

Dean Norton ([00:00:00](#)):

You wanna be able to address them across different disciplines. So thank you for joining us here to engage and to share in your perspectives about these important topics. And again, I wanna thank the entire team with Fest the voice of San Diego USD's, political Science Department in International relations, and also a, a college faculty member who teaches occasionally who has also been a strong supporter. And she's a member of my college Board of Advisors. You may know her, Mary Mackenzie. So I just wanna thank her as well for her contribution. So there you go. Thank you.

Scott Lewis ([00:00:40](#)):

Thank you so much. Thank you, Dean Norton. Thank you so much. This year we've, we've had a, a sponsor from them for for a while, a partnership with them for a while. But this year it, it took another level, what we were some of the pioneers in the news industry. We weren't the first online news organization. We weren't the first nonprofit news organization, but we were the first to combine those for a local area. And now there are about 300, 330 or so nonprofit news organizations across the country, all of whom took our lead on that, and we're super proud of, of that accomplishment. Thank you. Some of them have taken steps and grown well past what we've been able to achieve, and now they've taught us a thing or two, and one of those organizations that's leading and creating something special for the whole state of California. In that same model is Cal Matters, and I'm pleased to welcome the c e o of Cal Matters. Neil Chase.

Neil Chase ([00:01:48](#)):

Scott, thank you. I I was gonna start off not by talking about Cal Matters, but by sharing what you just said about this organization, voice of San Diego. You know, you, you know it as your local news organization. What you may not understand is a little bit of what Scott just said around the country, around this whole industry voice of San Diego is where it all started. Right? And not only that, but because Voice of San Diego was one of the very first organizations to do this kind of journalism, they actually had to spin out another group, an industry trade group that now has like 500 members that helps everybody else figure out how to do that. That grew outta this organization, too. And a lot of what we've done at Cal Matters, we've learned from Voice of San Diego. So we're grateful to you and the

Neil Chase ([00:02:24](#)):

Folks who started this organization, and the, the Good Partnership, Cal Matters is an eight year old organization. So just a child compared to voice. We're based in Sacramento. We have people all, all over the state. And we were formed eight years ago to fill the gap in coverage about the state government, right? We in California, we're so passionate about the place we're from. When somebody asks you where you're from, you probably don't say California, you probably say San Diego, right? We talk about our baseball teams, we talk about the, all of us stealing water from each other, which is a great topic today of conversation, right? But there is a unification financially, at least and legally of this giant state of California, bigger than most countries, that a lot of folks don't think about the connection between all these different issues. And so, Cal Matters cover state government.

Neil Chase ([00:03:10](#)):

We work very closely with Voice and a lot of other organizations to make sure that coverage gets to people who will find it useful. This idea of non-profit journalism, you know, years ago, the advertising business paid for journalism. That's not true anymore. That's why we so much have to rely on you to support voice, to support Cal Matters, to support most of the news organizations that you're gonna see

growing and thriving in the coming decades. And so, you being here today is really important to Voice of San Diego. Really important to us at Cal Matters. It's a wonderful partnership, and we're thrilled to do it with you.

Scott Lewis ([00:03:43](#)):

Thanks, Neil. He didn't mention it, but one thing we're working on together is does anybody remember the Sacramento Report? Yeah. it's been a couple years now since the Sacramento Report ran. We are bringing it back in partnership with Cal Matters. Lopez, our managing editor, is on the team helping hire that position for Cal Matters. And it's gonna be a really special, I think, addition. And a just a great example about how joining forces we can get something special done. So thank you, Neil. Appreciate it. So I, I was convinced not I had one job for this event, and that was to get somebody to come sing the national anthem. And I kept getting putting it at the bottom of my to-do list and never got to it. I even got so point to the point yesterday where I posted on Twitter, did anybody know how to sing?

