

# ANNUAL REPORT ON THE STRATEGIC PLAN



WORKING  
FOR YOUR  
WATER



FISCAL YEAR  
2019-2020

# ABOUT SWEETWATER AUTHORITY

Sweetwater Authority (Authority) is a publicly-owned water agency established by a joint powers agreement with the South Bay Irrigation District and National City, with policies and procedures established by a seven-member Board of Directors. The Authority provides safe, reliable water service to approximately 190,000 people in a 36 square-mile service area that includes National City, Bonita, and the western and central portions of Chula Vista.

## OUR MISSION

The mission of the Authority is to provide its current and future customers with a safe and reliable water supply through the use of the best available technology, sound management practices, public participation and a balanced approach to human and environmental needs.

## OUR VISION

The Authority is a premier water agency. We partner with public and private sectors to maximize value for our ratepayers. Our water system infrastructure is innovative, yet functional, practical and cost-effective. We provide a reliable and sustainable source of water. We consistently deliver industry-leading service to our customers.

## GOVERNING BOARD

The Authority's Governing Board is composed of five directors elected by division by the citizens of the South Bay Irrigation District, and two directors appointed by the Mayor of National City, subject to City Council confirmation.

### SOUTH BAY IRRIGATION DISTRICT DIRECTORS



STEVE CASTANEDA  
DIVISION 1  
BOARD CHAIR  
TERM 2018-2022



JOSÉ F. CERDA  
DIVISION 2  
TERM 2016-2020



JOSE PRECIADO  
DIVISION 3  
TERM 2016-2020



HECTOR MARTINEZ  
DIVISION 4  
BOARD VICE CHAIR  
TERM 2018-2022



JOSIE  
CALDERON-SCOTT  
DIVISION 5  
TERM 2016-2020

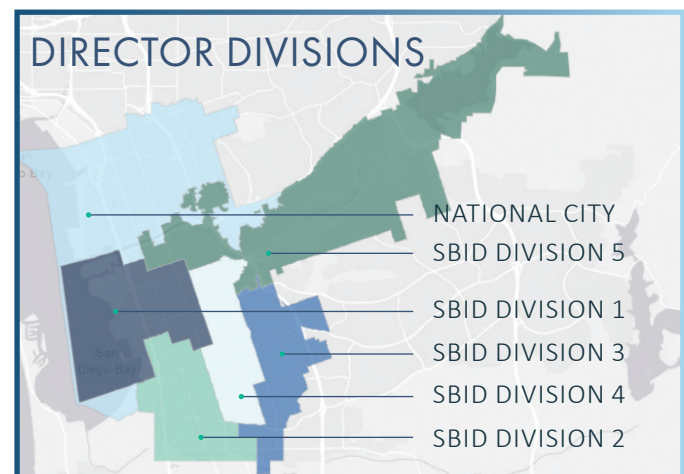
### NATIONAL CITY DIRECTORS



ALEJANDRA  
SOTELO-SOLIS  
TERM 2019-2022



JERRY CANO  
TERM 2019-2022



This document is the year-end report summarizing the achievements of the Authority over the past fiscal year and the degree to which Authority staff achieved goals and objectives as set forth in the Strategic Plan. The full Strategic Plan and the Detailed Work Plan Status Report are available on the Authority's website at [www.sweetwater.org](http://www.sweetwater.org).



## A MESSAGE FROM BOARD CHAIR STEVE CASTANEDA

While this year has seen unprecedented challenges, I am proud of all that the Authority has been able to accomplish in service to our ratepayers. In March we went from working alongside each other, to quickly reimagining what a safe workplace looks like, and implementing new efficient ways to conduct everyday operations while continuing to deliver safe, reliable water to the more than 190,000 people in South Bay who depend on us day in and day out.

Throughout this year, and even while the coronavirus pandemic wreaked havoc on life as we knew it, the Authority's dedication to service and our community has not skipped a beat. In fact, our agency has made significant achievements and gained momentum in several key areas this year.

We have had an incredible year of innovation, community collaboration and accomplishments. Our commitment to water safety and reliability, community partnerships, transparency, and our customers has never been more evident.

