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Contact: Heather Engel, ACWA Director of Communications | C (916) 669-2387

Contact: Gina Ayala, OCWD Director of Public Affairs | C (714) 378-3323

Orange County Water District Honored for Innovative Water Resiliency Efforts

MONTEREY – The Association of California Water Agencies (ACWA) today presented the second annual Excellence in Innovation Award to Orange County Water District (OCWD) for recycling 100 percent of its local reclaimable wastewater flows into high-quality drinking water.

OCWD expanded its Groundwater Replenishment System (GWRS) to be able to recycle 100 percent of Orange County Sanitation District’s reclaimable wastewater flows, which produces up to 130 million gallons of drinking water a day (mgd), serving nearly one million people in north and central Orange County.

“Projects like these are so important in addressing climate change impacts, including more severe and prolonged droughts,” said ACWA President Pamela Tobin. “The successful and innovative approach to creating a more resilient water supply utilizing technology advancements is groundbreaking and serves as a model that can be replicated throughout California.”

In order to achieve 130 mgd, OCWD’s Research and Development Department constantly tested new membranes to optimize efficiency, use less energy and produce more water. In addition, the project took additional secondary effluent and major infrastructure upgrades including the Advanced Water Treatment Facility expansion, a new pump station, two flow equalization tanks, a pipeline rehabilitation and modifying headworks to be able to segregate reclaimable and non-reclaimable flows.

ACWA’s Excellence in Innovation Award recognizes outstanding innovations by public water agencies. The award, sponsored by CDM Smith, was presented during ACWA’s 2023 Spring Conference & Expo in Monterey, where more than 1,400 leaders from local water agencies in California gathered for programs and panel discussions on a variety of key water issues.

The other finalists for this year’s award were:

- Placer County Water Agency for its Water Systems Consolidation Program
- Rancho California Water District for its Energy Demand Response Program
- Reclamation District No. 108 for its Salmon Restoration Program

For more information about ACWA’s awards programs, please visit www.acwa.com/about/awards.