



## **Resilient: Our water supply AND our people** *A look back at 2021, and what's ahead in 2022*

By Gary Martin, Board President, Santa Clarita Valley Water Agency

As we enter our fifth year of operations as Santa Clarita Valley's regional water agency, we are better prepared than ever to navigate challenges of both the expected and unprecedented varieties. We had countless opportunities to persevere and grow in 2021, and I'm proud of the resilience shown by our staff to meet those challenges head on.

As the pandemic continued to ebb and flow, we modified our business practices to meet ever-changing health and safety requirements, while still providing superior customer care and numerous opportunities for public engagement. As statewide drought conditions intensified, our water resource portfolio was put to the test. But through it all, both our water supply and our staff proved to be resilient and able to meet our commitment to serving our community and providing safe, reliable water at a reasonable cost.

### **Unified and Prepared for the Long-Term**

In 2021, the Agency finalized several major planning efforts, the first since local water purveyors merged into one regional provider in January 2018.

- **Water Rates.** We adopted a unified retail water rate structure that ensures equitable and affordable rates for all customers. This five-year rate structure helps us operate our water system, conduct infrastructure maintenance, and meet governmental regulations. For more information, visit [yourSCVwater.com/rates](http://yourSCVwater.com/rates)
- **Urban Water Management Plan (UWMP) and Water Shortage Contingency Plan (WSCP).** As part of our ongoing water resource planning efforts, the Agency adopted the 2020 UWMP and WSCP. Together, these plans help us ensure a reliable water supply for the long-term, as well as in the event of a shortage, such as drought, earthquakes, fires, or catastrophic events. For more information visit [yourSCVwater.com/uwmp](http://yourSCVwater.com/uwmp) and [yourSCVwater.com/wscp](http://yourSCVwater.com/wscp).

### **Evolving and Adapting**

In 2021, drought was added to the list of ongoing challenges, including a pandemic and PFAS contamination. And in 2022, we will be faced with drought, pandemic and PFAS again, but armed with another year of experience and the resilience that brings.

### **Continuous Customer Care During COVID-19**

As the pandemic persists, we remain committed to the health and safety of our workforce and customers. For our customers who are struggling due to an unexpected financial hardship, we are offering payment plans and, most recently, partnered with the State to provide utility bill payment assistance to renters and other customers with past-due balances due to the pandemic. For our staff, we provide regular updates on COVID-19 guidelines and safety protocols and adapt our operations to minimize any health and safety risks.

### PFAS Testing and Treatment

In 2021, we accelerated our ability to test for per- and polyfluoroalkyl (PFAS) chemicals. Rather than waiting 1-2 weeks for test results from an outside lab, we installed new equipment to allow for in-house testing. We also became one of only three water agencies in California – and 25 labs nationwide – to be certified for PFAS testing.

In 2022, we will continue to restore groundwater that was shut off due to PFAS. Construction is underway on the next treatment facility at our Valley Center Well, located just west of Golden Valley Road and bordering the Santa Clara River. Once this groundwater well is restored it will produce up to 1,200 gallons per minute on average, which will serve up to 1,000 families annually. Additional PFAS treatment facilities are in the design or planning phases as we work to bring local sources back online. For more information visit [yourSCVwater.com/pfas](http://yourSCVwater.com/pfas)

### Unprecedented Drought in the SCV

The current drought is unlike any other in recent history. In 2021, we experienced the driest water year on record for the SCV, with a mere 3.38 inches of rainfall in a 12-month period, compared to our annual average of 17 inches. Coupled with the first ever zero percent initial allocation from the State Water Project, this drought has been one of the greatest “stress tests” for the Agency’s water supply portfolio.

Despite receiving 11.85 inches of rain in December 2021, we’re still in a severe drought. Although the rain was a welcome relief, we’ll need more rain and snow throughout the winter months to recharge reservoirs and groundwater aquifers across the state.

We don’t know if we’ll get any more rain, but we do know that even small actions can bring big water savings, and we can’t let this recent storm take our eyes off the goal of saving 15% of our water use compared to 2020. We appreciate our customer’s efforts in this regard, as water saved this year will be held in reserve should the drought extend another year or more.

Our Agency has many water-saving resources available, including water efficiency tips, rebates, learning opportunities and resources to help. We have saved before and together we can do it again. Visit [DroughtReadySCV.com](http://DroughtReadySCV.com) for more information.

### **Working Toward Sustainability and Inclusion in 2022**

2022 is looking “green” for SCV Water, as we focus on sustainability in our business practices and watershed management, and build a more sustainable communications network, making sure we reach all customers in a way that is most beneficial to them.

- **Groundwater Sustainability Plan.** After a multi-year process, the SCV Groundwater Sustainability Agency Board of Directors adopted a Groundwater Sustainability Plan in January 2022. The Plan will guide management of the basin and protect it from overuse, ensuring access to the water our communities need to thrive. For more information visit [scvgsa.org](http://scvgsa.org)
- **SCV Water Green Team and Other Sustainability Efforts.** In October 2021, the Agency implemented a new Flexible Workplace Program that allows eligible employees to work from home to reduce the Agency’s carbon footprint. Additionally, our staff Green Team, a cross-departmental group, issued a staff survey on commuting routines to support the development of SCV Water’s Greenhouse Gas and Sustainability Plan. While the complete picture is still emerging, we look forward to a positive impact as we move toward a more sustainable workplace in 2022 and beyond.

- **Equitable Engagement.** We are looking strategically at ways to engage the diverse communities within our service area. With a focus on understanding the different needs, priorities, and goals of these communities, we want to increase community awareness of water issues and opportunities, especially during potential service disruptions. Our ultimate objective is to meaningfully involve all customers in agency decision-making, such as planning, management, customer care and operations.

Looking ahead to 2022 and beyond, we'll continue to work through challenges as they arise, and for opportunities to be innovative to make our community a better place for the environment and everyone in it. Most importantly, we'll continue to provide you with affordable, clean and reliable water.