

Bear Valley Water Sustainability Project Press Release

Prepared for BBARWA by WSC

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Subject: Local Water Agencies Achieve an Important Milestone in Their Partnership Toward Sustainable Water Supplies for the Big Bear Valley

A water sustainability project that will maintain Big Bear Lake levels even during periods of drought, enhance environmental protection and support our thriving community achieved a significant milestone on Tuesday, July 17th.

More than 30 representatives from Big Bears' five participating water resource management agencies met at Big Bear Regional Wastewater Agency's (BBARWA) offices to kick off the first phase of implementation of the Bear Valley Water Sustainability Project. Over the next 18 months, key funding, regulatory, and governance decisions will be made ahead of design and construction of the estimated \$44 million project, which includes a treatment facility upgrade and new distribution infrastructure for the purified water.

When complete, the Bear Valley Water Sustainability Project will recover water that is currently piped outside of Big Bear Valley to irrigate crops in Lucerne Valley. Proven advanced water treatment processes, including nutrient removal, enhanced disinfection and reverse osmosis, will be installed at BBARWA's facility to produce more than 600 million gallons of high quality purified water each year to meet local water needs. The purified water will be discharged to the Stanfield Marsh Wildlife and Waterfowl Preserve then flow into Big Bear Lake where, according to preliminary estimates, it could increase Big Bear Lake levels by up to five feet in dry years. The project will provide a constant source of water for the 145-acre marsh to restore the thriving wetland habitat. The purified water will also support habitat for the endangered Unarmored Threespined Stickleback fish in Shay Pond. The purified water can also be used to recharge the groundwater basin, support additional snow making in dry years and even to store excess water in the watershed during wet years. The project is also expected to result

in additional water releases from the Lake, which could relieve a portion of BBMWD's obligation to provide in-lieu water; some of these additional releases can also be used for recharge in the San Bernardino Basin, which shares the project benefits and will generate project support outside Big Bear Valley.

The partnership of the five agencies is vital to make the project a reality. The recent workshop included elected officials, general managers and staff from: BBARWA; Big Bear City Community Services District (BBCCSD); City of Big Bear Lake Department of Water (BBLDWP); Big Bear Municipal Water District (BBMWD); and Bear Valley Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agency (BVBGSA).

Water Systems Consulting, Inc. (WSC) led the collaborative meeting and is the engineering and program management partner for the project. WSC's current tasks include gaining required regulatory approvals for the project, supporting acquisition of funding through local, state and federal grants and loans, and working with Tom Dodson & Associates to complete the environmental impact report (EIR).

The meeting brought these five boards together for the first time and is a culmination of years of comprehensive and collaborative efforts to identify the optimal solution with the most benefits and highest value for the Valley. The partners are intensely focused on providing comprehensive sustainable water, energy and environmental solutions through this project that will bring lasting value to the local community. In a recent related accomplishment, agency leaders are bringing sustainable energy solutions to the community through solar power agreements with Bear Valley Electric, ultimately reducing facility operating costs and saving ratepayers money.

"The BBCCSD is excited to be working collaboratively on this valuable and sensible project with the BBARWA, BBMWD, BBDWP, and WSC. This project will supplement the Big Bear Valley's water supply for years to come," BBCCSD General Manager Mary Reeves said.

After close evaluation of five possible treatment and benefit alternatives over the last three years, the selected Big Bear Water Sustainability Project alternative is widely supported by the participating agencies.

"The selected project alternative demonstrates the highest degree of environmental, water supply, and recreational and tourism benefits," BBARWA General Manager David Lawrence said. "Together, we will keep a valuable water resource in the Valley. The benefits of the project will support recreation and maintain the wetland ecosystem around the edge of the lake."

The approach will revitalize and renew the Big Bear Valley environment, community, and habitat and even extend the benefits beyond the Valley to the upper Santa Ana Watershed.

"Our meeting and kick off this past week was an important step toward a legacy water project for our community," BBLDWP General Manager Reginald "Reggie" Lamson said. "The degree of collaboration and support from the partnering agencies at this phase is recognizably best-in-class, and a model for all water agencies for what is possible when we approach our water resource needs as one community and one water."

To learn more about the project and read a project overview, please visit: www.bbarwa.org.