Scott Lewis ([00:04:34](#)):

And one guy's like, well, my Aunt Beth does. Yeah. Okay. Thank you, <laugh>. So we're not gonna do it, but I'm gonna do a little pitch for the spirit of it. So, I had somebody tell me the other day, like, this is odd that you call it politics. I have friends that say like, oh, your little festival of politics, huh? And they're like, it's, it's odd that you call this politics 'cause it's like policy and it's water. And, you know, these aren't things that some people associate with politics, right? They think I think a lot of people, unfortunately, have an image in their mind of politics as, you know, two people on Fox News or M S N B C debating something horrific, like policies on the border, or just, you know cruel solutions that they should be yes or no on, or just really debased understanding of, of, of the issue at hand.

Scott Lewis ([00:05:26](#)):

And I think what politics really means is that it's a system, some sort of effort where we try to solve this problem of how we share power, how we work together without violence, right? If you, if let's talk about, for instance, the next panel after the first one in this room is the Colorado River. How do we share the Colorado River? Well, without politics, without the rule of law, that underscore that underlies everything that allows us to have politics, we would solve how to share the Colorado River through a violent means, right? We would see who has the biggest guns, and we would make that happen. Politics allows us to share power, to share interests, and to make things peaceful and to compromise and come to a solution based on the popular will of the people. Politics is special. Politics is beautiful.

Scott Lewis ([00:06:24](#)):

I think a lot of people say, ah, he's just playing politics as though it's an insult. Everything is political because everything, at least we hope, is being settled through peaceful compromise and the sharing of power. And that's what politics is. And so the next time you hear somebody say like, ah, he's just a politician, or She's just trying to play politics, or they're just involved in a, in a political game, everything should be a political game because the alternative is horrific. And we see it play out in many other countries where, where it's actually the point of the gun that makes these decisions as opposed to the ballot box, as opposed to angry fights at city Council, as opposed to some of these difficult decisions and compromises that we have to make. And that's what today's meant to, to celebrate. Everything is politics, and that's okay, and we should celebrate it. And I just think like that's the spirit of what this country helped innovate, and that's the spirit of the national anthem. And everybody let's celebrate politics, huh?

Scott Lewis ([00:07:27](#)):

So in case you're not familiar with Voice of San Diego anybody, not <laugh>, this is our core group, I think. We are a nonprofit news organization dedicated to holding public officials accountable the information and to provide information you need to make good decisions for social progress and good governance. We are dependent last year, more than 70% of our funds to make this possible, to pay all our reporters to do everything. Like this was made possible by individuals who supported Voice of San Diego more than 70%. That's an achievement I'm really proud of. We didn't get any national funding. No major grants like that. It's all just individuals now. There's a bunch of local foundations and supporters that make it possible still, but all of you who support Voice San Diego, thank you so much. I really appreciate it.

Scott Lewis ([00:08:21](#)):

And just a shout out to our sponsors this year, thanks to the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of San Diego and Dean Norton. It really is special what you've done for us and for the community. Our, our thanks as well to A R A A R P. It's their second year getting support for them for this wonderful event. Thank you. A A R P Burnham Center for Community Advancement, the San Diego County Water Authority, the San Diego Foundation. By the way, the Water Authority Support Supporting Voice San Diego is wonderful. Thank you so much. Not something I ever pictured. This, the Atlantis Group California American Water, Cox Communications, San Diego Housing Federation, Burnham Moore Center for Real Estate at USD's NOS Center for, or School for Business, planned Parenthood, TKI Development, climate Action Campaign, Novo Brewing, and our partner K P B S. Thank you so much. We have a wonderful series of discussion. Yes, thank you.

Scott Lewis ([00:09:17](#)):

I think one of the biggest complaints I get about ESS is that there's always more sessions than people can fit in, and they wish that they saw everything we're gonna do. Our better best job yet of, of repurposing a lot of these insights around, there's about six student journalists who are taking notes at each place. And I gave 'em a little quick lesson on acts of journalism. So I'm excited to see that we will do a lot of content after this. Stories about what was said, what happened. So we'll do our best to keep up. So you, if you miss a panel, you can follow up later. The Colorado River panel after this first one has a couple, I think, interesting changes. The the Nevada representative of the Water effort there, couldn't make it because of the fog. But I think there's gonna be some great discussions still there. And I'm excited to see what happens. So let's see. I think that's it. Thank you all for attending, and I hope you have a wonderful day.

Scott Lewis ([00:10:24](#)):

We'll begin this session in now.

