Frequently Asked Questions

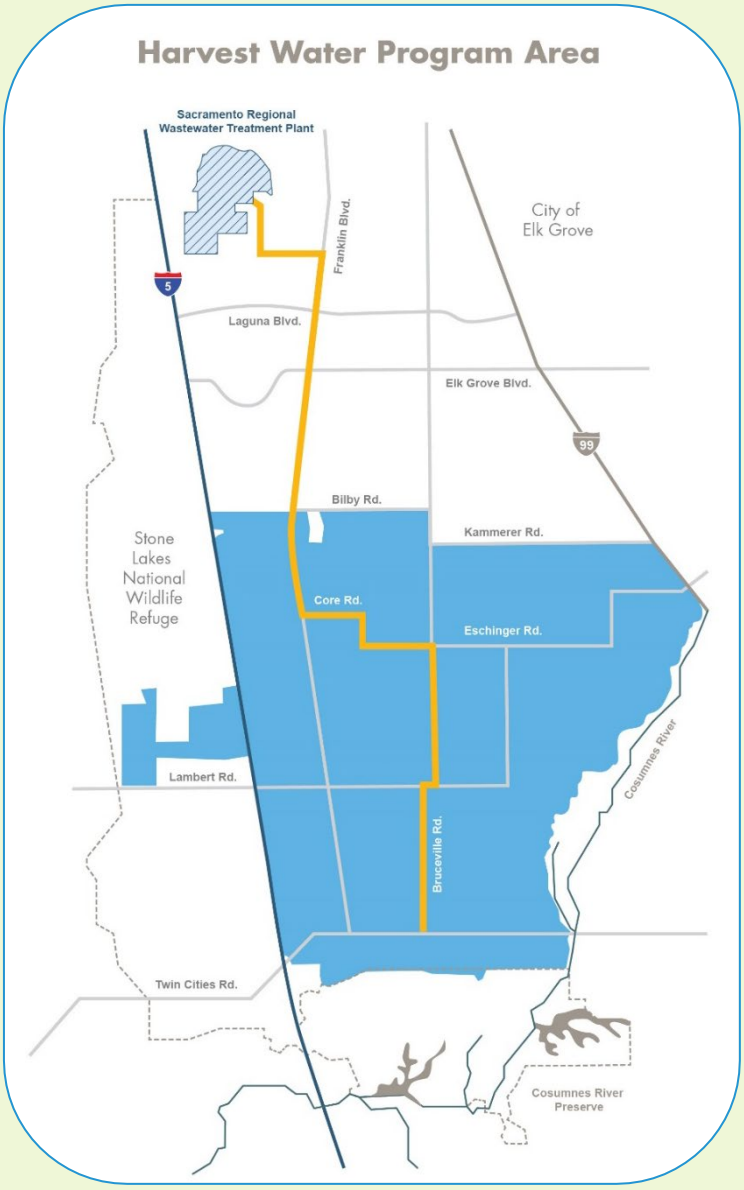
HARVEST WATER
keep it growing.

The Sacramento Regional County Sanitation District (Regional San) provides wastewater conveyance and treatment to over 1.4 million residents in the Sacramento Region and is in in the process of constructing a major wastewater treatment plant upgrade, known as the EchoWater Project, at its facility in Elk Grove. When completed, the EchoWater Project will have the capability to produce high quality recycled water – pure enough for unrestricted agricultural and municipal landscape uses.

WHAT IS HARVEST WATER?

Regional San, in collaboration with farmers and regional stakeholders, is developing Harvest Water (previously known as the South Sacramento County Agriculture & Habitat Lands Recycled Water Program or South County Ag Program).

Harvest Water will offer multiple benefits, including providing a safe and reliable supply of up to 50,000 acre-feet per year of tertiary-treated recycled water for agricultural uses, reducing groundwater pumping, supporting habitat restoration efforts, and providing near-term benefits to the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta. The Program is located roughly between I-5 and the Cosumnes River, from Elk Grove south to the Cosumnes River Preserve. The Harvest Water Program is an exceptional opportunity to proactively preserve working farmland and restore and manage groundwater, while simultaneously improving stream flows in the lower Cosumnes River, enhancing streamside habitats and wetlands, and improving regional water supply reliability. This recycled water could potentially be available as soon as 2024.



