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Four Water Agencies Partner to Preserve Hydropower

SAN BERNARDINO, Calif. (October 26, 2026) – San Bernardino Valley Municipal Water District (San Bernardino Valley), Bear Valley Mutual Water Company (Bear Valley), Big Bear Municipal Water District (BBMWD) and Crafton Water Company have joined forces to secure seven historic hydroelectric facilities that ensure reliable water deliveries, preserve endangered species' habitat, and offset costs for regional water partners.

Led by San Bernardino Valley, the acquisition from Southern California Edison (SCE) establishes a new chapter for facilities along the Santa Ana River, Mill Creek and San Antonio Creek. The agencies formed the Santa Ana Watershed Hydro Authority (SAWHA), a Joint Powers Authority (JPA), to oversee their operation and maintenance.

“These facilities represent years of regional collaboration to preserve critical infrastructure that benefits water agencies, communities and the environment,” said T. Milford Harrison, San Bernardino Valley's Board President. “We recognized an opportunity to protect local resources and built a partnership to make it happen. Now, the agencies that depend on this infrastructure have a direct role in its future.”

Under the agreement, SCE provided \$34.2 million to fund necessary repairs to return the facilities to operational status. The arrangement lets SCE avoid higher projected cost of decommissioning the facilities while allowing local agencies to preserve infrastructure critical to regional water deliveries.

The effort began in 2020, when San Bernardino Valley learned of SCE's plans to divest the facilities and brought regional water agencies together. Years of technical evaluations, inspections and negotiations followed, culminating in the formation of SAWHA. San Bernardino Valley and SCE recently obtained regulatory approvals from the California Public Utilities Commission and the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission.

The facilities generate electricity as water passes through them before continuing downstream to local users, with a combined potential generation capacity of 11.5 megawatts.

“For Bear Valley, protecting these facilities means protecting the water supplies local farmers depend on,” said Larry Jacinto, Board President of Bear Valley. “This partnership gives us a voice in maintaining the infrastructure that serves our shareholders.”

The four agencies commemorated the partnership with a dedication ceremony on October 22 at one of the facilities, the historic Mill Creek No. 1 Powerhouse in Mentone. Congressman Jay Obernolte delivered remarks and presented a congressional proclamation recognizing the project and its regional significance. Additionally, the office of Congressman Pete Aguilar provided a certificate commending the agencies for their commitment to regional infrastructure and water supply reliability. The event also included a tour of the powerhouse that came online in 1893, the first commercial facility in the United States to successfully generate three-phase alternating current (AC), highlighting the region's rich hydropower history and SAWHA's commitment to its future.

“What happens in our mountains affects communities downstream,” said Tom Bradford, President of BBMWD. “SAWHA strengthens our ability to protect water quality and manage these resources with the entire watershed in mind.”

“Our shareholders depend on reliable water deliveries,” said Steve Wellington, Board President of Crafton Water Company. “SAWHA allows us to help maintain the facilities that make those reliable deliveries possible.”

About the Santa Ana Watershed Hydro Authority

The Santa Ana Watershed Hydro Authority (SAWHA) is a Joint Powers Authority comprising San Bernardino Valley Municipal Water District, Bear Valley Mutual Water Company, Big Bear Municipal Water District and Crafton Water Company. SAWHA oversees seven historic hydroelectric facilities along the Santa Ana River, Mill Creek and San Antonio Creek to support reliable water deliveries, renewable energy generation and regional resource stewardship.

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.sbvwmwd.com.

About Bear Valley Mutual Water Company and Crafton Water Company

Bear Valley and Crafton Water Company are not-for-profit mutual water companies first established in the late 1800's, providing non-potable water for irrigation purposes to the farming community of Redlands and surrounding areas. They primarily rely on water from the Santa Ana River, Mill Creek, local groundwater, and the State Water Project. Learn more at www.bearvalleymutual.com.

About Big Bear Municipal Water District

BBMWD is a special district responsible for the operations and maintenance of Big Bear Lake for recreation and wildlife as well as the Big Bear Dam. They oversee a variety of programs including lake recreation, habitat creation and maintenance, monitoring water quality, managing lake levels, and controlling the downstream outflow of the dam.