Speaker 4 ([00:10:37](#)):

She said I was supposed to do that, so maybe just, I'll just introduce you, or did you just or do the q and a thing? Yeah, do the q a. Just note the sponsors again. I'll in the, you guys have known each other well, right? Yeah. We all used to argue. How, how we just, we just go with a yes. Yeah.

Speaker 5 ([00:12:05](#)):

Well, just John. And, and his mirror is not here. He's the speaker who couldn't really get VY instead for

Andrea Lopez-Villafaña ([00:12:11](#)):

This one.

Speaker 5 ([00:12:13](#)):

John Scott knows. Oh, okay. You'll introduce, yeah. We were supposed to do you some waters. Yes, there is no worries. If you're ready, you're great. Ready? No bottle for me.

Andrea Lopez-Villafaña ([00:12:43](#)):

Yeah, sorry. They can do that. No, I have to deliver bottled water. Good morning, everyone. Hi. How's everyone doing? Welcome to Politifest 2023. I am so glad you guys made it out. My name is Andrea. I'm the managing editor at Voice of San Diego. I'll let a couple of you get settled, Scott, pretty much said my piece. But I'd just like to add additional recognition to our sponsors for today. Thank you to the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of San Diego for being our partner for the sixth year. And special thanks to A A R P Be Center for Community Advancement, the San Diego Counter Water Authority, the San Diego Foundation, Atlantis, California American Water, Cox, the San Diego Housing Federation, burning Moore Center for Real Estate at USD's NOS School of Business, planned Parenthood, his Ski Development, climate Action Campaign, Nova Brewing, and our media partner, K P B S. Woo. That's a lot of supporters. It's good.

Speaker 5 ([00:14:01](#)):

That's

Andrea Lopez-Villafaña ([00:14:01](#)):

Always good. <Laugh>. Thank you everyone. If you're unable to attend any of our sessions, some of them will be live streamed. And as Scott mentioned earlier, we'll be doing our best to repurpose a lot of the content from today onto our website. So you can visit that@bsd.org, and you can submit questions during the panel. I will be flagging those for Scott. If you've downloaded the Cvent app. I'm just gonna pause the directions here. You'll just click on Polus 2023, find your current panel, and then scroll down to live q and a. And now I will introduce our fearless leader and c e o and editor-in-chief of Voice of San Diego, Scott Lewis.

Speaker 5 ([00:14:48](#)):

Thank you.

Scott Lewis ([00:14:51](#)):

How about Lopez? Huh? I'm a big fan of Lopez. She's brought up well, welcome everybody. So, I, I I moved to San Diego in 2003 in the spring, and I had just given up jobs. I've followed my wife who was in the Navy. I felt like I was lost with my career. Like I didn't know what was going on. And I got a job at the Daily Transcript to cover water and housing, and I thought it was it, I thought it was just awful <laugh>. I thought I'd hit the low. I thought I, I, you know, how was I ever gonna get into exciting things again? I had no idea what a gift I had been given. And it, it soon occurred to me that I was involved in something special as I started to cover a deal that the San Diego County Water Authority, the Imperial Irrigation District, the Metropolitan Water District, and the co Coachella Valley district were putting together what would become the biggest deal in, in Southern California, in California, water history.

Scott Lewis ([00:15:57](#)):

The quantification settlement agreement. I took the train up to Metropolitan Water District, the train the station right there opens up to the tower where Met is housed. I went in, I watched them vote on this, and it was special. It was a really, I could tell that it was a special occasion. Since then, it's been now 20 years and now we're hosting an event about water and housing. And and I'm, I feel like it's come full circle, and I feel real really proud that I've been able to watch things this, this whole time. What makes that deal so special in, in my opinion, is that it it truly was a historic transformation. These groups all fought a lot, and then they had to become partners. They still occasionally squabble a little bit, right? Just a little bit.

