

5 THINGS TO KNOW!

About Water Year 2023-24

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Last year's unprecedented water year ended September 30, 2023. Last winter and spring saw massive amounts of rainfall and snowfall accumulation in California and the Western United States. These events ended a three-year drought in California and provided slight relief to the Colorado River System, which has been in decline for approximately 25 years. As we continue to analyze the health of Orange County's water supply going into the winter months, key factors include that Northern California water supplies are very healthy after years of record low

supplies, and the Colorado River system has seen improvements but remains in a considerable deficit compared to earlier decades. Additionally, water usage in Orange County is very low, and Orange County's groundwater basin is also in great shape, helping relieve the region's dependence on imported water.

As we sail ahead into the winter months, let's dive into these leading issues:

1

IMPROVED IMPORTED WATER STORAGE LEVELS

Due to last year's wet winter, water supplies available in California were at a 17-year high, refilling many of the state's large reservoirs. The water captured for storage will help water users get by when future drought conditions return.

2

LONG-TERM SUPPLY ISSUES FOR LAKE MEAD AND THE COLORADO RIVER

The Colorado River Basin experienced drought relief last winter with storms raising Lake Mead levels by approximately 30 feet. However, lake levels have plummeted by 180 feet since 2000, and storage levels have only improved in three (3) out of the last 25 years. This trend provides a good clue that the lake will likely not return to pre-2000 levels in the foreseeable future.

3

DECREASED WATER USAGE

Water usage has declined significantly in Orange County over the last 20 years, the lowest since the late 1970's. This decrease has resulted in less imported water use for the county overall, with Orange County's dependence on imported water also at its lowest since the 1970's.

4

THE ARRIVAL OF EL NIÑO

El Niño is officially here, traditionally meaning more precipitation for California, which could result in an odd sequence of having two (2) wet years in a row. If that happens, water providers could experience water storage challenges. Even so, the promise of an El Niño does not guarantee extra rain or snow.

5

HEALTHY LOCAL WATER SUPPLY

Orange County's imported water and groundwater supply are in good shape going into the winter. The Groundwater Basin, which serves North and Central Orange County, is 87% full compared to its sustainable operation level. This situation is notable, given that the previous two (2) years before last winter were very dry.

