

Clean Break on Water

Los Angeles sees recycling as means to keep aquifers full while reducing dependence on importing.

By **CALVIN NAITO**

YOU need local clean water to live. Water is essential to your life. If a day passes without you drinking any, you will die. In south Los Angeles County, 40 percent comes from water stored under your feet.

It is called groundwater, and you should support efforts to protect and preserve it.

The next time you turn on your kitchen faucet and fill a glass with water, hold it up and look at it before you take a sip. A little less than half of the glass comes from water that is stored underground. The water beneath your feet is stored in underground reservoirs called aquifers.

However, in order to keep pulling this water out of the ground through wells (which are like straws), we must continuously put an equal amount into the underground lakes. If we don't, the underground basins will go dry. In other words, the basins need to be continuously replenished.

In the south county, the entity responsible for doing this is the Water Replenishment District of Southern California.

The district's job is to protect and preserve the area's groundwater for 43 south county cities, which collectively constitute 4 million people – roughly 40 percent of the county's population and 10 percent of California's population.

The totality of users – residences, businesses, industries – in the district service area collectively use 80 billion gallons of groundwater per year. The district assesses replenishment fees on water users to fund its projects and operations.

The replenishment water comes from three sources: stormwater capture, and recycled and imported water.

Much of this water is deposited in two large leaky ponds called "spreading grounds" located in the Pico Rivera area. The porous earth beneath the spreading grounds allows the water to percolate down into aquifers, thereby replenishing the two basins in the district service area.

The breakdown of the three streams today is 40 percent stormwater, 40 percent recycled water and 20 percent imported water.

The district seeks to eliminate the area's dependence on expensive imported water and become self-reliant.

How do we create a more reliable system? The general answer is: find a way to utilize more recycled water.

The district has a more specific answer on how to increase the amount of recycled water used. It has something called the Groundwater Reliability Improvement Program, or Grip, which is in the conceptual and planning stages. This includes evaluating various project alternatives. Grip is a main component of the district's Water Independence Now, or WIN, suite of projects.

At present, the district is proposing a Grip facility near Whittier that would include the construction of an advanced water treatment plant as one of the alternatives. The treat-

ment plant would take recycled water and purify it. The purified water leaving the plant would then be transported via pipelines to the spreading grounds near Pico Rivera.

The Grip project is in the midst of multiple environmental and other regulatory reviews, which include public comment. A firm estimate of the total cost of the multimillion-dollar infrastructure project is still being developed. There might be temporary impacts from the construction of the pipelines, which could be mitigated. Some people might be psychologically uncomfortable with the thought of drinking recycled water, even though the finished water would meet federal and state health standards.

With the Grip project, the breakdown of the three streams replenishing the district's underground basins would be 40 percent stormwater, 60 percent recycled water and zero percent imported water.

Using more local recycled water through the Grip project would be better than piping in water from Northern California and the Colorado River.

Getting Grip

The Grip project would save money, establish a more reliable system and protect the environment. The public would save money because imported water costs three times more than local groundwater.

Grip would establish a more reliable system because it would eliminate potential disruptions. Imported water is less secure since the flow could be interrupted or reduced due to droughts, earthquakes and other disasters such as levee failure.

By using more recycled water, the Grip project would put to good use water that would otherwise be lost to the ocean. By contributing to the replenishment of water in the underground lakes, water from the Grip project would add to the massive army of fresh water particles pushing back against ocean seawater pressure, thereby preventing the intrusion of seawater into the underground aquifers. With Grip, the public would benefit from an environmental sustainability project that would protect their local ecosystem for many years to come.

When you hold up your next glass of water, remember where almost half the glass comes from.

Projects like Grip and the larger work of the water district and other water agencies are protecting and preserving the essential natural resource underground – and thereby protecting the health of you and your loved ones.

We need to continue to approve of the allocation of public resources and investment in our liquid lifeline.

Support the local clean water beneath your feet.

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