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COACHELLA VALLEY WATER DISTRICT

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CVWD Adopts QSA

Coachella Valley Water District's board of directors today unanimously approved the Quantification Settlement Agreement (QSA), an historic series of accords that ensure the area has a reliable, expanded supply of imported water for at least 45 years, enabling CVWD officials to implement more effectively long-term water management plans that affect all area residents, farming and other businesses.

CVWD's board was the second of four water agencies that must approve the QSA. Metropolitan Water District (MWD) of Southern California's board of directors approved the QSA on Tuesday, Sept. 23. The board for the San Diego County Water Authority (SDCWA) is scheduled to vote on the agreement Thursday, Sept. 25. Imperial Irrigation District's board also must approve the deal, and is scheduled to conduct a public hearing on Monday, Sept. 29. Directors could vote then, or when they meet the following week, on Tuesday, Oct. 7.

The state Legislature two weeks ago passed three bills that are essential to implementation of the QSA, and California Governor Gray Davis is expected to sign them into law Sept. 29. Boards from the four agencies must approve the QSA by Oct. 12, otherwise the recent legislation expires.

With respect to what Coachella Valley receives and its obligations, the QSA that now is so close to approval is very similar to the one CVWD's board—and those of MWD and SDCWA—approved in early December. CVWD will contribute \$45 million toward environmental and other mitigation expenses associated with the accords. An estimated \$163 million will be contributed toward mitigation by three of the four agencies—MWD is excluded from this obligation—with \$30 million set aside for Salton Sea restoration.

A significant element of recent action by state lawmakers is committing California to Salton Sea restoration. QSA-related environmental and other mitigation expenses are capped at \$163 million; so all additional mitigation costs in excess of this amount will be the state's responsibility.

(more)

QSA

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“Adoption of the QSA is a win-win-win-win-win-win-win-win situation,” said CVWD general manager-chief engineer Steve Robbins. “Everyone benefits. Each of the four participating agencies benefits. The state benefits. The federal government benefits. The other basin states that use Colorado River water benefit. And the Salton Sea benefits.”

CVWD board members were briefed by Robbins and their legal representatives in closed session before taking the 5-0 vote in favor of the QSA. “This is a monumental step forward for our ability to plan for the future,” said board member Patricia “Corky” Larson, who participated in the vote through teleconferencing.

Negotiators are extremely optimistic because it appears that all of the potential obstacles that derailed the QSA last year have been removed. Approval of the QSA will mean for Coachella Valley:

Quantification: CVWD’s legal entitlement to Colorado River water is set by the QSA at 330,000 acre-feet annually, except in years when drought conditions reduced everyone’s allotment. This is about what CVWD’s order has averaged in the last decade, but without the QSA the amount is not guaranteed and subject to conditions beyond the district’s control. CVWD’s water order was cut in 2003 when the Department of the Interior suspended California’s access to as much as 800,000 acre-feet of surplus Colorado River water.

Increased water supply: The QSA provided for the transfer of water from IID to CVWD. Initially the amount of water transferred is minimal, but the ramped-up schedule provides for what eventually will be 103,000 acre-feet per year. This additional water will serve two primary purposes: First, it provides local growers with an enhanced supply of reliable, comparably inexpensive canal water, which will enable CVWD to convert any farm irrigation still using well water to Colorado River water, thus reducing the overdraft on the valley’s aquifer. Second, water not used directly for irrigation purposes will be utilized to recharge the aquifer in the lower valley, further reducing annual overdraft. Transferred water will be purchased at prices considerably below the “going rate” for imported water. Additional water obtained from MWD will increase CVWD’s total annual diversion of imported water to more than 450,000 acre-feet.

Canal Lining: Although the QSA provides that the water saved go elsewhere, the lining of the still-earthen segments of the Coachella Canal will save a net of about 26,000 acre-feet of water, which at present seeps into the ground and is unavailable for use. This and lining portions of the All-American Canal bring California even closer to living with its 4.4 million acre-foot annual entitlement to Colorado River water.

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