REGIONAL WATER QUALITY CONTROL BOARD
SAN DIEGO REGION

EXECUTIVE OFFICER SUMMARY REPORT

APRIL 8, 2026

ITEM NO. 5

SUBJECT

An overview of recycled water production, use, and regulation in the San Diego Region. (Dr. Mahsa Izadmehr and Brandon Bushnell)

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Informational item only; no staff recommendation.

KEY ISSUES

This item provides the San Diego Water Board and the public an opportunity to learn about recycled water production and use in the San Diego Region. This informational item will cover how recycled water is regulated in California, summarize statewide recycled water production and reuse data, highlight a few recycled water projects in the San Diego region, and discuss how recycled water is an important part of California's Water Supply Strategy.[1]

PRACTICAL VISION

Chapter 6 of the San Diego Water Board's Practical Vision includes strategies to achieve resilient local water supplies.[2] These strategies call for the San Diego Water Board to protect, restore, and regulate water resources in a manner that contributes to a sustainable local water supply and protects beneficial uses for current and future generations. Recycled water is an important component of achieving a diverse local water supply in the San Diego region.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this item is to provide the Board with information on recycled water production and use in the San Diego Water Board's region. Recycled water is an important resource for the region, supporting water supply reliability and resilience in the

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[1] California's Water Supply Strategy is available at: https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water-supply-strategy/

[2] Practical Vision: https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/sandiego/water_issues/programs/practical_vision/

face of drought and climate change. Recycled water treatment and use in the State of California falls into two main categories:

- Non-potable recycled water, which is used in landscape irrigation, industrial, and commercial applications. Non-potable recycled water is distributed to the use sites through purple pipe systems.

- Potable recycled water, which is used to augment drinking water supplies. Facilities producing potable recycled water use advanced treatment technologies to further purify non-potable recycled water to levels that ensure public safety. Potable recycled water is further subdivided into the following reuse categories:

    - Indirect potable reuse, which involves discharging highly treated recycled water into groundwater basins or surface water reservoirs to replenish drinking water supplies.

    - Direct potable reuse, which involves discharging highly treated recycled water directly into a public water system or into a “raw” water supply immediately upstream of a drinking water treatment plant.

These types of recycled water vary in their level of treatment, and as such, the regulatory approach differs for each category. San Diego Water Board staff work with staff from the State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board) Division of Drinking Water (DDW) to ensure recycled water is produced in a manner that does not adversely affect water quality and public health. Title 22 of the California Code of Regulations (Title 22) contains specific regulations that govern the treatment and use of recycled water to protect public health.

Additionally, the State Water Board adopted the *Policy for Water Quality Control for Recycled Water* (Recycled Water Policy) in 2009, with amendments in 2013 and 2019, to streamline permitting for recycled water projects and promote increased use. The 2019 amendment established statewide goals to increase recycled water use from 714,000 acre-feet per year (afy) in 2015 to 1.5 million afy by 2020, and to 2.5 million afy by 2030.

To track progress toward these goals, the State Water Board’s Executive Director issued an Investigative Order requiring wastewater treatment plants discharging more than 20,000 gallons per day to collect monthly data and report annually on: 1) volumes of wastewater treated, 2) volumes of recycled water beneficially reused, and 3) volumes of treated wastewater disposed. This data helps identify opportunities to expand recycled water production and use statewide.

Statewide data for 2024 shows that wastewater treatment plants produced 725,436 acre-feet of recycled water, an increase of approximately 8,500 acre-feet compared to 2023 and data for 2025 is due to be submitted by April 30, 2026. However, this volume remains below the 1.5 million acre-feet goal set for 2020, indicating that additional

efforts are needed to meet long-term targets. More information is available on the State Water Board's Volumetric Annual Report dashboard:

https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/recycled_water/volumetric_annual_reporting.html

Within the San Diego Water Board's jurisdiction, wastewater treatment plants reused approximately 17 percent of the wastewater collected in 2024. From a total of 346,873 acre-feet of influent wastewater, 60,144 acre-feet was recycled, while 274,765 acre-feet was treated and disposed to land or to surface waters. This highlights both the progress made and the significant potential for increasing recycled water use in the region.

Looking ahead, expanding recycled water production and potable reuse projects will be critical to meeting statewide goals and ensuring sustainable water supplies for the San Diego region.

PUBLIC NOTICE

The agenda notice for today's meeting was posted on the San Diego Water Board's website and sent to subscribers to the email list for Board meetings. This satisfies the Bagley-Keene Open Meeting Act requirements to publish the meeting notice and agenda.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

None.