**Providing Financial Stability to Customers** – Our customers depend on our essential service 365 days a year, and we've worked hard to balance the ability of our agency to operate efficiently with the cost of providing clean, safe water. The Governing Board worked tirelessly to identify and implement a number of cost-saving measures to guarantee our water rates stay affordable through the end of 2021. This year, we will not increase rates and the Board is seriously looking at ways to bring more value to our customers through potentially mining sand at Sweetwater Reservoir and developing business relationships with regional agencies.

**Helping Local Businesses** – The Authority strives to support economic development in South Bay and launched two programs designed to help our local businesses. The Authority became a member of the Statewide Community Infrastructure Program (SCIP) which allows for certain projects within the service area to be financed in a manner that reduces overall costs. With the immense amount of growth and development in the South Bay, the Governing Board saw this as a tremendous opportunity and a way to help encourage growth and development in the community. Also new this year is a preferential purchasing program for local businesses that reflects the Governing Board's priority in supporting economic stability within the Authority's service area of National City, Chula Vista and Bonita, by increasing opportunities for local businesses in agency contracts.

**Listening to Our Ratepayers** – This year, we launched the Authority's first Citizens Advisory Committee with the goal of expanding the Authority's engagement with customers and providing Board members with an additional channel for community input and feedback. As the Authority looks into innovative ways to maximize our use of local water sources and other cost-saving initiatives, it was important for us to establish a way for our customers to provide valuable input on how we can best maximize both efficiency and fairness. The Board is excited to begin working with this new Citizens Advisory Committee on evaluating the costs and benefits of these initiatives in a way that best serves our ratepayers.

**Cultivating Community Partnerships** – It is exciting to be on a Board that values the importance of strategic partnerships. We launched innovative partnerships that help provide new educational and business opportunities that benefit our community and expose local children to a career path that could position them as tomorrow's water leaders.

**Ensuring Transparent Fiscal Management** – The Authority has always prided itself on being transparent while serving the community. In May we received the incredibly prestigious "District of Distinction" accreditation by the Special District Leadership Foundation in recognition of our commitment to transparency and fiscally sound management practices.

Now as we look to the challenging year ahead, I am confident that the Authority will continue to rise to the occasion. We are dedicated to serving our community, and as we all face unprecedented uncertainty, we are committed to supporting our customers and fostering local economic stability.



## A YEAR OF DISTINCTION

Last fiscal year, the Authority received the "District of Distinction" accreditation by the Special District Leadership Foundation for sound fiscal management policies and practices in district operations. This distinction, a prestigious title, is only possessed by two percent of the more than 4,000 Special Districts.

With this special accreditation, the Authority continues to prioritize a commitment to serving the community with transparency and fair and ethical business practices.



### SPECIAL RECOGNITIONS

- "Certificate of Recognition" from the City of Chula Vista (August 2019)
- "Certificate of Recognition" from the City of National City (September 2019)
- "Excellence in Information Technology Practices" from the Municipal Information Systems Association of California (MISAC) (November 2019)
- "Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting" from the Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) (April 2020)

# WATER QUALITY



**GOAL 1:**  
Provide high  
quality water that  
meets regulatory  
requirements.

## INNOVATIVE FLUSHING PROGRAM DELIVERS WATER-SAVING RESULTS

In July 2019, the Authority launched a new multi-year flushing program. The program utilizes innovative, water-efficient technology to improve water quality by cleaning all 400 miles of pipelines in our service area.

The Authority is the first agency in the region to receive an operating permit by the California State Water Resources Control Board to utilize the new Neutral Output Discharge Elimination System (NO-DES) water-efficient technology for flushing pipelines, which not only saves water, but also has less impact on water service to our customers.

The innovative water-saving flushing program made great progress through our service area in just the first year, completing the City of National City area and moving through nearly a third of the Bonita area. In the City of National City, crews flushed a total of 75.8 miles of pipeline and saved 14.2 million gallons of water.

The flushing program is just one component of our commitment to maintaining long-term water quality, and ensuring every drop of water is clean and safe.



