Program: Seasonal Land Following



On the Colorado River, a traditional ag-urban fallowing program would require a participating farmer to idle cropland for an extended period of time. The Metropolitan Water District of Southern California is now exploring landowner interest in a seasonal land fallowing pilot program to forgo planting a water-intensive crop for a portion of the spring and summer. The pilot program with Bard Water District in the southeast corner of California advances a new way to maximize the utility of water for farmers and cities alike.

Partner: Bard Water District

Bard is a unit of the Yuma Project, created by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation and receives water via the All American Canal. Metropolitan diverts supplies into its Colorado River Aqueduct from Lake Havasu, approximately 153 river miles upstream from Bard.



A Voluntary Pilot Program

No more than 2,000 acres of farmland would participate in the program during 2016 or 2017. Land would be idled from farming from April 1 through July 31. Metropolitan would pay \$400 per participating acre per year. Approximately two acre-feet of water could be conserved by every acre seasonally fallowed. Water conserved by Bard would be diverted into the Colorado River Aqueduct by Metropolitan. The pilot program provides an opportunity for Metropolitan to investigate the potential for a water management program with a new, flexible and affordable water supply. Payments to Bard and the participating farmers will allow for Bard system improvements as well as providing a stable income for local farmers. Although a participating farmer can get paid to use less water, under the program the water rights remain with the local community.

Different Seasons Different Crop Values

Desert agriculture enjoys a market advantage in the winter, growing vegetables such as lettuce and broccoli. Facing harsh growing conditions in summer, Bard farmers on their 6,400 acres typically grow more water-intensive commodities such as grains and water-intensive grasses. Entering into a purchase agreement for this water, in lieu of growing a lower value summer crop, is a potential new water market that Bard and Metropolitan are cooperatively exploring.



Broccoli is a higher value winter crop



Sudan grass is a water-intensive summer crop

Metropolitan and the Colorado: Progress through Collaboration

Since drought conditions ended access to Colorado River water in 2002, Metropolitan has adapted through a series of partnerships within the state and throughout the Basin.



Voluntary land following with the Palo Verde Irrigation District



Conserving and storing water in Lake Mead



Reducing Colorado River reliance by advancing local supplies and conservation. A Southland landscape before conversion to California-Friendly plants...



...and after water-intensive turf was removed.

Working Toward Lasting Solutions

With an imbalance between supplies and demands in the Colorado River Basin, it will take new solutions in the years ahead. The Metropolitan-Bard seasonal land following pilot program exemplifies Metropolitan's commitment to finding new and workable ways to maintaining agriculture productivity while providing reliable supplies to the Southland economy.

For more information about the Metropolitan-Bard Seasonal Land Following Pilot Program, contact Kira Alonzo at (213) 217-6489, kalonzo@mwdh2o.com or Najwa Obeid at (213) 217-7595, nobeid@mwdh2o.com

WHO IS METROPOLITAN

The Metropolitan Water District of Southern California is a state-established cooperative of 26 member agencies – cities and public water agencies – that serve nearly 19 million people in six counties. Metropolitan imports water from the Colorado River and Northern California to supplement local supplies and helps its members develop increased water conservation, recycling, storage and other resource-management programs.

OUR MISSION

The mission of the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California is to provide its service area with adequate and reliable supplies of high-quality water to meet present and future needs in an environmentally and economically responsible way.

The Metropolitan Water District of Southern California

700 N. Alameda St.
Los Angeles, CA 90012

P.O. Box 54153
Los Angeles, CA 90054-0153

(213) 217-6000

(800)call-mwd (255-5693)

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