
PVOU Intermediate Zone Remedy

Restoring a Valuable Regional Asset

San Gabriel Basin WQA Continues to Seek Funds for Groundwater Cleanup

By Elizabeth Smilor
Special Sections Writer

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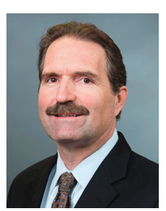
Randy Schoellerman, P.E.
Executive Director
San Gabriel Basin
Water Quality Authority

About several hundred feet below much of the San Gabriel Valley is a massive groundwater basin with the capacity to store 2.8 trillion gallons of water. The Main San Gabriel Basin accounts for 80 percent of the drinking water for more than 1.4 million people.


Randy Schoellerman

"We see the Basin as an extremely valuable asset. Our communities have a great local source for clean drinking water and part of our mission is to help protect it," said San Gabriel Basin Water Quality Authority (WQA) Executive Director Randy Schoellerman.

The WQA was established by the State Legislature in 1993 to develop, finance, and implement groundwater treatment programs in the San Gabriel Basin after contaminants were identified in the late 1970s. The contamination is believed to be the result of decades of improper chemical handling and disposal practices by various industries. As a result, water suppliers had to shut down wells and large portions of the basin were placed on the federal Superfund cleanup list in 1984.

"Our role is coordinating the cleanup of the Basin to ensure the sustainability of that groundwater supply for today and for future generations," said Schoellerman. "As prolonged drought impacts affect the big water picture, a clean Basin becomes even more important. The region needs to store local recharge and imported water in wet years in order to be sustainable in dry years. Restoring the Basin will create a reliable source of drinking water for generations to come."


South Pasadena Wilson Treatment Facility


SEMOU Site Investigation

The San Gabriel Basin Quality Authority coordinates the cleanup of contaminants from the Basin. There are 33 active groundwater treatment plants, two of which are shown at left and above. Site investigations, as shown at right, continue to find new areas of contamination.

There are 33 active groundwater treatment plants in the San Gabriel Basin. The WQA has coordinated cleanup efforts that have resulted in the treatment of more than 1.9 million acre-feet of water. An acre-foot is equal to approximately 326,000 gallons. Though variable, about 200,000 acre-feet of water is pumped from the Basin annually and distributed. The San Gabriel Basin is the primary source of drinking water for residents in Alhambra, Irwindale, La Puente, Rosemead, Azusa, Baldwin Park, City of Industry, El Monte, South El Monte, West Covina, Glendora, Monrovia, Arcadia and other areas of the San Gabriel Valley.

The cleanup is partially funded with state and federal monies as well as significant contributions from the responsible parties. This funding helps to lessen the burden on local ratepayers.

In the past two fiscal years, the WQA has received two $10 million federal Restoration Fund allocations following a decade without any. The funds help to pay for new and existing treatment facilities and contaminant investigations, but fall far short of the almost $200 million in project requests received by the WQA this past year.

"We are at the forefront in supporting the remediation of Per- and Polyfluorinated Substances (PFAS), an emerging contaminant of great concern in many areas," said Schoellerman. "It's important that we continue to receive sufficient funds to not only keep the treatments plants operating, but to address these new contaminants."

The California Legislature has extended the life of the WQA to July 1, 2050. Both the changing climate and the emergence of new groundwater contaminants illustrate the continued need for the WQA for a resilient and sustainable future. ■

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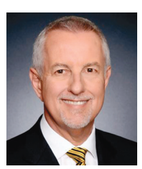
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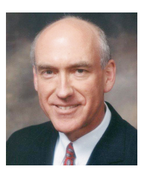
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