REGIONALSAN
TAKING THE WASTE OUT OF WATER

For more information, please visit **regionalsan.com/harvestwater** or contact Regional San at **HarvestWater@sacsewer.com** or **(916) 876-3322**.

WHAT IS THE STATUS OF HARVEST WATER?

In July 2018, Regional San was awarded $280.5 million in state funding to support the planning and construction of Harvest Water in southern Sacramento County. The funding is granted through the California Water Commission's Proposition 1 Water Storage Investment Program. The Harvest Water Program was awarded the grant for the exceptional public benefits the program will bring to the region by delivering up to 50,000 acre-feet per year of tertiary-treated recycled water for agricultural irrigation and wildlife habitat. Funding from the grant will be used to provide recycled water for agricultural irrigation to restore groundwater levels and to implement and monitor management strategies that support the achievement of the public benefits. The public ecosystem benefits include protecting and improving wetland and streamside habitats, vernal pool complexes, Cosumnes River flows, and Sandhill Crane habitat.

However, before grant funds can be allocated, Harvest Water needs to go through the administrative steps of finalizing environmental documentation, securing environmental permits, executing agreements with irrigators to receive the recycled water, and securing contracts with state agencies, interested partners and landowners to implement management plans to support the public ecosystem benefits. These activities are scheduled to occur in 2019 thru 2022. Once the final grant funding agreement and key permits are secured, construction can begin. Recycled water deliveries could begin as early as 2024.

WHAT ARE THE KEY BENEFITS TO LANDOWNERS/OPERATORS IN THE PROGRAM AREA?

A reliable agricultural water supply using recycled water is a cornerstone of the Program. Agriculture is a critically important partner. The long-term sustainability of agriculture in the region is important to the entire community and tertiary-treated recycled water is a reliable, safe, and efficient means of protecting that future. The Program will supply recycled water to replace local groundwater supplies for agricultural irrigation throughout most of the year, and in most water years. The ability to restore groundwater levels through in-lieu recharge also allows future conjunctive use of the groundwater during extended droughts and peak demand at the later stages of the Program. This ability to switch back and forth between water sources keeps pumps functioning, and allows for system maintenance and flexibility. Because the water is from a municipal source, it is highly reliable. This allows farmers to have double and even triple source water reliability. In some cases, landowners will have groundwater, recycled, and surface water available.

The 2014 Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) initiated additional groundwater planning for this area, and in future years may lead to additional requirements for groundwater users, such as maximum water use allocations in areas that are experiencing groundwater decline. While local requirements are still being developed under SGMA, access to recycled water will help the basin achieve compliance with SGMA and gives producers much more flexibility in an uncertain regulatory environment.

WHAT ARE THE OTHER KEY BENEFITS OF THE PROGRAM?

The beneficial use of the highly reliable and highly treated tertiary recycled water from Regional San's Echo Water Project will be provided for agricultural use and habitat lands—instead of being discharged to the Sacramento River. With discharge limits continuing to be strengthened, and the list of water quality constituents to be monitored and eventually regulated growing, the Harvest Water Program is an essential part of Regional San's long-term effluent diversification and discharge plans. This diversification of use helps all Regional San's current and future ratepayers, as discharge requirements become more restrictive and expensive.

The restoration of groundwater elevations in the Central Groundwater Basin (also known in the State's terminology as the South American Subbasin), provides a manageable and sustainable basin for all groundwater users in this portion of the County into the future. Higher groundwater elevations and the availability of tertiary-treated recycled water year-round is intended to also improve southern Sacramento County ecosystems year-round. Higher groundwater elevations along the Cosumnes River corridor will support improved riparian vegetation due to shallow groundwater water levels being reachable by the roots of trees and shrubs along the river. Increased streamflow in the Cosumnes River in dry months will support the Fall-Run Chinook Salmon fishery, fields managed for Sandhill Crane habitat will increase numbers, and vernal pool wetlands will be restored in balance as productive grazing lands. Keeping lands south of Elk Grove in agriculture and cooperative habitat protection will support farming into the future.