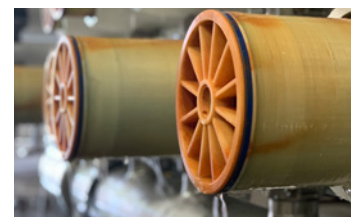
## UPGRADED TREATMENT PLANT INFRASTRUCTURE

At the Authority's Robert A. Perdue Water Treatment Plant, up to 30 million gallons of surface water are processed every day. The treatment process requires the addition of several chemicals to remove suspended solids and inactivate viruses and bacteria. Treatment chemicals are delivered in bulk and stored on-site. In June 2020, the Authority replaced the ferrous chloride tanks that store chemicals used in the pretreatment process. The new tanks have increased storage capacity, and safety features including ladders and railing to help prevent falls and easier to read magnetic site gauges.

## MAINTAINING FILTRATION EFFICIENCY

The Authority's award-winning Richard A. Reynolds Desalination Facility turns salty groundwater into safe drinking water through a process called reverse osmosis (RO). RO membranes are replaced periodically to maintain

efficiency in a system that can treat up to 3.7 billion gallons of water per year. In May 2020, 88 of the lead RO process membranes were replaced to help keep the facility running at maximum capacity.



## COVID-19 RESPONSE: ENSURING TAP WATER SAFETY

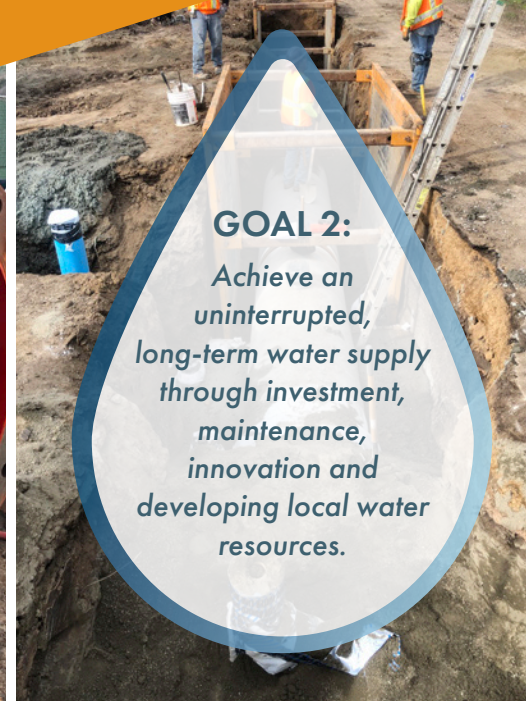
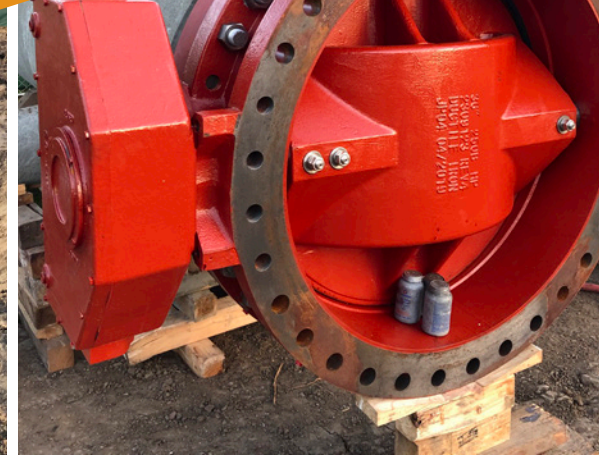
Access to safe drinking water during an emergency is essential, and no more so than when water bottles are flying off the shelves in stores, and the economic crisis impacts household budgets. Fortunately, the coronavirus has had no impact on our drinking water supplies. Thanks to filtration, chlorine disinfection, and other treatment processes, pathogens like viruses and bacteria are eliminated.

During the crisis, the Authority did extensive outreach to reassure customers that their tap water was safe. With a number of other pressing concerns on customers' minds during the crisis, it was important for the Authority to reassure customers that the water at their tap was completely safe to drink and bottled water wasn't necessary.





# SYSTEM & WATER SUPPLY RELIABILITY



**GOAL 2:**  
Achieve an uninterrupted, long-term water supply through investment, maintenance, innovation and developing local water resources.

