

How agencies are cooperating on water quality, supply for the valley

Arden Wallum and Beverli Marshall

Your Turn

Guests columnist

Every day, nearly 400,000 people across the Coachella Valley depend on clean, safe water for drinking, cooking, and cleaning. Regardless of the city you call home, we all rely on the same groundwater for that vital supply. Since the Coachella Valley Groundwater Basin serves as a shared resource, we must act now to protect it for current and future generations.

All of us must unite to meet this lofty but achievable goal. Two projects on opposite sides of the Coachella Valley offer solutions to enhance supplies and improve the overall quality of every glass of water we drink.

To the west, Mission Springs Water District turned a decades-long dream into a reality as it broke ground recently on its Regional Water Reclamation Facility. The new plant will expand treatment capacity and allow the district to transfer an additional 700 homes and businesses from septic tanks to the centralized sewer system. Property owners will no longer need to worry about maintaining their personal systems, and the entire community will benefit from improved wastewater treatment. Once complete in fall 2023, the facility will process up to 1.5 million gallons of wastewater each day — a 75% increase in system capacity when coupled with the district's existing Desert Crest and Alan L. Horton Wastewater Treatment Facilities.

Construction of the new \$68 million Regional Water Reclamation Facility and related projects mark the beginning of a better future for water in the Coachella Valley. Other upgrades include more than 17,000 feet of pipes connecting additional customers to the system, ensuring untreated wastewater from septic tanks doesn't seep into and contaminate groundwater.

Our basin relies on runoff from nearby mountains and water imported from the Colorado River to maintain water levels, but those sources become limited during droughts. Additional local water sources will help stabilize our groundwater supply.

Water sustainability requires a team effort. To the east, in Indio, the Valley Sanitary District plans significant investments to improve wastewater treatment.

Since the district began operating in the 1920s, it has gone through several expansions and upgrades to fully utilize new technology and stay ahead of de-



Elected officials and other representatives break ground on the Regional Water Reclamation Facility in Desert Hot Springs June 10.

JAY CALDERON/THE DESERT SUN

mand in the booming city. The latest improvement effort kicked off in 2019 with the initiation of the Recycled Water Project at the existing Water Reclamation Facility. Once the first phases of the project are complete, the plant will be able to process greater amounts of wastewater and further enhance water purity.

The most significant rewards will follow the project's final phase when tertiary water treatment becomes possible. We then gain a supply of highly treated water clean enough to be directly injected into the groundwater basin and pumped out later for use. Tertiary treatment keeps pollutants out of the groundwater while tapping into additional supplies.

In dry times like these, we can no longer think in terms of "waste" water. We must find ways to maximize the potential of all available water.

These projects serve as two examples of how agencies across the Coachella Valley are working together to protect the shared water supply. Regional collaboration isn't a choice, it is a necessity to ensure long-term sustainability. Mission Springs Water District and Valley Sanitary District recognize our new reality by improving water quality for current customers as well as future Coachella Valley residents.

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