LAKE HEMET MWD TO BEGIN GROUNDWATER RECHARGE PROJECT

By Jeff Crider

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Water agencies have been talking for years about the need to recharge groundwater basins in the San Jacinto Valley.

Now they're actually doing something about it.

Lake Hemet Municipal Water District and the Riverside County Flood Control And Water Conservation District expect to begin work later this year on a joint project to improve the Little Lake Retention Basin, which is located on the southeast corner of Stetson Avenue and Lake Street in Hemet.

The project, which was approved by the Riverside County Board of Supervisors, involves deepening the retention basin by five feet to increase the retention capacity and associated percolation of storm water runoff that is captured by the flood control district. The excavation of approximately 46,000 cubic yards of soil will create an additional 29-acre feet of recharge capacity and storm water capture during rainy weather. That amounts to a 58 percent increase in groundwater recharge capacity.

"We think this is a great project that will help us make the best use of storm water runoff from our local mountains," said Thomas Wagoner, general manager of Lake Hemet MWD, which owns and operates the 50-acre foot Little Lake Reservoir immediately west of the recharge basin.

The project, which was recently approved by the Riverside County Board of Supervisors, is expected to cost about $500,000. The Riverside County Flood Control and Water Conservation District has also agreed to front 50 percent of the cost of the project.

Engineering design studies are underway. Once the studies are completed, a design will be selected and Lake Hemet MWD will seek bids from construction companies to do the project under the water district's supervision. Lake Hemet has also agreed to maintain the basin bottom to prevent excessive vegetation growth and to maximize percolation of captured storm water to the groundwater basin.

Michael Gow, Lake Hemet's assistant general manager and chief engineer, said construction would likely begin later this year with completion targeted in time for next winter's rains.

"The dry winter we've been having this year underscores the need to capture as much water as we can for groundwater recharge whenever it's available," Wagoner said.

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