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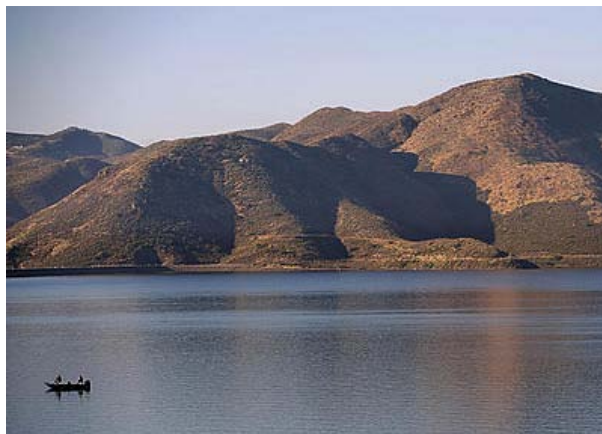
10:00 PM PDT on Sunday, July 10, 2011

By **JANET ZIMMERMAN**
The Press-Enterprise

Southern California's water wholesaler is offering up cut-rate surplus supplies for the first time since 2007, but few local providers can buy in because they are short on storage space.

The bounty comes from abundant snowfall all the way into early summer. Metropolitan Water District of Southern California expects by year's end to have the highest storage levels since 1928 in its regional reservoirs, including Diamond Valley Lake in Hemet, water resources manager Deven Upadhyay said.

The rosy picture presents a significant turnaround from the previous four years, when reservoirs and groundwater storage basins were depleted by a double whammy of drought and reduced deliveries caused by environmental restrictions on exports from the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta.



Rodrigo Peña / Special to The Press-Enterprise
Diamond Valley Lake in Hemet, a regional reservoir for Metropolitan Water District, is at a high for storage capacity. The district is offering other providers untreated surplus water for \$409 per acre-foot, \$118 off regular rates.

The district's replenishment program offers untreated surplus water for \$409 per acre-foot, a \$118 discount from regular rates. One acre-foot of water equals 325,851 gallons, enough to supply two families in Southern California for a year.

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A total 225,000 acre-feet is available under the replenishment program, which started in May.

In the past, Eastern Municipal Water District in Perris and Western Municipal Water District in Riverside bought small amounts of replenishment water to put in underground basins and save for future use, a form of drought protection.

But there isn't room this year, officials said.

"Because we've had above-normal precipitation and runoff this year spreading basins have been used to capture the local runoff," Western spokeswoman Michele McKinney Underwood said.



AP photo

Late-season mountain snows are boosting supplies. One acre-foot of water equals 325,851 gallons, enough to supply two families for a year. There are 225,000 acre-feet available.

Eastern has been working for years on developing more underground storage. The district, which serves Moreno Valley to Temecula and the San Jacinto Valley, wants to develop 35 acres of spreading ponds along the San Jacinto River in Valle Vista.

The new area would be able to store about 10,000 acre-feet per year, the same amount that has been overdrawn from the basin for many years, district spokesman Peter Odencrans said. Pending environmental clearances, the ponds could be ready to accept replenishment water later this year.

The Chino Basin Watermaster, a governmental body that oversees the giant basin supplying numerous utilities in San Bernardino, Riverside and Los Angeles counties, has requested 50,000 acre-feet of replenishment water, the maximum it can take, according to a staff report.

Purchasing now instead of in 2013, when water would be needed anyway for the regional desalters that clean up brackish groundwater, will save as much as \$4.5 million, staff wrote.

Metropolitan also has been stashing away surplus water for its 26 member agencies that serve 18 million people in Southern California. In addition to Diamond Valley Lake, the district has groundwater storage in the Central Valley and in Lake Mead on the Colorado River system.

The Colorado system also is having a boom year after more than a decade of drought.

"That's not to say that next year we won't go back into the drought. But we're thankful when a year like this comes around and we're able to capture that supply," Metropolitan's Upadhyay said.

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