



San Diego County Water Authority

Water Transfer Partnerships FAQ

April 2026

- **Question:** How can SDCWA transfer water when there is a drought?
Answer: The San Diego region is essentially drought proof thanks to decades of strategic investments and new local water supplies coming online. While other parts of California and the Southwest face reductions, our diversified water portfolio ensures we have a reliable supply even in dry years.
- **Question:** Why does the Water Authority have water supplies to transfer?
Answer: The Water Authority planned ahead. In the early 1990s, the Water Authority started investing in long-term water-use efficiency programs locally and in the Imperial Valley, along with local infrastructure, as demands in San Diego County were growing and reliability was a major concern. These investments now provide highly reliable water supplies for decades to come. Over the past 35 years, the Water Authority has seen per capita demand drop by 50% as efficiency has increased and population growth has stalled. Lower demands, increasing local supplies, and long-term water contracts give the Water Authority sustainable water supplies at least through 2050 – and the opportunity to share or transfer some of those supplies and help to address water challenges across the Southwest.
- **Question:** How much money will water transfers save San Diego County ratepayers?
Answer: The water transfer agreement with Western Municipal Water District in Riverside County will generate \$100 million in new revenues for San Diego County over the first five years. Additionally, the agreement with Eastern Municipal Water District will generate an estimated \$74 million over the first five years. Combined, the agreements will generate revenues totaling \$660 million over 21 years.
- **Question:** How much water is San Diego County transferring?
Answer: The contract signed with Western Water on March 19, 2026, commits the Water Authority to transferring 10,000 acre-feet per year for 21 years. The contract with Eastern MWD was signed on April 9, 2026, and Eastern will ramp up to receiving 10,000 acre-feet of water each year for the next 21 years. Both agencies are also securing an advance of roughly 30,000 acre-feet for later delivery – a strategic tool that gives the districts greater flexibility during dry periods and reduces long-term supply risks. Both

agreements allow the Water Authority to transfer additional supplies if it is beneficial for both parties.

- **Question:** What is the benefit for agencies that receive transferred water?

Answer: Agencies receiving this water gain access to a highly reliable supply that can help diversify their water portfolios and improve drought resilience. Because these supplies are not subject to the same cutbacks as some other sources, they can be especially valuable during dry periods. In addition, these supplies aren't subject to the long, costly and uncertain process of developing new supplies and associated infrastructure.

- **Question:** Will these transfers reduce wholesale water rates in San Diego County?

Answer: It's premature to speculate about rate benefits because there are numerous complex variables in rate-setting. The Water Authority Board will review options and make decisions about how to apply new revenues to the 2027 rates in coming months. In addition, retail water agencies have their own costs, and their rate proposals will reflect their needs – not just the wholesale cost of water.

- **Question:** Is the Water Authority seeking other water transfers?

Answer: Yes. Because of its unique position, the agency is looking at other opportunities to create win-win scenarios in Southern California and in other states that depend on the Colorado River.

- **Question:** Has this ever been done before?

Answer: The transfer agreement between the Water Authority and Western Water was the first of its kind, and was followed quickly by the agreement between the Water Authority and Eastern Municipal Water District. These deals have set a precedent for water sharing in Southern California.

- **Question:** In total, how much water is the Water Authority looking to transfer?

Answer: No firm volume has been set at this point because agency leaders are taking an incremental approach to balance supplies and demands.

- **Question:** Will this transfer reduce water supply reliability in San Diego County?

Answer: No. The Water Authority works closely with its member agencies to forecast both demands and new supplies that are coming online in the next few years. The Water Authority's current draft Urban Water Management Plan confirms that the Water Authority's diversified portfolio of supplies, combined with a sustained commitment to water-use efficiency, will meet the region's water supply needs through 2050, even during multiple dry years. Together, the Water Authority and its member agencies are committed to ensuring enough water for our region while reducing the cost impacts on working families.

- **Question:** How does water move from one agency to another?

Answer: The Water Authority’s partners will receive transfer water through existing pipeline connections with Metropolitan. These are “paper transfers,” which means no new infrastructure is required, saving time and money for both parties. More specifically, the Water Authority will order water from Metropolitan and have it delivered to its partners. The Water Authority will then reduce its own deliveries from Metropolitan and use its locally controlled water from other sources.

- **Question:** Why is the Water Authority seeking transfers now?

Answer: With long-term demands decreasing in San Diego County and additional local supplies coming online in 2026 and 2027, the region has sufficient supplies through 2050, according to the current draft Urban Water Management Plan. At the same time, water agencies across the Southwest are looking for flexible ways to improve water reliability.

- **Question:** What does the legal settlement between the Water Authority and Metropolitan have to do with water transfers?

Answer: The Water Authority and Metropolitan settlement agreement in 2025 defined a process for the Water Authority to “exchange” water with Metropolitan and its member agencies. The Water Authority must first offer the supplies to Metropolitan’s member agencies and then offer any unpurchased additional supplies to Metropolitan, up to 50,000 acre-feet.