



THE METROPOLITAN WATER DISTRICT
OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

Board Report

Sustainability, Resilience, and Innovation

• Sustainability, Resilience, and Innovation Office Group Monthly Activities

Summary

Sustainability, Resilience, and Innovation Office April 2024 Monthly Activities

Purpose

To report on Sustainability, Resilience, and Innovation Office April 2024 Monthly Activities.

Detailed Report

SRI Core Activities

On April 9 and 24, 2024, the Climate Adaptation Master Plan for Water (CAMP4W) Team presented to the Finance and Asset Management (FAM) Committee and Subcommittee on Long-Term Regional Planning Processes and Business Modeling to report the draft Year One Progress Report. The report documents the progress since February 2023 and sets up the next steps for 2024. The discussions are focused on the next steps for 2024 laid out in Sections 4 through 6 of the Report. This is in preparation for a potential concurrence action at the May FAM and board meetings. The Chief SRI Officer also presented to Eastern Municipal Water District, Santa Monica City Council, a delegation from the United Arab Emirates, Los Angeles Cleantech Incubator, the Los Angeles County Water Plan Summit, and the Spheres Sustainability Summit on sustainability and climate adaptation efforts.

On Earth Day, SRI released Metropolitan's [2023 Climate Action Plan \(CAP\) Implementation Second Annual Progress Report](#). The report provides a detailed greenhouse gas inventory from 2022 and progress made on the implementation of greenhouse gas reduction measures during 2023. This is Metropolitan's second annual CAP Implementation Progress Report and details the district's significant progress in reducing greenhouse gas emissions as we strive for carbon neutrality by 2045.

Sustainability and Resilience

On April 18, 2024, SRI staff participated in a moderated panel discussion as part of the California Public Information Officials (CAPIO) and California State Information Officers Council (SiOC) webinar on the 2024 Edelman Trust Barometer. Edelman's global research measures the public's trust in government, business, media, and NGOs to deliver information and solve problems. This year's Edelman Trust Barometer focus was on innovation, and SRI staff discussed Metropolitan's innovative approaches to planning through its CAMP4W, Generative Artificial Intelligence Guidelines for Metropolitan employees, and innovative water treatment strategies being studied through Pure Water Southern California.

On April 18, 2024, SRI staff presented a report on *Water Affordability Panels and Recommended Actions* to Metropolitan's Equity, Inclusion, and Affordability (EIA) Board Committee and sought input from the EIA Committee on proposed near-term and mid-term actions. Four panels on affordability were conducted during EIA Board Committee meetings in 2023 and early 2024. These panel discussions brought together experts and stakeholders to provide insights and recommendations for specific policies and programs aimed at making water

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more affordable for communities and water agencies within Metropolitan's service area. Staff received feedback on four near-term (2024) and four mid-term (2025+) recommendations.

On April 25, 2024, SRI staff presented Metropolitan's 2023 Climate Action Plan (CAP) Implementation Second Annual Progress Report to the US Water Alliance's Peer Exchange: Net Zero Community of Practice. SRI staff updated the Peer Exchange on the progress in Metropolitan's greenhouse gas emissions reduction.

Centralized Grants Management Office

In April, Metropolitan hosted the first SoCal Water Utilities Grants Network (Grants Network) meeting. This hybrid meeting was attended by over 50 water professionals working on grants. The Grants Network is made up of over 70 staff from member agencies, sub-agencies, and consultants. Metropolitan will be hosting these meetings quarterly at various facilities.

The Grants Network provides a platform for water utilities to collaborate and share resources for funding opportunities. It aims to streamline the grant application process, making it more efficient and reducing the administrative burden for water utilities. By connecting water utilities and centralizing funding information, the Grants Network improves access to funding for water utility projects, ensuring that critical infrastructure improvements can be made while reducing rate pressure.

Innovation, Pilots, and Emerging Technologies

Pilot Partnerships

Metropolitan's SRI Innovation team, in partnership with WaterStart and Metropolitan's Bay Delta and Water Resources Management (WRM) Teams, has verified success in controlled pilots with Performance Resource Management (PRM), a company that is pioneering biological soil management in agriculture. Pilot data demonstrates increased crop per drop. When the only variable in split-field trials is PRM technology, yield increases of 20–30 percent are observed with the same amount of water used on each field. Crops tracked on pilots include alfalfa and tomatoes. Reduction in fertilizer has been observed near 35 percent in tomatoes. The carbon footprint of fields receiving PRM's technology is reduced as more crops are being produced with fewer inputs, while the life of alfalfa fields will be extended by 3–4 years, which reduces planting costs, soil prep (tilling), and germination water (inefficient, high evaporation) while extending plant genetics. PRM's technology aligns with Metropolitan's vision for responsible and efficient use of natural resources and agricultural water conservation. As a member of WaterStart, Metropolitan's member benefits include Peer to Peer Global facilitated discussions and presentations between members and sharing new technologies or discoveries that benefit all members and the water industry; co-funded pilots; H2O TECHCONNECT/Channels for Innovation joint community; global partnerships; and many more benefits. The next Global RFP for water technologies will be sent out in June.

