

INDIAN WELLS VALLEY WATER DISTRICT CASH FOR GRASS PROJECT

PROJECT SUMMARY

There is one source of potable water in the Indian Wells Valley (IWV) – an aquifer. It should be noted that the Indian Wells Valley Water District is not the only water producer in the IWV. Others include China Lake Naval Air Weapons Station, Searles Valley Minerals (in Trona), Inyokern and private well owners, both residential and agricultural. Combined usage is about 30,000 acre feet of water annually and Water District customers are responsible for about 29 percent of that total. However, annual recharge to the aquifer is generally estimated to be between 7,000 and 11,000 acre-feet. Water levels are exhibiting a downward trend through time without recovery even as California’s “20 x 2020” is demanding a per capita water use reduction of 20 percent by the year 2020. Water agencies found to be non-compliant with this usage reduction will be deemed ineligible for State or Federal grants and/or other fiscal assistance. Furthermore, the State Water Resources Board has adopted certain mandatory water conservation regulations that require the District to reduce water consumption by 36% compared to June through November 2013 consumption. Therefore, real headway in water efficiency and water conservation is imperative.

Regarding implementation of a “Cash For Grass” program, the Indian Wells Valley Water District Water Management Committee has met and reviewed information assembled by District staff. It is believed that such a program should be expected to achieve measurable results within some reasonable time period. The Committee previously discussed assembling a menu of rebates for retrofitting indoor fixtures but this approach is not recommended for several reasons. Unlike many older urban areas, Ridgecrest has relatively newer housing stock that already utilizes more efficient plumbing fixtures required by building codes in effect in recent years. It would be necessary to engage a consultant to survey and assess the potential for indoor retrofits, since staff does not have a reasonable estimate for that. On the other hand, the potential for converting living turf to more efficient desert-appropriate landscape – or Xeriscape – is readily apparent just by observing Ridgecrest. Aside from water thrifty beautification and compliance with California law, one major benefit of a “Cash For Grass” program is that the resultant yard conversions are very public. This creates interest by other residents to investigate what is often referred to as “landscape for the 21st Century” or “sustainable landscape.” Research compiled by Mojave Water Agency and the Southern Nevada Water Authority (SNWA) indicates there is a significant “bandwagon effect.”

A program of this nature requires adequate financial incentive to produce enough living turf conversion to substantially reduce water usage in the Indian Wells Valley. In the past, SNWA has paid as much as \$2.50 per square foot of turf. IWVWD believes that \$1.00 per square foot of turf up to \$2,000.00 reimbursement is an attractive buy-back price.

According to a five-year, multi-million-dollar study conducted by the SNWA, grass in a similar desert environment to ours requires 73 gallons of water per square foot per year to thrive while Xeriscape only needs 17 gallons per square foot – a significant savings. With the average conversion in that study hovering at about 1,000 square feet, each completed retrofit would save about 56,000 gallons of water annually – and would continue to do so as long as the conversion remained in place.

This project does not benefit a disadvantaged community (DAC).

The status of this project is “shovel ready” and is expected to be started in June 2015. It does not require CEQA, NEPA, permitting, approvals, etc.

The Indian Wells Valley Water District is in compliance with the following regulations, as applicable:

- Urban Water Management Plan
- CASGEM

Agricultural Water Management Plans and Surface Water Diverters are not applicable. The Indian Wells Valley Water District is a medium-priority basin and will require a Groundwater Management Plan. This plan is not due for several years, however, the District is currently preparing for it.

The District is not submitting multiple projects.

The IWVWD project can be phased over several years by allowing a certain number of conversions per year.

The IWVWD has not received Prop 84 planning or implementation funding in previous rounds.

BUDGET

Category	Requested Grant Amount	Cost Share: Non-State Fund Source	Cost Share: Other State Fund Source	Total Cost
(a) Direct Project Administration	\$100,000	\$92,500	\$0	\$192,500
→ Proposal preparation				
(b) Land Purchase/Easement	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
(c) Planning/Design/Engineering/Environmental Documentation	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
(d) Construction/Implementation	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
(e) Grand Total	\$100,000	\$92,500	\$0	\$192,500

TIMELINE

DATE	ACTIVITY
6/1/15	Cash for Grass applications due
6/5/15	Rank received applications “lottery” style
6/8/15	Contact applicants to schedule pre-inspection
6/8/15-6/30/16	Conduct pre-inspections
6/8/15-6/30/16	Conduct post-inspections
6/8/15-6/30/16	Approve conversions and issue reimbursement checks