Palo Verde Land Management, Crop Rotation and Water Supply Program

... at a glance

This landmark program is part of Metropolitan's portfolio of water resources that helps ensure a more reliable water supply for urban Southern California, while helping Palo Verde Valley farmers and the local economy.

In August 2004, the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California and the Palo Verde Irrigation District (PVID) entered into a 35-year agreement for a land fallowing, crop rotation and water supply program. This mutually beneficial program is among several other programs Metropolitan has implemented to help California meet its water needs and at the same time reduce its use of Colorado River water. The program commenced January 1, 2005 and will extend through July 31, 2040.

Why it is important

Voluntary water transfers, such as this one, are an important element in meeting California's urban water supply needs. This water transfer program serves as an example for mutually beneficial partnerships between farmers and California's cities.

How it works

Palo Verde farmers refrain from irrigating between 7 and 28 percent of the valley lands in any year at the request of Metropolitan, making water that would have been used for farming on these lands available to urban Southern California. Land taken out of production is maintained in accordance with approved soil and water management plans, and rotated every one to five years. The program allows Metropolitan to purchase additional water, while providing stable income to the farming community. Annual payments to farmers vary in response to actual acreage fallowed.

By the numbers

- Program length: 35 years, Jan 1, 2005 – July 31, 2040
- Estimated water supply for urban Southern California each year: 25,000 to 118,000 acre-feet
- Estimated total water supply over program length: 1.8 MAF to 3.9 MAF
- Total Palo Verde Valley farmland in production: 91,400 acres
- Maximum amount of farmland taken out of production in any year: 28 percent or 26,000 acres
- Signup payments received by participating farmers: a one-time payment of $3,170 for each acre enrolled for a total of $73.5 million
- Annual fallowed land maintenance payments per acre: $733 for 2013, adjusted upward annually for inflation for future years
- Annual payment to Palo Verde Irrigation District for its administrative program costs (payment varies annually) $246,000 for 2012/2013
- Amount expensed for program environmental documentation and implementation: $3.3 million

An acre-foot of water equals 325,851 gallons and is enough for two average families, in and around the home, for one year.

Mutually beneficial

The program helps the farming community by infusing money into the Palo Verde Valley economy, while increasing the reliability of drinking water supplies to nearly 19 million Southern Californians. It involves no changes in water rights, land ownership or loss of prime agricultural lands. Lands rotated out of production can be made more productive before being placed back into production, resulting in increased crop yields.

Payments to farmers provide stable income that can be used on farm-related investments, purchases and debt repayment. Metropolitan also invested another $6 million for local community improvement programs. A non-profit public benefit corporation was established by the Palo Verde community and administers the $6 million fund through investments in community improvement programs to offset any potential economic impacts from the program.

Urban Southern Californians benefit from the addition of a flexible and affordable water supply, which provides from 10 billion to 38 billion gallons of water each year.

Part of a bigger picture

This partnership is one of several water management programs Metropolitan has implemented to augment its Colorado River supplies since it lost access to surplus water in 2002. These programs have helped refill the Colorado River Aqueduct. Beginning in 2008, Metropolitan was allowed to store conserved water in Lake Mead for future use. As of January 2013, Metropolitan has stored about 578,000 acre-feet of water in Lake Mead that was generated in part by water conserved under the PVID program. In addition, Metropolitan is exploring new types of efficient water management techniques on its farmlands in PVID to see if there are other ways to conserve agricultural water.

In addition to implementing new transfers, Metropolitan is lessening water usage through ongoing urban conservation and recycling efforts to maintain a reliable water supply for the 19 million people it serves. In wet years, Metropolitan deposits surplus water in groundwater basins and reservoirs scattered throughout the region, saving the water for a not-so-rainy day. Currently, more than 1.5 million acre-feet can be stored in the region, half of those in the massive Diamond Valley Lake near Hemet, California.

For more information about the PVID program, contact Program Manager Michael Yu at (213) 217-6814 or at myu@mwdh2o.com.

About Metropolitan

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

Mission Statement

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.

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