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EXPANDED PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN METROPOLITAN, QUECHAN TRIBE WILL CONSERVE COLORADO RIVER WATER, HELP PROTECT LAKE MEAD **Land fallowing program promotes sustainability, partnership in the Colorado River Basin**

LAS VEGAS – A new seasonal land fallowing program between Metropolitan Water District and the Quechan Tribe of the Fort Yuma Indian Reservation will conserve Colorado River water, making it available to Southern California cities so they can leave more water in Lake Mead, while supporting the Tribe’s agricultural economy.

During a signing ceremony Wednesday, Metropolitan Water District and the Quechan Tribe formalized an agreement for a two-year seasonal fallowing pilot that will pay interested farmers to not grow crops on a portion of their lands between April and July in 2022 and 2023, and make the conserved Colorado River water available for urban needs and help California boost declining water levels in Lake Mead. The agreement will also help meet water conservation targets identified in the 500-plus plan, an effort by Lower Basin water users to add 500,000 acre-feet or more of water to the reservoir over each of the next two years to reduce the risk of Lake Mead reaching critically low elevations.

“In addition to the threat of climate change, we’re facing unprecedented drought conditions across the West, and Colorado River reservoirs are at record lows,” said Metropolitan board Chairwoman Gloria D. Gray. “Everyone throughout the Lower Basin must work together to get through these challenges and ensure our communities have the water they need. I want to thank the Quechan Tribe for their partnership and look forward to the benefits we will all see from this program.”

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The 45,000-acre Quechan tribal lands lie along the Colorado River in southeast California and southwest Arizona. Farmers typically grow high-value crops (such as vegetables) in the winter, followed by lower-value, water-intensive field crops (such as Sudan grass) in the spring and summer. Metropolitan will pay up to \$473 per acre fallowed during the spring and summer months, up to \$1.6 million annually, with no more than 1,600 acres left idle. Of the payments made, 75 percent will go to farmers under individual agreements, while 25 percent will be paid to the Quechan Tribe. This agreement builds on an existing water conservation agreement with the Tribe.

“Water is a sacred part of the Tribe’s culture, past, present, and future, and being a good steward of our water resources is a fundamental tribal value,” said Quechan Tribe President Jordan Joaquin. “We are pleased to expand our partnership with Metropolitan for the good of our homeland and the entire Lower Basin community.”

Metropolitan estimates an annual water savings of up to about 3,500 acre-feet, enough to serve about 10,600 Southern California households.

“The stakes are too high not to take bold actions now. We’re working hard to find every opportunity to save water and promote short- and long-term sustainability along the Colorado River,” said Metropolitan General Manager Adel Hagekhalil. “I am deeply appreciative of the Quechan Tribe for not only working with us on this new program, but for their collaboration with Metropolitan over the years.”

The Quechan agreement will operate similarly to the [fallowing program](#) between Metropolitan and the Bard Water District, which began in 2019.

Metropolitan has water conservation partnerships in place with every agricultural entity in California that uses Colorado River water, including Imperial Irrigation District, Palo Verde Irrigation District, the Coachella Valley Water District and the Bard Water District.

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The Metropolitan Water District of Southern California is a state-established cooperative that, along with its 26 cities and retail suppliers, provide water for 19 million people in six counties. The district imports water from the Colorado River and Northern California to supplement local supplies, and helps its members to develop increased water conservation, recycling, storage and other resource-management programs.

The Quechan Tribe of the Fort Yuma Indian Reservation currently occupies a portion of the Tribe’s ancestral territory in what are now the states of California and Arizona. Encompassing 45,000 acres, the Reservation is bisected on the south by Interstate 8 (I-8), and Imperial Irrigation District’s All-American Canal runs from its northeast to southwest corners. The Tribe’s headquarters are located on the old Fort Yuma grounds in California, along the Reservation’s southern boundary and directly across the Colorado River from the City of Yuma.