



Helix
WATER DISTRICT

Setting Standards of
Excellence in Public Service

Administration Office
7811 University Avenue
La Mesa, California 91942-0427

619-466-0585
helix@helixwater.org
hwd.com

Contact

Michelle Curtis, Public Affairs
michelle.curtis@helixwater.org
619-667-6261

FOR RELEASE

Regional collaboration on water purification project expands local, drought-proof supply of drinking water

The Helix Water District Board of Directors authorized its General Manager to sign water purchase agreements for the East County Advanced Water Purification project at a special meeting on May 27, 2020.

The project is a collaborative, regional effort that will diversify the district's water portfolio, provide a drought-proof supply and further enhance reliability by purifying treated wastewater using the district's Lake Jennings and other facilities.

The \$681 million project, led by the ECAWP Joint Powers Authority, will recycle daily wastewater flows from Santee, El Cajon, Lakeside, Winter Gardens and Alpine. Treated water will undergo membrane filtration, reverse osmosis and advanced oxidation to produce water that is near-distilled in quality.

The purified water will be piped into Helix's Lake Jennings before undergoing additional processing at the district's R.M. Levy Water Treatment Plant and be distributed as safe, clean drinking water.

"I'm looking forward to the development of this project and I believe it's an investment that strengthens our district's water supply reliability and security. This is a great example of what can be accomplished by working with our neighboring agencies," said Helix Water District Board President Mark Gracyk.

ECAWP project water will reduce east San Diego County's dependence on imported water by almost 30 percent once full operations begin in 2026. The project will create a local supply for the East County at about the same cost as what the district pays now for imported water. Deliveries of imported water from the Colorado River and State Water Project can be significantly curtailed during times of drought, making them less reliable than local sources.

Board of Directors

Mark Gracyk, President
DeAna R. Verbeke, Vice President
Daniel H. McMillan, Division 1
Kathleen Coates Hedberg, Division 4
Joel A. Scalzitti, Division 5

“The project was conceived by JPA members as a way to reduce rising wastewater costs for their customers. For Helix to participate, the project had to make financial sense for our ratepayers as well,” said Helix Water District General Manager Carlos Lugo. “By expanding our local supply, the ECAWP project water will help ensure that we are better able to navigate future droughts.”

The 30-year purchase agreements establish the cost and quantity of water that Helix will purchase from the ECAWP JPA under the proposed project.

Helix and the JPA members – Padre Dam Municipal Water District, San Diego County Sanitation District and the City of El Cajon – have been working together to evaluate the ECAWP plan since 2014. Each JPA member has until 2021 to make a final decision on the feasibility of the project and participation.

Helix has invested \$850,000 and significant board and staff resources to study the feasibility of the project, including a tracer study with Scripps Institute of Oceanography to learn how water moves and mixes in Lake Jennings.

“We are committed to exploring sustainable projects that benefit our customers,” said Gracyk. “The ECAWP project will be a great complement to our other ongoing investments in regional water supply projects, such as the Carlsbad Desalination Plant, to ensure we have enough water to meet demand.”

About Helix Water District

Helix Water District provides water treatment for over 500,000 residents in San Diego’s east county suburbs, and water distribution for 277,000 people in the cities of La Mesa, Lemon Grove and El Cajon, the Spring Valley community and unincorporated areas of the county.

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