Our Region's Trusted Water Leader
San Diego County Water Authority | 75

PIONEERING
VISIONARY
AGILE *and*
DRIVEN
FOR 75 YEARS…
AND COUNTING

June 9, 1944
The San Diego County Water Authority forms with nine charter members to administer the region's Colorado River rights, import water and take over operations of the regional aqueduct.

ORGANIZED JUNE 9, 1944

November 29, 1944
President Roosevelt orders the U.S. Navy to construct Pipeline 1, connecting the Colorado River Aqueduct in Riverside County to the City of San Diego's San Vicente Reservoir in Lakeside.

December 17, 1946
The Water Authority annexes into the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California. As a condition of annexation, MWD requires the City of San Diego to assign its 112,000 acre-foot Colorado River water right to MWD.

November 24, 1947
The first Colorado River water flows into San Diego County just in time to help avoid what could have been a significant water shortage in the region.

One acre-foot is about 325,900 gallons, enough to supply 2.5 single-family homes of four for a year.

1950
The Water Authority serves about 80 percent of county's residents, delivering 59,000 acre-feet of water to 435,000 people.

1950 - 1951
Drought causes concerns in San Diego County, and the Water Authority pursues plans for a second major pipeline.

1954
Pipeline 2, a 48-inch-diameter pipeline built adjacent to Pipeline 1, begins delivering imported water.

1960
The Water Authority provides 157,000 acre-feet of water to 956,000 people — almost 95 percent of county residents.

1961
Pipeline 3, a 72-inch-diameter pipeline capable of delivering nearly three times the water as Pipeline 1, is completed in the Second San Diego Aqueduct that terminates at Otay Reservoir.

1964
In Arizona v. California, the U.S. Supreme Court rules that California is limited to 4.4 million acre-feet of Colorado River water annually in the absence of a surplus or unused apportionment from Arizona and Nevada.

1970
The Water Authority's serves more than 1.2 million people, delivering 246,000 acre-feet of water.

1976
Pipeline 4, 96 inches in diameter and capable of carrying nearly as much water as first three pipes combined, is completed in the Second Aqueduct.

1976 - 1977
San Diego County and the rest of California suffer from severe drought conditions.

1978
The first water from Northern California is delivered to the San Diego region via the State Water Project's California Aqueduct and the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California.

1980
The Water Authority serves nearly 99 percent of the county's 1.8 million residents, delivering 310,000 acre-feet of water.

1982
Pipeline 5, a 96-inch-diameter pipeline, is added to the Second Aqueduct, increasing regional delivery capacity to about 1 million acre-feet per year.

1987
A major six-year drought begins in California.

1989
The Water Authority authorizes an Optimal Storage Study to analyze the agency's water storage needs.

1989
A $530 million Capital Improvement Program is adopted by the Water Authority, encompassing 10 major water infrastructure projects.

1990
The Water Authority serves 2.4 million residents who use 642,000 acre-feet of water. Per capita potable water use is 235 gallons per day.

1990
The Water Authority initiates its Aqueduct Protection Program, an industry-leading maintenance and repair program for large-diameter pipelines.

1991
The Water Authority sponsors state Senate Bill 1224, requiring that toilets sold or installed in 1994 or later use no more than 1.6 gallons per flush – a standard adopted nationally in the Energy Policy Act of 1992 and a cornerstone of future water-efficiency efforts nationwide.

1991
After five years of drought, Metropolitan Water District deliveries to San Diego are cut by 31 percent for 13 months. The Water Authority purchases additional water from California Drought Water Bank and implements a major water conservation campaign. Economic development in the region suffers a major blow.

Never Again!

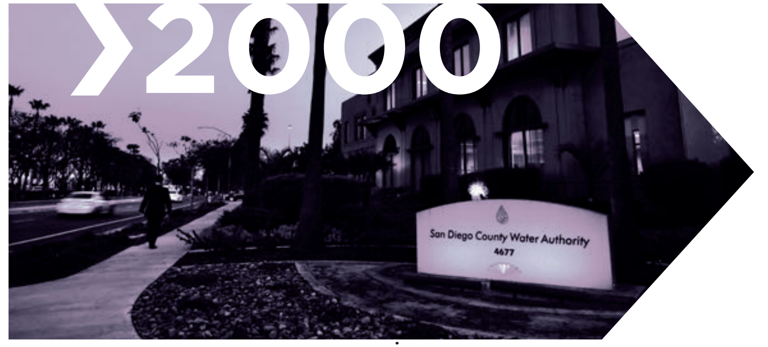
No More Water Shortages!