Scott Lewis ([00:16:49](#)):

But they were forced to become partners after truly a political effort to figure out a compromise about their, their various interests. And, and the concern over the Colorado River, am I, let me, I'm gonna do an explanation. All of these folks know all of this much better than I do, so I'll ask 'em to, to correct it. But the quantification settlement agreement just put most simply quantified how much water the California and the Imperial Irrigation District was gonna take from the Colorado River Fair. And that quantification was huge, because it meant that for the first time in a long time, California would take its actual allocation from the Colorado River that it was that it, it had a historical right to, from the quote, law of the River Fair. I'm doing all right here. Okay. but it, that had a lot of interesting angles too.

Scott Lewis ([00:17:41](#)):

And the, one of the biggest parts of this discussion in this deal was that a lot of the water that Imperial Irrigation District was going to save or conserve would be transferred to the County Water Authority to San Diego, in effect, a massive transfer of water from the farm farmers in Imperial Valley to the urban you know, businesses and users in San Diego. Now, they didn't actually transfer the water like in trains across the desert but they did effectively make that transfer in the world of, of data and law about the Colorado River. And that was a special one. They also agreed to line the canals, which saved a lot of water, and that excess water was also transferred over. And in order to make that transfer possible, they had to make an agreement with the Metropolitan Water District, which does actually transfer the water over.

Scott Lewis ([00:18:41](#)):

And and, and that was a source of a lot of negotiation and discussion for, for quite some time, right. 10 years, they negotiated. But there were some, there were some consequences and in some cases some things that we're gonna still have to deal with. And I think Michael speaks for one of those interests as the I guess the representative on this panel of the Salton Sea. So what, what year was it when the Salton Sea flooded? 1904 or some, so 1904, they, they couldn't control the water outta the Cal River River. It all goes into the Salton Sea and creates this lake, which is a very special place for a lot of habitat. It was replenished over time by the runoff from the, from the farms. But as the farms become more conser efficient, then less water goes into that lake. The salinity of the lake goes up, it dries up, and it creates an environmental catastrophe. Could be an environmental catastrophe. So there's a lot going on here. So, first on my left at the end, there's Daniel denim. He's the new general manager of the San Diego County Water Authority. Welcome, Dan. Appreciate

Dan Denham ([00:19:52](#)):

It. Thank you. Thank you for having me.

Scott Lewis ([00:19:53](#)):

And then to my immediate left is Tina Shields. She's the water manager at the Imperial Irrigation District. You worked on the quantification settlement agreement, right? Which was five <laugh>.

Tina Shields ([00:20:04](#)):

Yeah, I've worked on it for 20 plus years. Yeah.

Scott Lewis ([00:20:07](#)):

Before

Tina Shields ([00:20:08](#)):

It was a quantification settlement agreement.

Scott Lewis ([00:20:09](#)):

What was it before? Just like a deal of the transfer water. Well,

Tina Shields ([00:20:12](#)):

We started transferring water with Metropolitan in 1989 mm-hmm. <Affirmative> through our initial conservation program. So that was sort of a har of things to come.

Scott Lewis ([00:20:20](#)):

Okay. And then to my right, I'm so excited to have from LA again on this stage, just to have everybody here is, is a really special, kind of historic thing. And to my right is Adele Haj kil. He is the new not new, but sort of new general manager and c e o at the Metropolitan Water District. Welcome, sir. Thank you

Dan Denham ([00:20:38](#)):

For having me.

Scott Lewis ([00:20:39](#)):

Yeah, thank you. And then, like I said, Michael Cohen senior associate at the Pacific Institute is gonna be the kind of voice of the Salton Sea in this, because it truly is a major interest in this entire situation. And if its interests aren't represented we're gonna have a lot of problems throughout the imperial valley and throughout California. I think. So, welcome, Michael.

Michael Cohen ([00:20:59](#)):

Thanks very much for having me as well. And I would, well, I guess I'll elaborate later, but argue that the s Salt and Sea was critical to the, to the first metropolitan deal, Uhhuh <affirmative> and then held up the San Diego deal for, what, seven years, right? The, they were first San Diego first proposed in '96, so how to address the Psalm Sea, and then we're continuing to grapple with that. Yeah.

Scott Lewis ([00:21:19](#)):

So glad

Michael Cohen ([00:21:20](#)):

To be here. Well,

Scott Lewis ([00:21:21](#)):

Tina, tell me since you were involved in those discussions and negotiations, what is the biggest, why, why should we care about the, the quantification settlement agreement 20 years later? What did it do and what is it still doing, in your opinion?

