



One Water and Adaptation Committee

A pilot program for early retirement of alfalfa in the Palo Verde Valley

Item 6d

January 12, 2026

Presented by: Lauren Steely

Item 6d Adopt Pilot Program for Early Retirement of alfalfa in the Palo Verde Valley

Subject

Adopt Pilot Program for Early Retirement of Alfalfa in the Palo Verde Valley

Purpose

Provide information on a concept for a potential new water conservation pilot project with farmers in the Palo Verde Valley

Service Area & CRA





1. Background

Metropolitan and PVID have been considering ideas for new conservation opportunities in the Palo Verde Valley.

Seasonal fallowing of summer forage crops has worked well in Bard Water District and with the Quechan Tribe. But the crops and economics are different in PVID.

Working with PVID, we have developed a concept for a pilot program that would encourage growers to retire their existing alfalfa crop earlier in the year compared to the normal practice.



2. Program Concept

There are currently ~35,000 acres of alfalfa in PVID.

Farmers in PVID typically grow alfalfa for up to 6 years, after which productivity declines. They retire the old stands in the fall or winter and let the field lay dormant until the next planting.

This program would incentivize growers to retire existing alfalfa stands earlier in the year (spring or early summer), saving water during the hottest months.

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Business as usual	Alfalfa										Idle	
Early Retirement	Alfalfa					Idle	←					

3. Proposed Terms

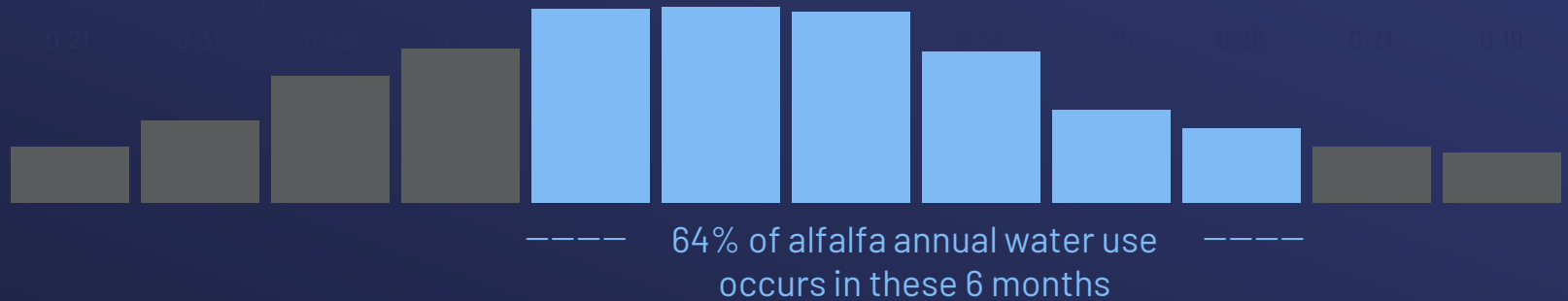
Size and term	One-year, up to 5000-acre pilot starting in spring 2026
Eligibility	<p>Any alfalfa field is eligible to be retired.</p> <p>Any landowner may participate, including those not enrolled in the Fallowing Program.</p>
Requirements	<p>Farmers must terminate the existing alfalfa stand and let the field lie idle.</p> <p>Fields must be idled for any 4 to 5 consecutive months during a May-Oct window.</p> <p>No water can be ordered during the idling period, but the ground may be worked.</p> <p>Any crop can be replanted after the idling period.</p>
Verification	<p>Fields would be verified as idle by PVID staff, using the same inspection process as the Fallowing Program.</p> <p>Actual water savings would be verified after-the-fact using OpenET data.</p>



4. Idling periods

Growers would choose from five possible idling periods during a May-Oct window

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Alfalfa				Idle						Business-as-usual retirement months for alfalfa	
Alfalfa				Idle							
Alfalfa					Idle						
Alfalfa					Idle						
Alfalfa						Idle					





5. Assumed water savings and proposed payments

Assuming full participation of 5,000 acres:

~11,000–16,000 AF of water savings

depending on the specific idling periods chosen by farmers.

Financial terms have yet to be established



6. Next steps

Negotiate price and terms with PVID

Board Info item (OneWater) February 2026

Board Action item (OneWater) March 2026

Potential pilot start May 2026

