



Celebrating Earth Day, Every Day

Every day, cities and water agencies work 24/7 to provide a sustainable water supply so our communities, our economy and our environment continue to thrive. The importance of our planet's precious resources, like water, is brought to light as we celebrate Earth Day on April 22.

In Orange County, we are blessed to have access to a safe, reliable, and clean drinking water supply. In the north and central portion of the county, water comes from a large groundwater basin – a hidden treasure beneath our feet – that provides 77% of the drinking water supply for 2.5 million residents.

Since 1933, the Orange County Water District (OCWD) has been entrusted to safeguard the region's groundwater basin. It replenishes the basin through the management and development of local supplies, enhances water reliability, ensures that the water is of the highest quality and meets all state and federal drinking water standards, prevents seawater intrusion, and protects Orange County's rights to Santa Ana River water.

To accomplish this, OCWD's operations take place on a vast amount of land throughout the county. We make sure to balance operations while also protecting the natural habitat in and around this land. OCWD has dedicated more than 1,100 acres of land for environmental preservation and invested millions of dollars for conservation. The District has also made more than 200 acres of its lands available for public trails and recreation, ensuring that the public will continue to be able to enjoy open space in Orange County for years to come.

OCWD also owns approximately 2,150 acres of land in the Prado Basin of Riverside County, which includes more than 400 acres of constructed wetlands. The Prado Wetlands, which are the largest constructed wetlands on the west coast of the United States, are designed to remove nitrogen and other chemicals from the Santa Ana River before the water flows downstream into Orange County where it is eventually recharged into the Orange County Groundwater Basin. There, it will be pumped out as drinking water and served to you.

The wetlands also provide an opportunity for native habitat to thrive and OCWD monitors more than 350 species at Prado. Our wildlife management program includes the removal of non-native invasive species like the water guzzling giant *Arundo donax*, and habitat restoration for species such as the threatened least Bell's vireo bird and Santa Ana sucker fish. The removal of *Arundo donax*, in particular, helps in providing a greater supply of water.



OCWD's [environmental stewardship](#) efforts benefit both nature and water supplies and we are committed to sharing our programs with our communities, specifically through our youth water education programs. This month, the Children's Water Education Festival will be held virtually April 22-29 as it celebrates its 25th anniversary. The Festival presents a unique opportunity to educate third, fourth and fifth grade students about the environment and is offered at no cost to Orange County schools. Through a series of interactive and immersive presentations taught by well-known experts and organizations, students learn about a variety of subjects – from water quality, watershed protection, environmental engineering, and more.

We've also developed a watershed education fieldtrip program for third grade students attending schools in Orange County to learn about the interconnectedness and importance of protecting a watershed by touring the Prado Wetlands. While these field trips are currently held virtually, we look forward to welcoming students soon for an in-person fieldtrip so they may participate in hands-on activities to see, touch, and explore the beauty of OCWD's Prado Wetlands, which is home to a wide variety of plant and wildlife species.

The City of Fullerton is also committed to the long-term health and viability of the community through environmental stewardship. The City strives to plan and implement a wide range of sustainability initiatives and create a more resilient and greener city in the long run.

I encourage you to visit the ["Fullerton Green Project" webpage](#) for a list of highlights that demonstrate the City's continued commitment to sustainability through innovation and environmentally friendly policies and programs. As important partners in these efforts, we hope you will learn more about how you can participate and make your home, business, and community greener.



In collaboration with Orange County Water District staff, this article was provided by Orange County Water District Director Bruce Whitaker, who represents Division 10, which covers the City of Fullerton. Contact Director Whitaker at BWWhitaker@live.com