



Orange County's 2022 Water Forecast

Happy New Year 2022! May the New Year be wetter and better!

While we can't accurately predict the weather, we can be very sure of one thing: Orange County has reliable access to high-quality drinking water.

Over the past year, we heard much about the drought and many subsequent actions from regional and statewide water agencies. A statewide drought emergency was declared, encouraging all Californians to voluntarily reduce their water use by 15% compared to 2020 usage; the United States Bureau of Reclamation (USBR) announced a first-ever Lake Mead Level 1 Shortage Condition; the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California (MET) issued a Water Supply Alert, encouraging residents and businesses to voluntarily reduce their water use and help preserve the region's storage reserves; and most recently, in December 2021, the California Department of Water Resources (DWR) announced a 0% initial allocation of State Water Project (water from northern California) for 2022, the lowest initial allocation that has been recorded in its history.

Among these announcements made throughout the year, one common theme was prevalent: prepare for a third consecutive dry year in 2022.

As mentioned above, stories about California water districts receiving 0% of requested water supplies made headlines recently, and I want to set the record straight that Orange County water agencies will have enough water for your everyday needs. Not only is Orange County equipped to meet these challenges, but for decades, local water agencies have prepared for what we recognize are recurring drought conditions. We know we live in a semi-arid region that receives only 13 inches of annual rainfall so we're not solely relying on Mother Nature to provide for the 3 million plus residents in the county. Instead, agencies like the Orange County Water District (OCWD; the District) and many retailers across the county are investing in locally-controlled, drought-proof water supplies given the scarcity of water sources that are located hundreds of miles away.

It's projects like the Groundwater Replenishment System (GWRS), which takes highly treated wastewater and purifies it into drinking water quality, that help sustain our region. This project produces 100 million gallons of pure drinking water every day that is then recharged into the Orange County Groundwater Basin (Basin), which serves as a reliable additional source of water supply for 2.5 million people in north and central Orange County. OCWD and its project partner OC Sanitation District (OC



San) are currently constructing its final expansion that will create an additional 30 million gallons of new water every day, bringing the total to 130 million gallons – enough water to serve 1 million people daily.

In addition to expanding water reuse, stormwater capture programs also ensure supply reliability for our region. For example, OCWD has implemented technology like Forecast Informed Reservoir Operations at Prado Dam which can selectively retain or release water from the dam based upon weather forecast. This project will fine tune the dam operations creating a new water supply that could serve approximately 60,000 people daily. Another example of how Orange County is creating local reliability is the Santa Ana River Conservation and Conjunctive Use Program, a first-of-its-kind regional groundwater banking program, which will provide a collaborative, watershed-scale approach toward groundwater basin management, replenishment, and water transfers and use up to 137,000 acre-feet of storage in six different groundwater basins spanning three counties.

Every dollar invested in water infrastructure projects like these has yielded tremendous benefits for our communities. To maintain our resiliency for the future, we must remain vigilant and continue investing in these types of projects, so we're always prepared and reliable. It's our responsibility to continue exploring all options that will help us increase water supply to not only mitigate the current drought, but also, future droughts that we will inevitably face.

In the meantime, you can help, too. The city of Fullerton has a variety of resources, rebates, and water-use efficiency tips to help residents and businesses use water efficiently. Please visit the city's website for specific information about water-saving programs available to you.

*** UPDATE:** December 2021 precipitation was most welcome, improving chances for a better than average rainfall total this year. This season began July 1 and through December totals about 5.5 inches—compared to our average 4.33 inches for the first six months!

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