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Judge Approves Groundwater Storage Increases for Local Chino Basin Rights Holders
Ruling allows Inland area users to retain banked water, extending supplies for six months

RANCHO CUCAMONGA, CA (June 25, 2021) – A San Bernardino County Superior Court judge today ruled that local agencies that pump water from the Chino Basin can store and access an additional six-month supply of groundwater, providing significant benefit for 1.5 million people across Inland Southern California.

The ruling by Judge Stanley Reichert on this single element of the Chino Basin Optimum Basin Management Program (OBMP) means water providers in the region can retain use of the stockpiled groundwater, worth about \$50 million, and have room for more. The Chino Basin Watermaster Board of Directors and staff and the cooperating agencies worked together to craft this solution over the course of several years.

“Judge Reichert’s decision will result in tremendous advantages for the residents and businesses in our region, particularly as the state confronts another serious drought and groundwater storage takes on added significance,” said Jim Curatalo, Chairman of the Chino Basin Watermaster Board, which oversees management of the basin. “The local Chino Basin pumpers stood to lose the banked water, which is enough to serve about 200,000 people for a year.”

Groundwater is more reliable and less expensive than water imported from Northern California and the Colorado River, providing a cushion against drought and minimizing the need for drastic water rate increases for customers.

The Chino Basin supplies water for people from Pomona east to Fontana and from Rancho Cucamonga south to Chino, Eastvale and Jurupa. The creation of the OBMP in 2000 represented a monumental, cooperative effort to set guidelines for protecting water quality, avoiding subsidence, setting storage limits and more among more than two dozen pumpers, including agriculture, business and industry, cities and water suppliers.

At that time, designated safe storage capacity for local basin pumpers was set at a total of 500,000 acre-feet; an addendum to the OBMP environmental study in 2017 increased storage to 600,000 acre-feet, with a deadline of June 30, 2021, to reach a new, long term arrangement.

The new agreement approved by Judge Reichert increases approved storage to 700,000 acre-feet, and makes Chino Basin one of the largest groundwater banks in the state. Without approval of the agreement, these parties would have lost the right to use the excess water they had stored in the basin under the earlier addendum.

The OBMP was updated in 2020 and the water rights holders are now working on an implementation plan.

“Groundwater is a renewable resource, and still it needs constant care and management, so it doesn’t diminish,” Curatalo said. “This renewed commitment and effort have to begin now to set us on course for the next 20 years.”

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About Chino Basin Watermaster

The Chino Basin Watermaster was established by the San Bernardino County Superior Court in January 1978. The purpose of the nine-member Board is to implement the 1978 Judgment and any subsequent Court Orders. Groundwater producers that own and operate water wells within the Chino Basin are represented in one of three Pools depending on the associated type of water right, Agricultural, Non-Agricultural, and Appropriative, which is made up of cities and water suppliers.