1992
The Water Authority begins planning and environmental studies for the Emergency Storage Project, a system of reservoirs, pipelines and pump stations designed to serve water throughout the county if a major catastrophe such as an earthquake interrupts imported water supplies.

1995
The Water Authority and Imperial Irrigation District announce a Memorandum of Understanding to pursue a major water conservation-and-transfer agreement for boosting regional water supply reliability.

1997
The Water Authority starts developing a master plan for securing diversified water supply sources and implementing the associated capital improvement projects through 2030.

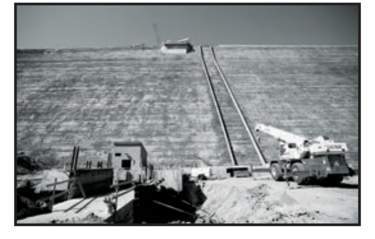
1998
In April, the Water Authority and the Imperial Irrigation District execute an agreement for the largest agricultural-to-urban water transfer in U.S. history. In November, the Water Authority and MWD sign an Exchange Agreement to move the IID transfer water to San Diego County.



2000
The Water Authority serves 2.8 million people who use 695,000 acre-feet of water. Per capita potable water use drops to 216 gallons per day.

2000
The State of California amends the County Water Authority Act, expanding the Water Authority's ability to build, own and operate electric and natural gas facilities.

2003
The Water Authority dedicates Olivenhain Dam, completing Phase One of the agency's $1.5 billion Emergency & Carryover Storage Project. It is the region's first new dam in 50 years.



2010
The Water Authority serves 3.2 million residents, who use a total of 566,000 acre-feet of water as per capita potable water use shrinks to 152 gallons per day.

2011
The 11-mile, 8.5-foot diameter San Vicente Pipeline Tunnel, a key component of the Water Authority's Emergency & Carryover Storage Project, is finished.

2012
The Water Authority's Lake Hodges Pump Storage Project begins operations, providing up to 40 megawatts of clean, on-demand electricity for the region with two 28,000-horsepower pump turbines.

2015
Commercial water production begins at the Claude "Bud" Lewis Carlsbad Desalination Plant, which generates approximately 50 million gallons of high-quality drinking water each day as the nation's largest seawater desalination plant.

2018
The Water Authority serves 3.3 million residents who use 518,000 acre-feet of water. Per capita potable water use drops to 134 gallons per day.

2003
The U.S. Secretary of the Interior, the Water Authority, and other parties sign the historic Colorado River Quantification Settlement Agreement. The Water Authority and IID commence their water transfer agreement, and QSA water begins flowing to the San Diego region.

2010
Projects to replace nearly 60 miles of the earthen All-American and Coachella canals with modern, concrete-lined canals are completed. The projects provide San Diego with approximately 80,000 acre-feet of high-priority, low-cost water each year for 110 years as part of the QSA.

2014
The San Vincente Dam Raise, the largest water storage increase in county history, is completed, giving the region a critical hedge against water shortages. The project adds 157,000 acre-feet of water storage capacity to the reservoir, which is owned and operated by the City of San Diego.

2017
The Water Authority's Emergency & Carryover Storage Project wins the engineering industry's most prestigious global award from the American Society of Civil Engineers.

San Diego County Water Authority
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1944 - 2019

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San Diego County Water Authority
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Celebrating 75 Years of Service to San Diego County

The San Diego County Water Authority's story started during the height of World War II, when it became clear that imported water supplies were necessary to sustain a booming region on the forefront of the war effort.

On June 9, 1944, San Diego voters approved the agency's formation under the County Water Authority Act. Imported water arrived three years later to slake the thirst of a growing population just weeks before local supplies would have run out.

For its first several decades, the Water Authority served mainly as a pumps-and-pipes agency, delivering imported water to local cities and water districts. But a severe drought in the early 1990s forced the region to confront the fact that continuing to provide safe and reliable water demanded a diverse portfolio of water supplies instead of near-total reliance on a single source.

In the decades that followed, the Water Authority transformed itself into one of the most pioneering, visionary, agile and driven water agencies in the world, winning national and international acclaim for engineering and water management excellence. Today, the Water Authority and its member agencies are leaders in water conservation, asset management, innovation, seawater desalination and water resource planning to serve the region's 3.3 million residents and sustain its $231 billion economy for decades to come.

1944 - 2019