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PIONEERING PILOT COLORADO RIVER LAND MANAGEMENT, SEASONAL PROGRAM REVISED BY METROPOLITAN BOARD OF DIRECTORS

**Two-year pilot program with Bard Water District will provide Metropolitan up to 4,570 acre-feet of Colorado River water per year**

Beginning in April, farmers in the southeastern corner of California will voluntarily skip their spring and summer plantings and transfer saved Colorado River water to the urban Southland under a groundbreaking two-year pilot program revised today by Metropolitan Water District's Board of Directors.

No more than 2,000 acres of water-intensive field crops in the Bard Water District will be idled from April to July in 2016 and 2017, providing up to 4,570 acre-feet of transferable water to Metropolitan each year, under the terms of the land management and seasonal fallowing program initially approved by MWD's board in January.

"With a projected future imbalance between supplies and demands in the Colorado River Basin, it will take new partnerships and new solutions now and in the years ahead," said Metropolitan board Chairman Randy Record.

"This pilot program exemplifies Metropolitan's commitment to find new, workable ways to maintain agriculture and provide reliable water supplies to the Southland's urban economy," Record said.

Under the \$1.8 million pilot program, Metropolitan will pay \$400 for each acre that is not irrigated during a four-month period, which is estimated to free up nearly 2.3 acre-feet per acre for transfer to the urban agency. (An acre-foot of water is nearly 326,000 gallons, about the amount used by two typical Southland households in a year.)

The Bard district—a unit of the Yuma Project created by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation—receives Colorado River supplies via the All American Canal to irrigate nearly 6,400 acres in the southeast corner of California, adjacent to Yuma, Ariz.

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In the winter, Bard farmers typically grow higher value, lower water use crops, such as lettuce and broccoli. During the summer months, farmers typically plant lower value, more water-intensive crops such as grains and thirsty grasses.

Instead of growing less profitable summer crops, farmers would sell their water to Metropolitan, creating a potential new water market, while maintaining their rights to grow crops in future years, said Metropolitan General Manager Jeffrey Kightlinger.

“This program offers mutual benefits that advance a new way to maximize the value and use of water for farmers and cities alike,” Kightlinger said. “It shows the potential of providing Metropolitan with a highly flexible and reliable water supply at an affordable cost that significantly augments our portfolio of short- and long-term water supplies for the region.

“At the same time, payments to Bard farmers could help them better manage fluctuations in the crop market by offering a stable income and providing needed capital to help fund local water system improvements and offset future rate increases,” he added.

With the Colorado River and the Southwest in the 16<sup>th</sup> year of drought, the pilot program marks Metropolitan’s latest agricultural conservation and transfer program partnership in California. The district maintains a similar land management and fallowing program with the Palo Verde Irrigation District and a long-term water conservation partnership with the Imperial Irrigation District. In both Bard and Palo Verde, the water rights remain with the farming community.

While the Colorado River drought limited Metropolitan’s access to Colorado River supplies since 2002, the district also has adapted by conserving and storing water in Lake Mead and by reducing its reliance through water-use efficiencies and new local supplies.

Under the revisions approved today to allow participation by small farms, the minimum size of any single Bard parcel enrolled in the pilot program was lowered from 20 to 10 acres.

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*The Metropolitan Water District of Southern California is a state-established cooperative of 26 cities and water agencies serving nearly 19 million people in six counties. The district 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.*