Tina Shields ([00:21:36](#)):

So, I think we look back and we think about all we've been through to get here, because it's been a little bit of a wild ride, particularly at the beginning. And next Tuesday is actually the 20th anniversary of the execution of all of the agreements. But where we are now, we think is a really good partnership between ag and urban areas. We supply water that shores up the water supply reliability for much of the state in Southern California. And there's financial supplements to the Imperial Irrigation District. So we can work with our farmers to upgrade our conveyance system and to allow them to implement more expensive conservation measures. So when you talked about the big part of quantification was sort of putting a cap on California, we had been using water that belonged to other states that hadn't fully developed their entitlements.

Tina Shields ([00:22:24](#)):

And we were sort of put on notice, Hey, California, stop using that extra water. And it had been filling that metropolitan's pipeline so perfectly legal uses. But it was time to go on a little bit of a diet. But the other part of the, the Q S A was the settlement part. There was a lot of adverse actions as we tried to facilitate the San Diego transfer, and there were complications with how the water rights system works within California. So there was really a need to not only cap the district's use, so you could measure the conservation from, but to settle all these outstanding disputes so that we could move forward in implementation.

Scott Lewis ([00:23:02](#)):

So Dan as we've talked about, the transfer of water from the farmers to the urban area is a key part of this. The title of this, of this discussion, we called was it a Good Deal? So just this last month, the, the city of San Diego had to raise water rates what will be effectively 20% over the next two years. The mayors in, in explaining to his constituents why that was happening, said it was because of the high cost of imported water, of which this is a con contributing factor. In your opinion, was it a good deal that the, that rate payers in San Diego should be still proud of?

Michael Cohen ([00:23:43](#)):

Yeah absolutely.

Speaker 10 ([00:23:44](#)):

I, I, I think it was a good deal. It still is, is a good deal. I, I mean, if you think about it, you, you had willing buyers, willing sellers, right? And, and a wow <laugh> <laugh> and and I think a real concern for, for the environment. And I, I think that that's a big piece of it that, you know, Michael hit on. But if you look at the cost of, of what we pay for the trans, hold a little closer. If, if you look at the cost of what we pay for the transfer water right now you know, you, you cannot get that water, any new water at that rate at this point in time. We're talking about reuse, decel, things of that nature. So long term I know early on in the transfer it was viewed as overpaying in, in many ways. But I think that that's stabilized. And, and it's



gotten to a point where it, it not only provides certainty for the San Diego region, but certainly for the Imperial Valley in terms of revenue source and funds for conservation. Mm-Hmm. <Affirmative>,

Scott Lewis ([00:24:42](#)):

Adel, let's go to you. So you represented the, you had to be involved because you, you Imperial Valley gets its water kind of directly from the river metropolitan, pioneered with the mules and everything, way back, wind to get the pump over the hill and into into the greater LA and San Diego area. So you had to be involved in any kind of transfer, because that's, those are your pipes, those are your canals. As Met looks at this, do you, does it look like a, a deal that was something to be proud of?

Adel Hagekhalil ([00:25:16](#)):

Yeah, I think, I think the folks that got involved in the Q S A should be applauded, because I think it's about partnerships. I think Tina mentioned it, and many talked about it, and Dan talked about it. We were in a place where we had to cut our use by 800,000 acre feet. And met was a junior water rights holder. And the whole issue is, if you really look at the priority of the river, we would have to take the entire head. And, and, and the urban Committee, 90 million people that we serve would have suffered from that.

Adel Hagekhalil ([00:25:51](#)):

And so, by us working together and quantifying how much each gets, but building the relationships with our ag partners to conserve water, to help us reduce and live within our share, but then partner to invest in conservation, invest in following, invest in what we need to do to allow us to move water. We cut our water used by 400,000 acre feet. We've done conservation. We invested billions in both local programs for reused local programs for conservation. We've done a lot to do that. I mean, our water used today is the same as it was 40 years ago. Our consumption of water is 40% less, half of it is locally sourced. But I think the start of the Q S A was able to bring parties together and figure out how we gonna live within our means, but do it in a collaboration and partnership.