WHAT WILL BE THE PRICE OF DELIVERED RECYCLED WATER?

The anticipated price of delivered recycled water will be limited to the value of avoided groundwater pumping costs. A uniform pricing structure will be negotiated with water users. Since Regional San was awarded a grant through the Water Storage Investment Program, there is no anticipated capital cost to water users to connect to the recycled water system.

HOW DOES THIS PROGRAM IMPACT GROUNDWATER MANAGEMENT AND RIGHTS?

Groundwater rights of the overlying lands will not be compromised by the South County Ag Program. The success of the Harvest Water Program depends upon the use of recycled water offsetting some of the groundwater currently being pumped from the Central Basin. The goal is to have recycled water replace a significant portion of groundwater that is currently used for irrigation. However, supplemental groundwater will still be needed for irrigation to meet peak summer demands, particularly during droughts. The focus of the Program is to achieve local benefits first. The Program is designed to protect working agricultural and habitat lands and support sustainable groundwater management. Once the groundwater level targets are attained, and the groundwater basin is in a sustainable balance, groundwater stored in the basin will be available on a limited basis to potential groundwater accounting partners (farmers, municipalities adjacent to the Program Area, Regional San) to use in dry years instead of surface water. The Program helps provide local resiliency to droughts, while still maintaining the key benefits of restored groundwater levels. Regional San is committed to the cooperative development of a fair and transparent groundwater accounting system. The details of this groundwater accounting arrangement are currently in development between the program partners, including the agricultural and conservation community.

WHAT GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE AND AGREEMENTS WILL BE USED TO IMPLEMENT THIS PROGRAM?

Regional San has discussed a governance structure that allows efficient distribution of recycled water to the southern Sacramento County community without adding layers of governmental bureaucracy. One way to do this is to work with the community and the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCo) to simply annex the area for the provision of recycled water only (not sewer service). This entails having agreements between Regional San and the landowners that are tailored to the individual needs of the property owner (connections to the irrigation system, types of use, terms of use, etc.). Letters of intent have been received from many landowners managing acreage in the program area. Program staff will be working with landowners on individual agreements with each owner/operator to firm up the terms of engagement so that the Program can be permitted, funded, designed, and built. Additional voluntary agreements will address ecosystem management activities with interested landowners to support and enhance benefits to local ecosystems, such as fencing, buffer strips, wintertime irrigation for crane habitat, and crop residuals that will be included on their properties at each landowner's discretion.

IS RECYCLED WATER SAFE?

Recycled water is treated wastewater that has undergone additional filtration and disinfection processes to make the water safe for non-potable (non-drinking) uses. Since April 2003, Regional San's cutting-edge Water Recycling Program (WRP) has provided an environmentally responsible and safe water supply for non-potable purposes, such as landscape irrigation, industrial uses, and environmental restoration. Recycled water treated at Regional San's water recycling facility meets and exceeds the California Department of Health Services' most stringent irrigation requirements for recycled water. There has never been a documented health-related problem traced back to recycled water when used in accordance with state guidelines. Find our more at **regionalsan.com/water-recycling**.

WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS FOR THE PROGRAM?

Regional San will be working with landowners, community leaders, and other stakeholders to communicate the Harvest Water Program plans and to secure agreements to use and manage the recycled water resources and to create the opportunities for ecological benefits to be delivered as part of this Program. If you are interested, please contact us and we can schedule a briefing to provide more details on the program and add you to our mailing list to receive future updates.

OVERALL SCHEDULE

Next steps include continuing planning efforts with interested local farmers and landowners and developing preliminary designs for distribution systems to convey recycled water to agricultural lands.