

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

August 24, 2026



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Santa Ana River Enhanced Recharge Project Recognized for Innovative, Team-Based Approach to Water Supply Reliability

(SAN BERNARDINO, CA, August 24, 2026)- A collaborative, solutions-based approach to water infrastructure has earned the Santa Ana River Enhanced Recharge Phase 1-B Project statewide recognition for innovation while significantly expanding the region's ability to capture and store local stormwater. Delivered through collaboration among San Bernardino Valley Municipal Water District (San Bernardino Valley), Western Water, Riverside Public Utilities, and the San Bernardino Valley Water Conservation District, Enhanced Recharge increases the capacity to capture and store up to 88,000 acre-feet, or 28.7 billion gallons, per year of local stormwater from the Santa Ana River for use during dry years.

The California Municipal Utilities Association (CMUA) recently awarded the Enhanced Recharge Project first place in the medium-size utility category for Innovative Projects and Programs as part of its 2026 CMUA Impact Awards. The awards recognize innovative ideas and best practices in California's water and energy industries.

"We are honored to be recognized by CMUA for the Enhanced Recharge Project," said San Bernardino Valley President T. Milford Harrison. "By bringing engineers, biologists, and project partners together as one team, we delivered an innovative project that strengthens our region's water supply and protects the environment for future generations."

More than 30 years in the making, Enhanced Recharge transformed approximately 600 acres along the Santa Ana River into an integrated water supply and environmental resource. The project added 20 recharge basins, more than doubled stormwater diversion capacity and restored more than 200 acres of habitat for protected species. But one of the project's greatest innovations was how the work was accomplished.

Rather than approaching engineering, construction and environmental requirements as separate challenges, San Bernardino Valley worked with regional water agencies, biologists, contractors, regulatory agencies and other project partners as one integrated team. Engineers and construction professionals worked side-by-side with biological

experts to solve problems in real time, allowing the team to protect sensitive habitat while maintaining progress on one of the region's most important water supply projects.

“Enhanced Recharge shows what is possible when everyone comes to the table focused on solving problems together,” said Heather Dyer, CEO/General Manager of San Bernardino Valley Municipal Water District. “With project partners, Agency staff, our engineers, Bogh Engineering, and biologists together understood that protecting the environment and building critical water infrastructure were not competing goals.”

The collaborative approach was particularly important because the project was constructed within habitat suitable for five protected species. More than 70 active bird nests were documented during construction, yet the project experienced only one temporary work disruption. Continuous, real-time coordination between construction teams and biological experts allowed work to be strategically sequenced around sensitive areas while maintaining regulatory compliance.

The team also challenged traditional approaches to environmental mitigation. Instead of treating habitat restoration as a separate project, habitat was integrated directly into the recharge facility, including areas located between the new basins. Materials excavated during construction were processed and reused on-site to create specialized soil blends designed to support habitat restoration, reducing truck trips, costs and environmental impacts.

Innovation extended into construction itself. The team adapted techniques from the building industry to prefabricate concrete structures on-site using a process similar to tilt-up construction. The approach accelerated construction and reduced exposure to volatile material pricing. Strategic construction sequencing also allowed portions of the facility to begin capturing stormwater and recharging groundwater while work continued elsewhere on the site.

The combined result was a project completed 18 months ahead of schedule and on budget.

For project partners, this effort represents a model for how the next generation of water infrastructure can be delivered: by bringing the right people together early, encouraging experts from different disciplines to solve problems collaboratively, and viewing environmental stewardship and water supply reliability as complementary objectives.

The result is more than an award-winning infrastructure project. It is a long-term investment in a more resilient watershed—one that captures water when it is available, stores it underground for future dry years and creates habitat that supports the Santa Ana River ecosystem.

About San Bernardino Valley

San Bernardino Valley is a regional water agency with a service area that covers around 353 square miles in southwestern San Bernardino County and a small portion of Riverside County with a population of approximately 714,000. With a dedicated team of experts and partnerships across the region, San Bernardino Valley is committed to building a resilient and sustainable water future for the community. Learn more at www.sbvmwd.com.