



Interstate Water Transfer MOU FAQ – June 2026

- **Question:** How can the Water Authority transfer water when there is a drought?
Answer: The San Diego region is drought-resilient 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. The Water Authority is taking an incremental approach to transfers, backed by in-county water storage, new local water projects coming online, and regional water supplies that are tied to high-priority rights on the Colorado River.

- **Question:** Why does the Water Authority have surplus water supplies?
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 will the Water Authority ensure that it doesn't transfer water that we need for San Diegans?
Answer: The Water Authority continues to work closely with its member agencies to forecast both demands and new supplies that are coming online. Together, the agencies are committed to ensuring enough water for our region while reducing the cost impacts on working families.

- **Question:** What does the Memorandum of Understanding do?
Answer: Now ratified by the parties involved, the MOU will join the Water Authority, the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, the Metropolitan Water District and agencies in Nevada and Arizona to explore a transfer and exchange program. If successful, it would allow interstate water transfers or exchanges using desalinated seawater from the Claude "Bud" Lewis Desalination Plant in Carlsbad, among other potential sources.

- **Question:** How much money will this MOU save San Diego County ratepayers?
Answer: The MOU itself doesn't create a financial benefit, but it advances the potential for a program that could allow the Water Authority to generate new revenues through water deals with other states – and that would help improve water affordability in San Diego County.

- Question: Has this ever been done before?
Answer: The kind of program envisioned by the MOU has never been achieved in the Lower Colorado River Basin.
- Question: Why is the Bureau of Reclamation involved?
Answer: The Bureau of Reclamation is the watermaster for the Lower Colorado River Basin and responsible for setting operational guidelines on the river.
- Question: How long will it take to develop a pilot program?
Answer: No timeline has been set; however, the Water Authority is committed to working with its partners in an expeditious manner over the next year or two given the serious challenges on the Colorado River.
- Question: How much water will the Water Authority sell or transfer?
Answer: That has not been determined.
- Question: What is a water exchange or transfer?
Answer: A water exchange is a voluntary agreement that allows water supplies to be shared more efficiently between regions. In simple terms, one agency uses a local or alternative supply, such as desalinated water, so another region can access limited Colorado River or imported supplies. These partnerships improve reliability, flexibility and affordability across the system.
- Question: How does water move from one agency to another?
Answer: Water exchanges typically use existing aqueducts and pipelines, avoiding the need for major new infrastructure. Many are simply accounting exchanges within the current system, making them faster, more cost-effective, and more flexible for water agencies and ratepayers.
- Question: Why is the Water Authority seeking transfers and exchanges now?
Answer: With long-term demands flattening in San Diego County and additional local supplies coming online in the next few years, the region has sufficient water to both meet local demands and support supply reliability for partner agencies.
- Question: Is the Water Authority seeking other water transfers in addition to what might come out of this MOU?
Answer: Yes. Thanks to the unique position the Water Authority is in, the agency is also looking at every opportunity to create win-win scenarios throughout Southern California with additional exchanges or transfers.