

Environmental Stewardship Benefits Both Nature and Water Supply



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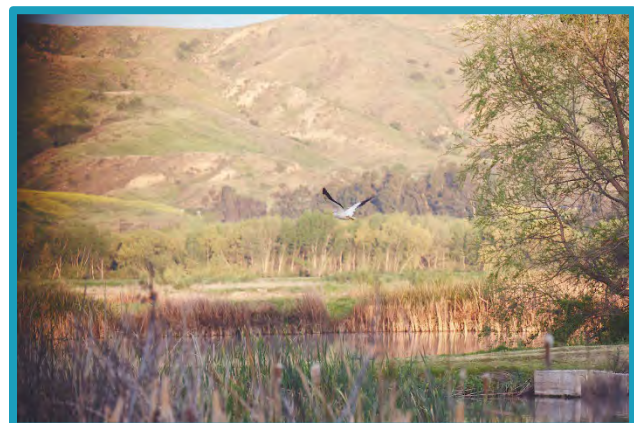
As Earth Day approaches each year, communities worldwide are urged to take steps toward a more sustainable future. Water, a critical resource for our environment, remains at the forefront of this mission, driving our continuous efforts day in and day out.

Within the Orange County Water District (OCWD), our focus lies in the careful management and safeguarding of our local groundwater basin. Stretching more than 300 square miles, this basin provides 85% of the drinking water supply for 19 local cities and retail water districts, who serve a collective 2.5 million people in north and central Orange County, including the city of Fullerton. Key to maintaining a healthy groundwater basin is managing pumping and storage levels, protecting water quality, and investing in water infrastructure.

From the world's largest water recycling facility, state-of-the-art laboratory, and an advanced recharge system over 1,000 acres of land to constructed wetlands, rubber dams and pump stations, the District operates nearly \$1.5 billion of assets that are critical to maintaining a safe, reliable water supply.

Balancing extensive water operations while preserving natural habitats surrounding our facilities remains paramount. Moreover, the District has made more than 200 acres of its lands available for public trails and recreation, ensuring that the public will continue to enjoy open space in Orange County for years to come.

OCWD manages thousands of acres of riparian habitat along the Santa Ana River, Santiago Creek and behind Prado Dam, including the District's 400 acres of constructed wetlands. Located in Riverside County, the Prado wetlands play a pivotal role in protecting and increasing Orange County's water supply.



The wetlands enhance water quality by removing nitrate and other pollutants in the Santa Ana River water that flows to Orange County. Being near the Prado Dam allows us to work in partnership with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to capture stormwater at the dam for recharge into the

Orange County Groundwater Basin – providing a local water supply and saving millions of dollars in alternative water supply costs each year.

The District's habitat restoration and wildlife management programs have successfully increased the endangered least Bell's Vireo in Prado from 19 territories in 1986 to 714 in 2023 and removed hundreds of acres of invasive Arundo Donax, which is a heavy water user and highly flammable. Its popular nesting bird box program along Santa Ana River reduces flying insect populations near important recharge activities and residential homes in Anaheim.

OCWD's environmental stewardship benefits both nature and water supply. To learn more about our programs and projects, please visit www.ocwd.com.

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.