Adel Hagekhalil ([00:26:49](#)):

We're still doing it right now. I mean, we just did a partnership with Bard Water District. We did a partnership precinct with the <inaudible> Tribe. We did a partnership with the Palo Verde Irrigation District. And the beginning, we did it with i i d what it tells me right now, what we did back then was a great learning. It was successful. And, you know, we had issues, and I know we've learned a lot from it. We continued to work. When I came in, I had to settle a lawsuit with, with I I d and, and give you some, you know, storage in in, in Lake Mead. But we also learned that we need to store water. And that was a new thing that came right after the, the Q Q S A in 2007. We had to come up with the intentionally created storage. That was a big change to us, and that helped us, because when we have water, we wanna store it. When we conserve, we wanna store it. So when we have bad days, we can use it. And, and, you know, it has saved us a lot. Mm-Hmm.

Scott Lewis ([00:27:50](#)):

<Affirmative>. Well Michael, help us understand why we should care about the Salton Sea. So talk about what's at stake there, and then what's the impact been over the last 20 years to the sea, or to the efforts to, to save it?

Michael Cohen ([00:28:08](#)):



So this is a big question. So I've been working on the Salton Sea for 25 years, and I'm gonna try to condense this in the next, I guess, two minutes,

Scott Lewis ([00:28:15](#)):

One and a half, if you could. No,

Michael Cohen ([00:28:17](#)):

I'm, one minute. I got a minute. So as I mentioned before, the Salton Sea was the crux of the initial agreement. So in fact, back in 1976, there was a hurricane raising the elevation of the Salton Sea by about a foot, which led to some of Tina's farmers suing the district and leading to a decision by the State Water Board decision 1600, saying that there was unreasonable water use in, in the district. E D F Tom Graff put out a report saying, here's an opportunity for efficiency based transfers, which led to the first transfer with Metropolitan back in 89. Just

Scott Lewis ([00:28:50](#)):

To clarify, you're saying the Salton Sea had too much water,

Michael Cohen ([00:28:53](#)):

So the Salton Sea was rising. So you mentioned Salton Sea Colorado River went back to its old terminus, right? The, the river before we got in there, meandered. And the Salton Sea is part of the natural terminus of the Colorado River. In fact, the Upper Gulf of California, that's where the Colorado River used to end. River doesn't really flow, doesn't reach the sea doesn't reach the ocean anymore. But essentially, the Grand Canyon carved out by the Colorado River filled up the upper trough, the end of the upper Gulf of California, all the way, almost up to, to Ella. So that's all sediment. So when you're walking on the Salton Sea, or the, the shoreline, that's Grand Canyon sediment that you're walking on. So the river used to meander. We built dams, we built we hardened the channel. The river doesn't meander anymore, but back in 1905, it forced its way back.

Michael Cohen ([00:29:44](#)):

There was whatever, an engineering mistake, and the river went back to where it would've gone. Anyway, so it filled back up. And over time, we've seen multiple iterations. This might take me more than 30 seconds, multiple iterations of Lake Coia used to be called the Salton Sea, is what it's there now. But that's, and there's this conception of the Salton Sea is this artificial water body, but there used to be water bodies that are periodically over centuries, over millennia. So it filled back up and then it started dry up again, because they put the river back in this artificial channel. But then i, I d started irrigating and irrigating more and more on the river. Went through the fields, over the fields and refilled the, the Salton Sea. So it was starting to go up and back in the fifties and sixties, it was a major destination, right?

Michael Cohen ([00:30:32](#)):

Frank Sinatra and the Rat Pack and others were out there. There was water skiing, and a lot of resorts were built out there, and it was a major destination. But then the, the sea continued to rise because there's more irrigation. They started double cropping. Triple cropping in Imperial Valley became much more agricultural powerhouse. So the Salton Sea rose and flooded out some of that resort areas also got saltier. And then there was these hurricanes that came through. And Kathleen, in particular, in 76, the sea went up almost a foot. And some of the farmers that were farming the very productive land adjacent to the Salton Sea, found their lands inundated. So they went through this court process, and

then E D F and Tom Graff said, Hey, here's an opportunity to solidify water rights for Metropolitan, for how many people were back then.

