

WESTLANDS Celebrates Progress on Groundwater Sustainability

DISTRICT FACTS

Location

Fresno

About

Westlands is the largest agricultural water district in the United States, made up of more than 1,000 square miles of prime farmland in western Fresno and Kings counties. Westlands has federal contracts to provide water to the district's family-owned farms.

Groundwater

Westlands was able to recharge almost 400,000 acre-feet during 2023 and plans to double that to 800,000 acre-feet through partnerships and initiatives such as its Pasajero Groundwater Recharge Project.

Water System

Westlands' water distribution system is comprised entirely of buried pipeline (approximately 1,100 miles of pipe) and is outfitted with over 3,000 water meters. It is among the few, if not the only, agricultural water agencies in the United States that distributes water through an entirely enclosed system.

Economic Impact

Farmers in Westlands produce approximately 60 different high-quality crops for the fresh, dry, canned and frozen food markets, domestically and abroad – worth nearly \$2 billion and generating more than \$4.7 billion in farm-related economic activity each year, supporting over 35,000 jobs.

Website

www.wwd.ca.gov



Westlands Water District recently marked the latest in a string of milestone accomplishments toward maximizing its groundwater recharge and storage capabilities.

On Aug. 22, Westlands celebrated the completion of Phase One of its Pasajero Groundwater Recharge Project. Attended by federal, state and local leaders, Westlands' ribbon cutting ceremony recognized not only the completion of phase one of the project but also partnerships contributing to its success and others like it in the future.

Phase one of the project features a new 30 cubic-feet-per-second conveyance turnout from the Coalinga Canal and six basins, and results in up to 21,000 acre-feet per year of recharge capacity. The second phase will include the addition of up to 10 dry wells with a recharge capacity of up to 5,000 acre-feet to convey surface water directly into the aquifer.

Last year Westlands was able to recharge nearly 400,000 acre-feet of water, and with projects like this and through partnerships,

Westlands plans to nearly double that capacity up to 800,000 acre-feet.

"The Arroyo Pasajero Groundwater Recharge Project and other similar projects hit a sweet spot in California water," stated John Watts, Senior Counselor to U.S. Bureau of Reclamation Commissioner Maria Camille Calimlim Touton, in a news release. "Groundwater recharge provides a mechanism to capture the flood flows from atmospheric rivers and other increasingly concentrated winter storms — and then store that much-needed water for use in droughts to allow the San Joaquin Valley to keep supplying food for the nation."

Regional Collaboration

This landmark project will revolutionize water management for Westlands but also demonstrates the effectiveness of collaborative partnerships between the Bureau, California Department of Water Resources, and regional water agencies who have worked together toward a reliable and resilient water future for the San Joaquin Valley.



Opposite page: Federal, state and local leaders gather for a ribbon cutting ceremony that recognized the completion of phase one of Westlands' latest groundwater sustainability project.

Left: Phase One of Westlands' Project features a new 30 cubic-feet-per-second conveyance turnout from the Coalinga Canal and six basins, and results in up to 21,000 acre-feet per year of recharge capacity. *Photos courtesy of Westlands Water District.*

Westlands signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Metropolitan Water District of Southern California and Friant Water Authority during the ACWA 2024 Spring Conference & Expo in Sacramento, with the parties agreeing to work toward solutions with shared interests such as water storage and banking.

Westlands is a member of the San Joaquin Blueprint which also entered into an MOU with Metropolitan. In addition to the agreements among water districts, Westlands has been actively involved in the creation of the framework for a South-of-Delta Long-Term Drought Plan which culminated in an MOU with the Bureau and South-of-Delta Central Valley Project contractors. The plan includes the creation of a "drought pool" where South-of-Delta water users contribute water to be stored for future use in dry years. These MOUs advance collaboration on goals, including water banking and conveyance, and have laid the foundation for the development of pilot programs with both Valley Water and Metropolitan.

A Role for Flood Control

Also this year, the state Department of Water Resources (DWR) awarded Westlands a \$1 million grant as part of its Flood Diversion Recharge Initiative. This grant will assist the state's efforts to reduce flooding by increasing flood flow diversion volumes to recharge areas and expand local capacity to divert future

flood waters. These efforts in turn reduce downstream flood impacts and facilitate groundwater recharge.

The grant will support the removal of 450 acres of orchards from land recently acquired by Westlands. Located in an area of Westlands identified as subsidence-prone, adjacent to the San Luis Canal, the cleared land will reduce demand for groundwater near critical infrastructure, improve the availability of surface water and sustainable groundwater allocation(s), provide the Westlands with increased recharge capabilities, and provide a site to temporarily retain diverted floodwater when needed. The subject land is part of 4,245 acres acquired since 2022, including the removal of 2,144,930 acres of orchards and vines, at a total investment of over \$58 million.

Stability Through Flexibility

Meanwhile, the Pasajero Groundwater Recharge Project increases the flexibility for storing water outside of the San Luis Reservoir and will provide groundwater banking and exchange opportunities for Westlands and partners.

"The Pasajero Groundwater Recharge Project is a great example of what can occur when the state and agricultural communities come together and work towards a common goal," stated DWR Director Karla Nemeth in a news release. "Increasing groundwater storage is crucial in strengthening our state's water stability

and meeting our water needs. This project will be an effective way to improve groundwater quality in the San Joaquin Valley."

The project received nearly \$4 million in funding assistance from DWR's Sustainable Groundwater Management Proposition 68 Implementation Grant Program and more than \$2.6 million from Westlands. Additionally, Westlands was awarded \$25 million from the federal Inflation Reduction Act to fund similar recharge projects that would help advance the implementation of additional collaborative drought resiliency efforts.

"Our changing climate and unpredictable water supply requires Westlands to remain innovative in how we secure and store water, the technologies we offer our landowners, and the partnerships we build," stated Westlands General Manager Allison Febbo stated in a news release. "Strengthening water security in California isn't something that can be done by just one water district, one water agency, or one region. The Pasajero Groundwater Recharge Project demonstrates the importance of prioritizing collaboration to develop comprehensive solutions to advance California's water goals."

Phase Two of the Pasajero Groundwater Recharge Project will begin with the construction of dry wells in the first half of 2027. ♦