



View of San Gabriel Mountains on March 1, 2023
Photo courtesy of Renee Barbee

Water Quality Authority Proud to Protect Main San Gabriel Basin



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Randy Schoellerman
WQA Executive Director

As the snow on the San Gabriel Mountains melts in spring, water flows downhill through waterways where it is diverted into spreading grounds to percolate into a massive groundwater bank far below the communities of the San Gabriel Valley. The Main San Gabriel Basin surface area spans 167 square miles and it lies about 100 yards beneath homes, businesses and streets.

This groundwater basin, which can store 8.6 million acre-feet of fresh water, supplies about 80 percent of the water that 1.4 million residents depend upon every day. The Main San Gabriel Basin is the primary source of drinking water for 25 cities and unincorporated areas of the San Gabriel Valley. Rainfall, snowmelt, conserved water as well as imported water fill the basin, which is managed by the Main San Gabriel Basin Watermaster (Watermaster).

“San Gabriel Valley communities are extraordinarily fortunate to have such a massive source of drinking water right beneath their feet,” said San Gabriel Basin Water Quality Authority (WQA) Executive Director Randy Schoellerman.

Since 1973, Watermaster has managed the replenishment and withdrawal of water from the Basin. In 1984, the EPA placed a large portion of the Basin on the federal Superfund cleanup list, due to industrial contamination. The State legislature established the WQA in 1993 to “to coordinate, plan, and implement groundwater quality management programs to efficiently remediate groundwater contamination and assist in preventing future contamination.”

“The improper disposal and handling of chemicals for decades forced the shutdown of wells and threatened to render this huge drinking water source unsafe,” said Schoellerman. “From the beginning, WQA’s role has been to coordinate the cleanup of the Basin to ensure the sustainability of the groundwater supply for today and for future generations.”



Above, water percolates into the Main San Gabriel Basin from the Santa Fe Spreading Grounds near the 210-605 freeway interchange. At right, the South Pasadena Wilson Treatment Facility is one of 32 active groundwater treatment plants that are integral to the cleanup coordinated by the San Gabriel Basin Water Quality Authority.

There are 32 active groundwater treatment plants in the San Gabriel Basin. The WQA has coordinated cleanup efforts that have resulted in the treatment of more than 2 million acre-feet of water. An acre-foot is equal to 326,000 gallons.

The cleanup coordinated by the WQA includes funding from state and federal sources as well as contributions from the responsible parties. This funding helps to lessen the burden on local ratepayers.

Watermaster manages water levels in the basin by regulating how much water can be pumped out each year, which is balanced by inflows from rainfall or imported water. The Basin is currently just below midpoint between its historic high and low points. Though variable, about 200,000 acre-feet of water is pumped from the Basin annually for use by residents as drinking water.

Meanwhile, the WQA coordinates the cleanup of the Basin to ensure safe drinking water whether the area is in a state of drought or abundance.

“As recent statewide drought conditions and variability in rainfall affect the big water picture, a **clean** sustainable Basin becomes even more important,” said Schoellerman.

Through the years, new contaminants and drinking water regulations have emerged, making WQA’s job as vital



today as it was at the start. PFAS (Per-and Polyfluorinated Substances), known as “forever chemicals” because they remain in the environment, are of particular concern for the WQA and throughout the nation. The California Legislature has extended the life of the WQA to July 1, 2050. The WQA will continue to safeguard one of the San Gabriel Valley’s most valuable assets: The Main San Gabriel Basin aquifer. ○

Learn how the WQA is keeping your water safe and clean at www.wqa.com.



Water Quality Authority

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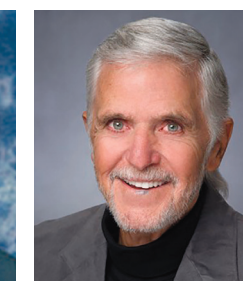
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