Michael Cohen ([00:31:21](#)):

But fewer than now. And Metropolitan started investing in, in lining canals and increasing the efficiency of water delivery. And then San Diego late eighties, early nineties, there was an yet another California drought and San Diego got cut, what they felt disproportionately and thought we need to secure our own water supply. But the question then was and people knew that efficiency meant less water flowing to the Salton Sea. And the Salton Sea is a major stopover on the Pacific Flyway. More than 400 different species of birds use the Salton Sea in the environs. It was a major breeding ground. White pelicans, brown Pelicans used to, to breed their huge numbers of eared greaves and other shorebirds ducks. Huge numbers of birds, often counting the millions of birds could be found at the Salton Sea. So it was a huge environmental resource.

Michael Cohen ([00:32:14](#)):

But the other major challenge is air quality. So air quality in the Coachella Valley and Imperial Valley does not meet state and federal standards. And the recognition back then was, as the Salton Sea shrinks, lake beds gonna get exposed, and dust is gonna blow off that lake bed, and that's gonna exacerbate an already bad situation. So here's this weird disparity between, I mean, we're looking around this campus or San Diego, or certainly not all of Metropolitan's service area, but many portions of it, quite wealthy. But you go down to Imperial Valley or Eastern Coachella Valley, and these are very disadvantaged communities, disproportionately Hispanic. So we're seeing essentially a resource taken away, water being shipped away from a poor area to a rich area to provide water supply reliability. And I, I, I would say you guys haven't mentioned that enough, but quick tangent here.

Michael Cohen ([00:33:09](#)):

Sorry. so last year 7 million people in, in the Metropolitan Water Service District faced much more severe drought restrictions because they did not have access to Colorado River Water. And Metropolitan is working right now to, to remedy that, to create, enter into, and move that water around to protect those, that 7 million people. But that water supply reliability was directly felt by those 7 million people who had additional water restrictions. So that, to my mind, is the, the key point of the Q S A is it is water supply reliability in a, in a region that's increasingly drowned. Finishing up here, so the, the Salton Sea was a sticking point because both ecological resources, but particularly this concern about public health and the shrinking Salton Sea, and it's 50 miles, 50 square miles smaller now than it was 20 years ago when the Q S A was signed.

Michael Cohen ([00:34:00](#)):

That's the size of Chula Vista, right? It's dramatically smaller than it was. Not all of that is exposing, is emitting dust, but it's emitting a lot of dust. So it's a public health threat to, there's some 650,000 people in the Airshed. So those people are feeling the brunt of this. The downside of the, the Q S A is the ecological threat or the ecological harm that's being felt. The salinity's already double what it was 20 years ago. And directly the, the threats to public health, to the people, particularly the people who live adjacent to the Salt Sea.

Adel Hagekhalil ([00:34:32](#)):

Yeah. Let's talk, let's talk to Dan. Lemme just say something about what, what Michael said is, for the Q S A to happen, we had to deal with the Salt Sea, and the state stepped in, right, and help us. But also, right now, we all recently with funding was being discussed at the federal level. We all stepped in and wrote letters and supported more investment at the federal level to invest in consultancy, because we all agree that we need to make sure the solution is done in a way that's a holistic approach, right? You can't just benefit one for the harm of another. Right? And that's something I believe in, and that's why I wear the spend that we are one, and I talk about providing safe, reliable water for all with no one left behind. And that's a, a, a huge thing for us at Metropolitan.

Adel Hagekhalil ([00:35:22](#)):

Now, affordability also is, is big, because also we have communities in metropolitan that actually are disadvantaged as we have in other places in San Diego, in, you know, our service area. And we need to make sure is, is that how we can invest in the future that doesn't bankrupt people and doesn't put 'em in a place. And, and we are working through it as part of the climate adaptation work we're doing in Metropolitan to plan for the next hundred years, but also how we pay for the investments in a way that can move us forward. Yeah.

