

ESTABLISHING THE ANTELOPE VALLEY WATER PLAN: WATER SUPPLY RELIABILITY FOR SUSTAINABLE GROWTH

The State and County have both recognized the significance of equity and environmental justice in our communities. A lack of action in decades past has led to disparities among communities within the County, which have long faced underinvestment, and led to infrastructure that is less robust and less resilient. Coupled with climate volatility and the ongoing impacts of climate change, there is a potential for communities in North County to be disproportionately impacted by the lack of infrastructure, especially when compared to other areas in the County that benefit from being within the County’s Flood Control District.

The Antelope Valley is vast, and many areas are sparsely populated. Over time, small communities have formed throughout the region and developed their own individual water systems. The result is a patchwork of infrastructure that, in some places, lacks reliability and cost effectiveness. These isolated systems often lack access to the technical and financial resources to respond to new water quality regulations, aged infrastructure, and climate change.

The Los Angeles County Waterworks District 40 (District 40) is a special district that underwent consolidation into its present form on November 2, 1993. Currently, the District spans eight regions, serving customers in the cities of Lancaster and Palmdale, as well as the unincorporated communities of Pearblossom, Littlerock, Sun Village, Big Rock Creek, and other areas in Northern Los Angeles County and Lake Los Angeles. This expansive coverage underscores the District's pivotal role in ensuring the provision of safe, clean water for the residents of the entire Antelope Valley.

District 40, like other water retailers in the adjudicated groundwater basin, face the challenge of providing safe, clean, water as they must address the prominence of Arsenic, Chrome 6, and other pollutants that require significant treatment before water can be delivered to customers.

At present, District 40 serves approximately 215,000 people through 57,000 metered connections. A majority of the District 40 water supply is procured from the Antelope Valley East Kern Water Agency (AVEK) and is supplemented by groundwater extracted from the Antelope Valley Groundwater Basin.

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While the recent adjudication of the Antelope Valley's underlying groundwater basin and the development of water banking projects in the Antelope Valley has done much to further water supply reliability, more development will require greater supply and additional water utility infrastructure. According to the 2019 Antelope Valley Integrated Regional Water Management Plan, nearly half of the region's water is imported from outside the valley, which costs two to three times as much as utilizing local groundwater resources. Reliance on imported water presents other challenges, notably the environmental impact associated with conveyance, as well as the frequency of drought conditions that restrict State Water Project allocations.

Utilizing existing groundwater resources can also protect rate payers from increases in costs with the escalating cost of importing water. While the Antelope Valley is seeing increased development, there are a number of disadvantaged communities that would benefit from a stabilization in utility rates in the face of rising gas and electric utility costs.

On April 29, 1999, the Los Angeles County Department of Public Works (DPW) released a draft Water System Master Plan, serving as a guide for system improvements over the next two decades. The draft highlights changes experienced by District 40 since its release, noting uncertainties in full deliveries from the State Water Project (SWP) and restrictions limiting imported water to 60% of District 40's demand due to infrastructure limitations.

Initial District 40 projections for population growth could not factor in the potential influx of new residents, driven largely by a growing need for affordable housing. The Antelope Valley stands out as one of last bastions of affordable housing in the County. Concurrent growth in the defense sector, including aerospace manufacturing, along with a greater demand for warehousing, logistics and transportation services will serve as a catalyst that will generate sustained growth in the region. The cities of Palmdale and Lancaster have noted significant applications for new housing and development that will transform the region.

On December 5, 2023, the LA County Board of Supervisors adopted the Los Angeles County Water Plan (CWP), a first-of-its kind plan that articulates a shared, inclusive, regional path forward to achieve safe, clean, and reliable water resources sustainably and equitably for Los Angeles County. While the CWP is countywide, not all areas of the County are alike. The Antelope Valley has additional and unique challenges that require focused attention. Prolonged droughts have heightened the need for legislative and regulatory measures to ensure water reliability. The County's commitment to initiatives such as the County's Safe Clean Water Program, the Climate Action Plan, and the County Water Plan underscores its dedication to sustainable and climate-resilient initiatives.

To effectively plan for regional growth, increased water demand, and long term water supply reliability, District 40 should develop a comprehensive Master Plan. This endeavor should also explore opportunities to advocate for and support small water system operators in North County as well as the other stakeholders in the region such as the Antelope Valley East Kern Agency, the Los Angeles County Sanitation Districts, Palmdale Water District, and the cities of Lancaster and Palmdale.

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I, THEREFORE, MOVE that the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors direct the Department of Public Works, in coordination with relevant County Departments, Water Districts, and the cities of Palmdale and Lancaster to develop an Antelope Valley Water Plan as an expansion of the recently adopted Los Angeles County Water Plan, building upon the efforts of the Antelope Valley Integrated Regional Water Management Plan, which should include the following:

1. Establishment of a Los Angeles County Waterworks District No. 40 Water System Master Plan that addresses water supply reliability, necessary infrastructure improvements, water quality impacts, infrastructure hardening, and climate resilience investments needed to support the continued growth of the region and include a Capital Investment Plan for Los Angeles County Waterworks District No. 40.
2. Establishment of a Capital Improvement Program that addresses the financial requirements for the build out of the Water System Master Plan.

I, FURTHER MOVE that the Board of Supervisors direct the Department of Public Works to pursue cooperative agreements with the Antelope Valley-East Kern Water Agency (AVEK), Palmdale Water District, Quartz Hill Water District, and other agencies, water districts in the region, as well as the Cities of Lancaster and Palmdale to create necessary infrastructure to ensure long term reliability of water supply for Los Angeles County Waterworks District No. 40 and to provide greater water supply availability for existing and projected future growth, and report back to the Board in writing in 60 days;

I, FURTHER MOVE that the Board of Supervisors direct the Department of Public Health, in coordination with the Department of Public Works, and the Chief Sustainability Office, to develop a strategy for coordination of and support for small water systems, including potential grant funding opportunities to support these efforts, as identified in the County Water Plan, and report back in writing in 60 days.

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