



Special Committee on Ag and Tribal Partnerships

6/23/2026 Subcommittee Meeting

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Subject

Provide information on the evaluation of crop substitution with Metropolitan's Colorado River agricultural partners.

Executive Summary

The State of California has an urgent need to identify programs that conserve Colorado River supplies. On May 1, 2026, the Lower Basin states submitted a proposal to the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation that included 440,000 acre-feet (AF) of reductions to California in both 2027 and 2028. The Metropolitan Water District of Southern California (Metropolitan) is exploring potential programs that would help California reduce its use by 440,000 AF. One potential program is a Crop Substitution Pilot Program. This program would incentivize participants to utilize the farming of low-water-use crops. Metropolitan learned of a farming entity operating in Palo Verde Irrigation District's (PVID) and Imperial Irrigation District's (IID) service areas that is replacing alfalfa with a low water-use crop. With their consent, Metropolitan is evaluating their agricultural efforts and the impacts on water savings. Metropolitan and the farming entity recently entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to document the evaluation's purpose of assessing the feasibility of a Crop Substitution Pilot Program.

Details and Background

Background

The 2007 Interim Guidelines expire this year, and the seven basin states have not reached a consensus on post-2026 Colorado River operations. The Lower Basin states submitted a proposal on May 1, 2026, for operations through 2028 that includes California reductions. Under this proposal, California would reduce its Colorado River water use by 440,000 AF in both 2027 and 2028. Metropolitan is exploring potential water conservation programs to facilitate California's ability to make reductions of 440,000 AF per year.

As a part of that exploration, over the past few years, Metropolitan and PVID have discussed non-fallowing agricultural water conservation programs, including a potential crop switching program. Metropolitan learned of a farming entity replacing alfalfa with a low-water-use crop in PVID's and IID's service areas. The crop uses an estimated one AF per acre of irrigation water compared to the approximately 4.5 AF per acre used for alfalfa. This demonstrates that crop substitution has the potential to conserve significant amounts of water while also preserving existing agricultural economies and communities.

Crop Substitution Evaluation and Potential Crop Substitution Pilot Program

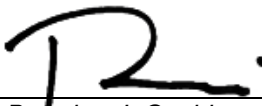
Metropolitan is pursuing an evaluation of the above-mentioned effort to farm a low water-use crop to better understand the water savings benefits and to assess the feasibility of crop substitution in PVID and IID. Metropolitan and the farming entity recently entered into an MOU to document both the evaluation and Metropolitan's intent to assess the feasibility of a Crop Substitution Pilot Program. Through the crop substitution evaluation, Metropolitan intends to gather data on the actual water conserved through crop substitution, the costs and economic viability of crop substitution, and irrigation district support. This data can guide the terms of a

potential Crop Substitution Pilot Program, including how incentives might be structured and how to verify actual water savings.

Metropolitan has not made any commitments to develop a Crop Substitution Pilot Program. If the evaluation determines that such a program would provide water savings benefits to Metropolitan, discussions with PVID and/or IID would be necessary to gain their support and potential participation.

Next Steps

Metropolitan will continue to pursue the crop substitution evaluation. In the near future, Metropolitan intends to set up a site visit with Metropolitan Directors on the Special Committee on Ag and Tribal Partnerships to view farms growing the low water-use crop. Additionally, if Metropolitan determines it may be beneficial and feasible to develop a Crop Substitution Pilot Program, Metropolitan will hold discussions with PVID and IID.



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