



San Diego County Water Authority

And Its 24 Member Agencies

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News Release

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Water Authority General Manager Sandra L. Kerl Retires

Dan Denham to serve as acting GM and maintain agency mission

June 29, 2023 – San Diego County Water Authority General Manager Sandra L. Kerl retires today after more than 40 years of public service, with Deputy General Manager Dan Denham taking over as acting GM until the Board of Directors permanently fills the position.

Kerl's tenure at the Water Authority included 10 years as deputy general manager and four years as the agency's top staff member during a period of unprecedented uncertainty regionally and nationally. Following her retirement announcement in April, Kerl was praised by state and local leaders for her steady hand and tireless efforts on behalf of San Diego County and the water industry.

"Sandy's vision and management skills have been crucial in successfully navigating the challenges of an extreme drought while ensuring stability through the COVID-19 pandemic," said Mel

Katz, chair of the Water Authority Board. "Her deep experience with water issues, collaborative management style, and can-do spirit guided the agency through an unprecedented period of change. Sandy's dedication and work ethic on behalf of San Diego region will be missed. We are grateful for her service and wish her nothing but the best in retirement."

"Sandy's vision and management skills have been crucial in successfully navigating the challenges of a three-year drought while at the same time ensuring stability through the COVID-19 pandemic."

-- Mel Katz, Chair, San Diego County Water Authority Board of Directors

During a June ceremony at the Water Authority's Kearny Mesa headquarters, California Senate President pro Tempore Toni G. Atkins presented Kerl with a framed resolution recognizing her contributions to the region on behalf of the entire San Diego County delegation in the state Legislature. San Diego County Congressmen Scott Peters and Darrell Issa also provided proclamations celebrating Kerl's service.

As general manager, Kerl launched an era of increased engagement with the Water Authority's 24 member agencies and the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California. She took a similar approach with staff, issuing the first agency-wide employee engagement survey and using the results to focus on areas of improvement. The Water Authority was named a Top Workplace in 2021 and 2022 by *The San Diego Union-Tribune* based on employee surveys by an independent organization.

Career highlights for Kerl also include playing pivotal role in securing financing for the nation's largest seawater desalination plant, which started commercial operations in Carlsbad in 2015 and produces approximately 50 million gallons of water a day for the San Diego region. Before joining the Water Authority, Kerl served as the city manager of La Mesa, Calif. Throughout Kerl's career, she has been active in the International County Management Association and has served as chair of the San Diego City/County Managers Association and San Diego Regional Training Center.

Kerl served as Chair of California Urban Water Agencies (CUWA) for the last year, an organization that has shaped the conversation about drought with state leaders during her tenure. She also served on the Executive Board of the Southern California Water Coalition, chairing the Colorado River Task Force and Southern California Leadership Council Executive Committee.

"It has been my privilege to work with so many talented and dedicated people during my 14 years at the Water Authority," said Kerl. "Enhancing our workplace culture, breaking down barriers to collaboration, and ensuring safe and reliable water supplies despite intense challenges would not have been possible without the dedication of staff, member agencies, and the Board of Directors. I have complete confidence that they will carry on our mission without skipping a beat."

The Water Authority Board formed a work group to lead the general manager selection process. During the interim, Denham will work closely with staff and the Board to ensure continued execution of Water Authority priorities. The transition team also includes Assistant General Manager Tish Berge, who will serve as acting deputy general manager, and Water Resources Director Kelley Gage, who was appointed acting assistant general manager.

Denham has served in several leadership capacities with the Water Authority over the past 17 years, including deputy general manager. In that role, he oversaw the MWD and Colorado River programs, along with the Engineering, Water Resources, and Operations & Maintenance departments. Denham also oversees the implementation of long-term agricultural-to-urban conserved water transfers that are among the largest in the United States. As a commissioner on the Quantification Settlement Agreement Joint Powers Authority, he leads the Water Authority's fulfillment of environmental mitigation obligations and legislative advocacy efforts at the Salton Sea.

Before joining the Water Authority in 2006, Denham served in various capacities at the City of San Diego's Metropolitan Wastewater Department, Financial Management Department and Mayor's Office. Denham holds undergraduate degrees in public administration and economics, and a graduate degree in public administration – all from San Diego State University.

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The San Diego County Water Authority sustains a \$268 billion regional economy and the quality of life for 3.3 million residents through a multi-decade water supply diversification plan, major infrastructure investments and forward-thinking policies that promote fiscal and environmental responsibility. A public agency created in 1944, the Water Authority delivers wholesale water supplies to 24 retail water providers, including cities, special districts and a military base.

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