



Prepared for the Rainy Season – Whether It Rains or Not

The days are shorter, the weather has noticeably cooled down and the holiday season is in full force – we’re officially approaching the end of 2021! While December marks the end of our calendar year, our “water year” just started a few months ago on October 1. In the first couple of months of a new water year, we’re especially hopeful to see some much-needed rain in our forecast. Even the slightest rainfall helps replenish water supplies for our region and the state.

In Orange County, we are in a semi-arid region that receives only an approximate 13 inches of annual rainfall, so relying on Mother Nature entirely for our water supply is not a realistic water management strategy. That is why agencies like the Orange County Water District (OCWD; the District) have made significant investments in a diversified portfolio approach that utilizes multiple sources of water.

For example, the groundwater basin (Basin) that is managed by the District holds water from a variety of sources including Santa Ana River base flows and stormwater flows, local surface water runoff, 100 million gallons of recycled water that is produced daily at the Groundwater Replenishment System (GWRS), and imported water from northern California and the Colorado River. With an expansion of GWRS now in progress, we expect an increase to 130 million gallons per day of recycled water!

All these efforts help replenish the Basin, which provides 77% of the drinking water supply to 2.5 million people in north and central Orange County. On the chance that a large rain event does occur, OCWD has found a way to capture even more stormwater thanks to a decades-long partnership with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE; the Corps).

The District has collaborated with the USACE since the construction of Prado Dam in 1941 to capture water behind the dam that would otherwise flow out to the Pacific Ocean. Instead, we’re able to recharge that stormwater at OCWD’s facilities in nearby Anaheim and Orange where it eventually becomes a part of our drinking water supply.



In recent years, the District expanded the opportunity with the Corps to capture and store even more water behind Prado Dam, which has proven to be an economical and effective solution to the region’s water challenges without compromising the safety of the dam. Should we have multiple storms in a given year, this will help OCWD bank a significant amount of water to help us get through future droughts and ensure we have enough in the long-term.

We are also committed to evaluating new technology such as Forecast-Informed Reservoir Operations (FIRO) at Prado Dam which includes more precise weather forecasting, runoff modeling and watershed monitoring to help selectively retain or release water from the dam, all while improving water management for the region. This project will increase long-term water supply reliability by adding an additional 7,000 acre-feet of water annually into the groundwater basin, creating a new supply for approximately 60,000 people per year.

Orange County water agencies have all done a great job in ensuring the region is prepared in both wet and dry years. As we close out the year and look ahead into 2022, OCWD will continue to invest in an “all-of-the-above” strategy including maximizing water recycling, increasing stormwater capture, improving reliability with new science and technologies, and implementing water quality projects that protect and increase our precious resource.

Visit www.ocwd.com or contact the [City of Fullerton’s Water Service Department](#) for more information. We appreciate the opportunity to connect with you and look forward to serving you this coming year and for generations to come.

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.