## 36-INCH PIPELINE REPLACEMENT PROJECT ENSURES LONG-TERM SYSTEM RELIABILITY

The Authority's complex distribution system, which brings water from our sources to your tap, contains 400 miles of pipeline expertly laid out below streets throughout the Authority's 36 square-mile service area. At the center of the system is a 36-inch transmission main. This pipeline connects water sources at Sweetwater Reservoir/Perdue Water Treatment Plant to the Authority's distribution system. The most critical sections of the pipe, some of which are nearly 100 years old, have reached the end of their service life and must be replaced to maintain reliability.

In fiscal year 2019-20, the Authority began replacing those critical sections of pipeline, all located within the Bonita Valley. Staff worked closely with community organizations to communicate anticipated traffic impacts and temporary trail closures during each phase of construction in order to help minimize disruptions.

Once complete, the new transmission main will help ensure water continues to be safely delivered across our service area for at least another 100 years and beyond.



## COVID-19 RESPONSE: ENSURING UNINTERRUPTED WATER SERVICE

Washing hands frequently has been a critical step in stopping the spread of COVID-19, and reliable access to water at the tap has been essential during the pandemic. With families spending more time at home, the Authority quickly reassessed the impact of construction projects on water service.

Since traditionally low-usage hours were no longer applicable, the Authority placed a limit on projects that would affect water service to residential areas, and postponed previously scheduled construction projects that could be deferred without impacting critical components of the Authority's distribution system. This quick action helped ensure customers at home would have safe water every time they turn on the tap.





# FINANCIAL VIABILITY

## GOAL 3:

*Ensure long-term financial viability of the agency through best practices, operational efficiency and maximizing assets.*

## EXPLORING WAYS TO MAXIMIZE AGENCY ASSETS

Under the direction of the Board, in fiscal year 2019-20 the Authority began conducting a feasibility study to explore ways to maximize agency assets, such as Sweetwater Reservoir and Loveland Reservoir, as well as look into new water sources such as recycled water and potable reuse.

In our mission to continually provide safe, reliable water, the Authority regularly explores innovative ways to keep costs down while maintaining operational efficiency and effectiveness.

## FINANCIAL RELIEF FOR CUSTOMERS

The Authority continuously searches for ways to ensure water remains affordable for customers.

In January 2020, the Board announced that by implementing strategic cost-saving measures, the Authority was able to reduce water rates effective January 1<sup>st</sup>, and most customers saw a decrease in their water bill.

Then when the COVID-19 crisis hit, and the financial impacts of the pandemic began to emerge, the Board acted quickly,

and in June 2020 approved additional measures to freeze the Authority's water rates through the end of 2021. These additional measures included use of the rate stabilization reserve previously adopted and funded by Board action.

These cost-saving measures help keep water rates affordable and provide at least a small portion of stability for customers as the community continues to navigate the economic impacts of the pandemic.

## COVID-19 RESPONSE: SUSPENDED DISCONNECTIONS & FLEXIBLE PAYMENT OPTIONS

In support of customers financially affected by the COVID-19 crisis, the Authority suspended disconnection of water service for failure to pay beginning in March 2020. The Authority also expanded payment flexibility, and continues to offer customized payment plans that fit customers' needs and circumstances.

With in-person interactions limited and social distancing restrictions in place, the Authority continued to offer customers the assistance they needed. For the brief time the Authority's lobby was closed in order to ensure public and staff safety, staff continued to assist customers with inquiries over the phone, as well as offer numerous convenient and contact-free ways for customers to pay their bill, including online, over the phone, and at stores they already visit regularly with PayNearMe.





# CUSTOMER SERVICE, CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT & COMMUNITY RELATIONS



## GOAL 4:

Provide high quality customer service based on customer feedback, and serve the community through education, outreach and partnerships.

## EXPANDING CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT

The Board approved formation of the Authority's Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) with the goal of expanding engagement with customers, and providing Board members with an additional channel for community input and feedback. In October 2019, the CAC appointees were formally announced, and took their ceremonial oath.

Committee members and alternates are appointed by Board members. The committee meetings are open to the public.

## INSPIRING THE NEXT GENERATION OF WATER LEADERS

In August 2019, the Authority, Otay Water District, and the Chula Vista Elementary School District officially launched the first-ever Hydro Station at the Authority's award-winning Richard A. Reynolds Desalination Facility. This innovative, STEAM-focused learning site introduces students to the "World of Work", giving them the opportunity to explore exciting careers in water agencies like the Authority that fit with their unique set of professional interests, personal strengths, and values.

