



Media Release

Board issues first five-year temporary groundwater recharge permit

Streamlined permitting helps capture stormwater in Sacramento, Merced counties

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SACRAMENTO – Furthering state efforts to capture and preserve stormwater during high flow events, the State Water Resources Control Board this week issued its first five-year temporary groundwater storage permit, authorizing the Omochumne-Hartnell Water District to divert 2,444 acre-feet from the Cosumnes River in Sacramento County.

This follows a 180-day [permit issued last week to the Merced Irrigation District and the Department of Water Resources](#), allowing them to divert up to 10,000 acre-feet from Mariposa Creek in Merced County to underground storage for irrigation.

The Omochumne-Hartnell District's five-year temporary permit is the first resulting from the board's collaboration with DWR under Governor Newsom's [Water Supply Strategy](#), which calls on the agencies to conduct outreach and provide technical assistance to potential permittees while also expediting the regulatory steps necessary to store significant rainfall.

"Already this year we have issued two permits, with another two approvals expected next week," said Joaquin Esquivel, chair of the State Water Board. "With only three applications outstanding, I am proud of how efficient our process has become. This month we will have issued 22 temporary permits since the state prioritized seizing the opportunity of storm events to improve groundwater supplies in 2015. And, with the newer five-year temporary permits now coming online, local agencies will be able to plan better and fully leverage the potential of the extreme weather events we are seeing more frequently with climate change.

"Given the weather we're experiencing, however, it's important to note that permits are only needed in certain instances. The majority of groundwater recharge happens naturally when it rains in California. And permits are not required for flood management or diversions for safety purposes."

Standard, or permanent, water right permits can take several years to process given legal requirements. Therefore, temporary permits were developed for short-term



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diversions. In 2020, legislation ([AB 658](#)) authorized five-year permits for local agencies to encourage recharge projects. Currently, the board issues 180-day permits within four months, while five-year permits take about a year.

All permits require a public notice and objection review period. Combined with required consultation with the Department of Fish and Wildlife, this can account for the bulk of the processing time. Concerns raised during this period are taken into consideration and often inform the conditions placed on the permit to protect fish and wildlife or the rights of other water users.

Since 2015, the board has accelerated its regulatory process by redirecting staff to the temporary permitting program, lowering fees and streamlining approval timelines.

It is also important to note that the board supports groundwater recharge through more than permitting. Since 2020, its Division of Financial Assistance has provided a total of \$1 billion in support to 13 projects that will bring a total of 88,000 acre-feet per year to the state's water supplies. Five of these projects already are complete and adding 25,000 acre-feet per year, or enough to supply 75,000 households annually.

With major storms forecast for the duration of the month, the Cosumnes and several other waterbodies in California are expected to continue experiencing high flows, providing a much-needed opportunity to restore major reservoirs and replenish underground aquifers. The water diverted by the Omoichumne-Hartnell District will be directed to the South American Subbasin underlying two dormant vineyards and extracted by private wells for use within the district service area through the 2027 irrigation season. To protect salmon and other water right holders, the permit sets limits on the amount of water that can be taken under certain conditions.

More information on [groundwater recharge permits](#) and [pending applications](#) are available on the board's website.

DWR and the board are partnering to fast-track efforts to capture flood waters to recharge groundwater basins. Information on their efforts can be found on [the Department of Water Resources website](#).

The State Water Board's mission is to preserve, enhance and restore the quality of California's water resources and drinking water for the protection of the environment, public health and all beneficial uses, and to ensure proper resource allocation and efficient use for the benefit of present and future generations.