



New Report Confirms Ability to Increase Stormwater Capture for Orange County

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Last month, the Orange County Water District (OCWD) and its partners were proud to announce the completion of a final viability assessment, a report which confirmed promising news for the region: increased Santa Ana River stormwater capture at Prado Dam in Riverside County.

How does Orange County benefit?

OCWD has worked with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) for decades to hold water behind the dam and release it at rates that can be captured and recharged, or put back in, the Orange County Groundwater Basin. Managed by OCWD, the groundwater basin serves as the primary drinking water supply for 2.5 million people in north and central Orange County, including those residing in the city of Fullerton.

What does the new report tell us?

The report highlights how improved forecasting tools, referred to as **Forecast Informed Reservoir Operations (FIRO)**, can allow dam operators to increase the volume of stormwater that is temporarily retained behind the dam, allowing for more opportunities to increase Orange County's water supply. These forecasts, which can better track storms and atmospheric rivers, are crucial in managing expected rainfall while identifying potential flood risks.

This report is the second completed FIRO assessment, and like the first, demonstrates the positive impacts of using atmospheric river forecasts to enhance operational flexibility at a major dam like Prado. As a result, we can increase water supply reliability for the region and decrease our dependence on imported water from far sources such as the Colorado River and northern California, which is increasingly more expensive and less reliable. This helps the region save millions of dollars in alternative water supply costs.

What's next?

As we embark on a new year, OCWD continues its commitment to ensuring the reliability of our local water supply. Testing FIRO at Prado Dam exemplifies our dedication to harnessing technological advancements for innovative and resilient water management practices. With the final viability assessment complete, the FIRO strategy is set to be implemented at Prado Dam over the next several years, with the goal of making it a permanent feature of dam operations by 2027.

The Prado Dam FIRO project is a great example of how multiple agencies can collaborate to collectively explore the potential of emerging technologies and improved forecasts and create an adaptive strategy with multiple benefits for the future of water management. We are proud of our leadership role and being the first agency to test FIRO in southern California.

If you would like to learn about FIRO, stormwater capture or the Orange County Groundwater Basin, please visit www.ocwd.com.

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