Over the course of the year, nearly 3,000 fifth grade students in the Authority's service area visited the Hydro Station, and had a very unique hands-on look into what it takes to do the work Authority employees do every day to deliver safe, reliable water to our customers.



## SUPPORTING LOCAL STUDENTS

The Authority offers mini-grants to schools within our service area to support and enhance water-related curriculum and education. In fiscal year 2019-20, the Authority revamped its mini-grant program in order to make it easier than ever for teachers to access funds and encourage them to seek creative and innovative ways to promote students' understanding of water or the water industry.

Throughout the 2019-2020 school year, the Authority awarded 20 mini-grants to schools and educational organizations within our service area, providing funds for nearly 1,000 students.



## TRUST THE TAP

In an effort to help spread the word about the Authority's safe, affordable and award-winning drinking water throughout the community, the Authority launched an outreach campaign focused on informing the public about our water quality and giving people the opportunity to taste our water for themselves.

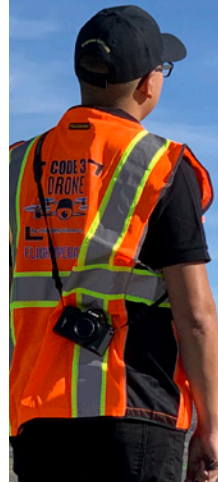
In 2019, the Authority was the official water provider for local community events, including Chula Vista HarborFest and National City's National Night Out, and provided over 1,500 gallons of free drinking water to event attendees. The Authority also launched a pilot water cooler rental program

that enabled event organizers to request free ice-cold water.

While community events in 2020 were canceled, the Authority's tap water campaign pivoted to focus outreach efforts to the members of our community impacted most by the COVID-19 crisis. With the help of our community partners distributing food and other essential supplies to those in need, the Authority produced and distributed materials explaining the safety and value of tap water, an important message for customers as household budgets tightened.



# WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT & CONSTRUCTIVE LABOR RELATIONS



## GOAL 5:

*Attract, retain, and develop a highly skilled, adaptable workforce; equip employees to effectively and safely perform their jobs and prepare for career advancement; and promote constructive labor relations.*

## AUTHORITY'S DRONE PROGRAM TAKES FLIGHT

As part of our mission to provide core services using the best-available technology, in fiscal year 2019-20 the Authority launched its first-ever official drone program. After an intensive eight-week program, which included on the ground and in the air training, seven Authority employees passed a rigorous test to become FAA certified pilots. Equipped with the skills and knowledge to fly drones for the Authority, these pilots will allow

the Authority to quickly and cost-effectively perform various monitoring, inspection and outreach tasks vital to providing safe, reliable water to customers.

The drone program is another example of how the Authority is always looking for new ways to improve and streamline operations and use technology to better serve our customers.



## COVID-19 RESPONSE: PROVIDING ESSENTIAL SERVICE IN A PANDEMIC

Authority employees are dedicated to serving our community. As the crisis began to unfold in March 2020, the Authority made swift decisions to limit in-person interactions, adjust staffing, and increase work-from-home capabilities in order to protect the health and safety of both the

public and employees. Despite constantly evolving restrictions and requirements put forth during the COVID-19 crisis, as essential service providers employees continued to work hard to provide the safe, reliable water the community relies on.

## CONNECTING WITH OUR COMMUNITY DURING CRISIS

As the impacts of the pandemic began to be felt across our community, Authority employees launched a voluntary giving campaign to support Community Through Hope, a local nonprofit distributing food to those most in need in the South Bay.

In just a few short weeks, employees raised nearly \$3,000, providing nutrition

for approximately 50 families in the community.

The Authority not only provides an essential service to our community, but in times of crisis, we are proud to have employees who come together to help support our neighbors in need.



## GOOD FAITH NEGOTIATIONS

In May 2020, the Board approved several cost-saving measures in response to the financial impacts caused by the COVID-19 crisis. Included in these measures was a proposal by employees to temporarily halt existing contract negotiations and extend labor agreements for one year, thereby waiving their annual cost of living adjustment.

With this extension, the Board and employees continue to show a commitment to supporting the community we serve.