Environmental Planning Section

Core Business: Environmental Planning and Regulatory Compliance Support

EPS staff continued to prepare California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) documents for capital projects, including supporting the April board action to certify the F.E Weymouth Water Treatment Plant and La Verne Site Improvements Program Final Environmental Impact Report (EIR). Staff also continued to prepare the draft Program EIR for Pure Water Southern California, including completing the Draft EIR screen check review of the Project Description, continuing preparation of the environmental impact analysis, circulating the revised drafts of the biological resources and hazardous materials technical reports for internal review, continuing cultural and biological resources field surveys and other technical studies, continuing tribal cultural resource consultation, and identifying mitigation for potential impacts. Preparation of the Initial Study and Mitigated Negative Declaration (IS/MND) for the Inland Feeder/San Bernardino Valley Municipal Water District Foothill Pump Station Intertie Project and the IS/MND for the West Valley Feeder No. 1 Stage 3 Improvements Project continued, as well as preparation of the Draft EIR for the Garvey Reservoir Rehabilitation Project. Staff conducted construction monitoring for capital projects, including PCCP Second Lower Feeder Reach 3B Rehabilitation, Perris Valley Pipeline, Allen McColloch Pipeline Urgent Relining, Lake Mathews Valve Storage Building, LaVerne Shops

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Upgrades, Weymouth Basins 5 to 8 Rehabilitation, and Weymouth Asphalt Rehabilitation projects, as well as the Colorado River Aqueduct (CRA) Structural Protection Program. EPS continued to support the Webb Tract Rice Conversion Project and the Webb Tract Wetland Restoration Project by continuing to prepare environmental documentation in compliance with CEQA.

EPS staff supported critical Water System Operations activities, including providing CEQA and regulatory clearances, pre-construction surveys, and construction monitoring support for operations and maintenance activities throughout the service area, including vegetation removal at Lake Skinner Dam in compliance with state Safety of Dams requirements. EPS staff continued to support the Allen McColloch Pipeline shutdown and urgent relining, providing environmental surveys and monitoring, and also supported shutdowns for the DVL/Eastside Pipeline Bypass Pipeline Tie-In and the Orange County Feeder. Finally, EPS staff started preparation of the first Annual Report for CRA borrow sites subject to Surface Mining and Reclamation Act (SMARA) compliance.



Before and after photos of vegetation removal activities at Lake Skinner Dam

EPS staff provided subject matter expert reviews of several legislative bills, including

- AB 2614 (Ramos): Water Policy: California tribal communities
- SB 1159 (Dodd): California Environmental Quality Act: roadside wildfire risk reduction
- AB 2330 (Holden): Endangered species: authorized take: routine fuel management
- HR 7408 (Westerman): American's Wildlife Conservation Act

EPS staff completed environmental clearances for one real estate agreement, and staff reviewed and analyzed CEQA notices for three external projects to determine the potential impacts on Metropolitan and protect Metropolitan's right-of-way and facilities; comments letters were prepared and submitted for those projects that had the potential to affect Metropolitan. Finally, EPS staff assisted with preparation and finalization of the Second Annual Climate Action Plan (CAP) Progress Report that was released to the public on April 22, 2024.

EPS also continued oversight of reserve management activities to protect valuable natural resources and meet Metropolitan's mitigation obligations. Comprehensive security patrols were conducted throughout both reserves to prevent trespassing, vandalism, poaching, and theft and to protect the reserves' natural and cultural resources, facilities, and equipment. Activities at the Lake Mathews Multiple Species Reserve included removal of non-native plants for habitat and fire management purposes. Activities at the Southwestern Riverside County Multi-Species Reserve included removal of non-native plants for habitat and fire management and coordinating with researchers conducting surveys for rare plants and threatened and endangered species (Quino checkerspot butterfly and coastal California gnatcatcher). In addition, the Alamos Schoolhouse interpretive center has been open on Saturdays, and the Reserve interpreter has been at the DVL Wildflower Trail on Saturday mornings to answer questions and share information about the reserve and the trail following its opening in late March. The wildflower bloom is smaller than in past years, but visitor numbers are still higher than those seen during other times of year. Fewer wildflowers may be attributed to an abundance of annual grasses resulting from early rains in fall 2023. These same annual grasses, however, have resulted in less invasive vegetation this spring.



California Poppies at the Lake Mathews Reserve

Land Management

Metropolitan obtained a two-year entry residential lease agreement from a private owner for the housing of a WSO employee who is tasked with emergency response duties. The occupancy of the single-family residence in Riverside will allow staff to respond to on-call duties at Lake Mathews and nearby facilities promptly.

New leases were executed with existing Palo Verde tenants, Noroian Farms, and Red River Farms. The leases were approved by Metropolitan's Board in September 2023 for a new term of up to 16 years with rent terms to enhance water conservation incentives that mirror the existing rent terms included in the current leases with the original, legacy Palo Verde tenants.

An entry permit has been issued to Southern California Gas Company (SCG) for access and construction staging purposes near San Diego Pipeline No. 3 in the unincorporated Rainbow community of San Diego County. The permit will help facilitate SCG's pipeline inspection and repair project.