# ADMINISTRATIVE EFFECTIVENESS

## expanding opportunities for local businesses

### GOAL 6:

*Provide efficient and effective administrative systems and procedures in accordance with best management practices.*

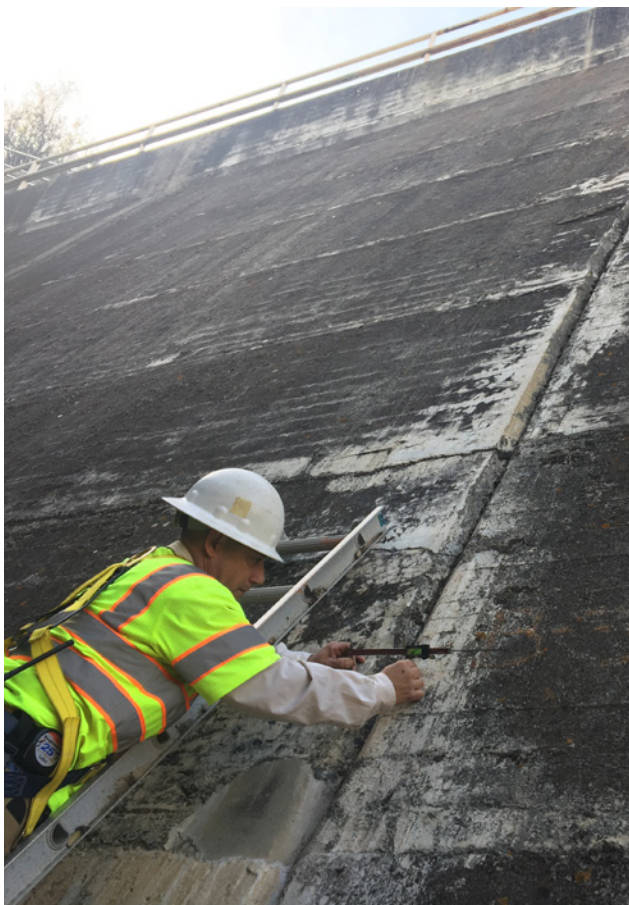
### NEW POLICIES SUPPORT LOCAL BUSINESSES

Doing business with the Authority is easier than ever for local companies, thanks to the Board's new policy of preferential purchasing for local businesses approved in June 2020. The Authority currently contracts with vendors for over 80 specific services, supplies or equipment types, and the policy change helps increase local business participation in agency contracts.

The new policy directed staff to engage the local vendor

community through a newly created vendor webpage and online form where interested businesses can submit their information to be included in the Authority's vendor database.

This policy change reflects the Board's compelling interest in supporting economic stability within the Authority's service area of National City, Chula Vista and Bonita, by increasing participation of local businesses in agency contracts.



### PREPARED FOR EMERGENCIES

In the last fiscal year, the Authority reviewed, updated, and completed a number of critical emergency preparedness plans that help protect our infrastructure, employees and customers in the event of natural hazards, security threats, and public health crises.

*Emergency Response & Recovery Plan* - Updated in December 2019, the Authority's Emergency Response & Recovery Plan includes plans and procedures that can be implemented in the event of an emergency that threatens our ability to deliver safe drinking water.

*Risk Resilience Assessment (RRA)* - Completed in March 2020, this assessment is required by the 2018 America Water Infrastructure Act and identifies the Authority's assets and the risk to these assets from natural hazards like earthquakes, floods, etc., and intentional hazards like cyber sabotage and physical security threats.

*Sweetwater Main Dam Emergency Action Plan* - Revised in fiscal year 2019-20, this plan identifies potential emergency conditions at the Sweetwater Main Dam and the surrounding areas, and specifies actions to be followed to protect lives and reduce property damage in the event of an emergency.

*Pandemic Response Plan* - In March 2020, the Authority developed a Pandemic Response Plan to ensure continuity of water service in the event of a pandemic, and to protect the health and safety of Authority employees and our community based on recommendations made by federal, state, and local health agencies.



# ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

## GOAL 7:

*Provide core services while maintaining a balanced approach to human and environmental needs.*

## COMMITTED TO PROTECTING NEIGHBORING NATURAL HABITATS

As stewards of the natural habitat and watershed, the Authority works hard to monitor and maintain three active habitat mitigation areas at Sweetwater Reservoir – the Sweetwater Reservoir Habitat Management Program (125 acres), the Skelton Habitat Mitigation Area (22 acres), and the Vernal Pool and Otay Tarplant Mitigation Area (20 acres). In each of these areas we actively monitor and protect the sensitive habitats of endangered species and protected vegetation.

The Authority is committed to protect and manage the watershed and natural habitat resources in an efficient and cost-effective way. By doing so, the Authority continues to meet project environmental compliance, and demonstrates staff ingenuity to self-mitigate project impacts and minimize project costs, and helps us maintain a balanced approach to meeting both human and environmental needs.

## PRESERVING SENSITIVE HABITATS



The Authority is committed to the protection and management of natural resources on our lands, and we have established policies and programs, such as habitat restoration and management, to ensure we comply with existing environmental laws and regulations.

During this fiscal year, the Authority completed major trail modifications surrounding Sweetwater Reservoir in order to protect the natural vernal pool habitat of the endangered San Diego Fairy Shrimp. The Authority completed a reroute of the trail that completely avoids the sensitive habitat. Authority staff then decommissioned the original trail segment to reclaim and preserve the area as a natural habitat for the fairy shrimp.

## PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES



The Authority's Sustainability Action Plan provides a framework for establishing and tracking initiatives that help reduce consumption and increase energy and resource conservation. Many of these initiatives are designed to encourage staff to adopt a more sustainable mindset and lifestyle.

This fiscal year the Authority completed a number of new initiatives targeted at helping employees reduce waste and conserve energy, including reducing paper towel waste, encouraging staff to safely dispose of batteries and old electronics, and installing energy efficient LED lighting.



## COVID-19 RESPONSE: OFFERING RESOURCES WHEN EVERY PENNY COUNTS

As households around our community saw the financial impacts of the COVID-19 crisis start to add up, the Authority continued to offer and promote cost-saving resources and rebates to customers. The Authority's popular Fix A Leak rebate program – an incentive program designed to help customers reduce water waste - was extended past its normal month-long run to allow customers to apply for the rebate from March through May. At the end of the program, 14 customers applied for the rebate, with more than 50% of the applications submitted during the special extension period.





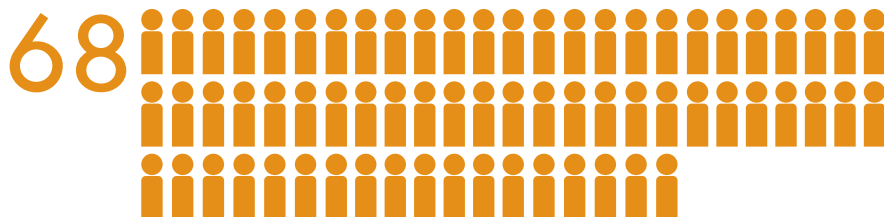
## WORKING FOR YOUR WATER

Authority employees are water industry leaders and innovators who are dedicated to providing all customers with water 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. As each drop of water makes its journey from the Authority's reservoirs or desalination facility, through transmission pipelines and finally out through our 36 square-mile service area, there are more than 130 people working every day and around the clock to ensure that when you turn on the tap, your water is clean, safe and reliable.

### CERTIFIED EXPERTS

Authority employees are experts in their field, with the majority holding at least one professional certification specific to the water industry.

#### WATER DISTRIBUTION OPERATORS



#### WATER TREATMENT OPERATORS



#### PROFESSIONAL ENGINEERS



#### FAA UAS REMOTE PILOTS



#### CROSS-CONNECTION CONTROL SPECIALISTS



*Want to work in an industry that is essential? Join the team!  
Visit [www.sweetwater.org/jobs](http://www.sweetwater.org/jobs) for current openings & to sign up for job alerts.*

## CUSTOMER RESOURCES

### CONTACT US



#### VISIT

Administrative Office  
505 Garrett Avenue, Chula Vista, CA 91910  
Office Hours: Monday- Friday, 8 am- 5 pm



#### WRITE

Mailing Address  
P.O. Box 2328, Chula Vista, CA 91912



#### CALL

Customer Service: (619) 420-1413  
Construction Information: (619) 409-6850  
Water Efficiency: (619) 409-6779



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