Scott Lewis ([00:35:54](#)):

I, I, I encourage you all, there was a, a satellite picture taken yesterday of California. It was so clear, it was one of the clearest satellite pictures ever taken of California. And you can see the Colorado River, and you can see the green of the Imperial Valley and how it flows into the Salton Sea. And you can just see this ancient riverbed in, in, you know, in a real stark way, if you know what you're looking at with that process. But Dan, I wanna ask you, so I think just to put a point on what Michael said, you, you've saved, we've, we've conserved water in the Imperial Valley, but a lot of that has been at the cost of the Salton Sea and its replenishment and the ecological and, and public health problems with that. And people are suffering in some ways because of that. But on the other side San Diego was protected more than almost any other community in Southern California. Some from some recent concerns about water availability and drought. And that's a, there's a direct relationship there. Is that something we should feel bad about? Or what, what are we, how should we understand it?

Speaker 10 ([00:37:02](#)):

As far as the San Diego and the Salton Sea? That relationship, I think is kind of what you're getting at. You know, I, I think that, that the state of California stepped in at the last minute, 2002 to backstop is, is the word that we've used a lot of times for the Salton Sea and, and provide funding that has, has been, you know not, not as much as, as was originally anticipated. But you know, I, I, I think that there, there's two part two, two parts to this. The Q ss a, the water transfer it can't be completely blamed for things that are occurring naturally out in a, in a natural desert community. There is absolutely an impact as a result of the water transfers, but it's not all of it. I mean, the 50 square miles that, that Michael references some of that, you know, is not admissive dust, right?

Speaker 10 ([00:37:57](#)):

And, and quite frankly, I think we're all pretty lucky that, that it's not, and the community out there that would suffer from, from the 50 or so square miles of, of, of Admissive Playa is, is in better shape because of some of the funding I think that's been provided. So in terms of the, the, the San Diego community feeling that, you know, we've, we've sort of benefited absolutely we have. There's, I, I think there's no

way around that. But we continue to work with the Valley with our partners and we're looking for solutions.

Scott Lewis ([00:38:29](#)):

Can we drive this home? We've talked now twice about the money that the state and others have provided to go in there. What is that literally doing? Maybe Michael, like what are they creating wetlands? Tina,

Tina Shields ([00:38:41](#)):

So I could talk a little bit to that, and I don't wanna be too Pollyannish because we live there and the other people don't. So we have white out dust storms that we didn't used to have where we can't even see down the block. And I've grown up and lived in the valley my entire life. We never had that. I don't think it's all transfer related, but certainly our community has to deal with the impacts. And then when coupled with poverty and limited access to healthcare really exacerbates a lot of the local issues. But the state of California did step up, that's probably a generous term. I, I d twice voted the deal down because we had concerns about the Salton Sea, and we didn't want our community to be saddled with that responsibility. So there was legislation passed by the state of California on two parts for the state to be a little proactive and have a restoration responsibility at the sea.

Tina Shields ([00:39:30](#)):

But there was also mitigation funding put up by all of the water agencies. And when that funding runs out, the state of California is a signatory to the contract that requires them to fund the supplemental efforts. So the more they do now on a proactive basis for restoration, the less they have to do as a mitigation when you're trying to chase the problem. They've taken a significant amount of funding. Their, their premier project right now is called the Species Conservation Habitat Project, and it's about a 4,000 acre berm area with water from six inches to 10 feet deep. They will be reestablishing the fishery, which was lost in the last year or two because the salinity level of the Salton sea has gotten so high, more than twice of the ocean. And the fish basically can't breed there except where the drain outflows are running into the system.

Tina Shields ([00:40:21](#)):

So they'll be populating that once you get the fish back, then the birds will start to come because that's their restaurant, and that's how they make things go. We also recently I I d has a lot of land ownership down there because of the historical flooding. And we recently executed an amendment on some of those leases so that the state can essentially double the size of that conservation project. And so there will be wetlands totaling over 8,000 acres. There's been a natural occurrence of, as the sea has receded, we've got about 30,000 acres of exposed shoreline. Now that's this potential dust concern that we're trying to put dust control projects on. But the state of California stepping up with that restoration responsibility, they're a little late. They should have started about 15 years ago. There was some mitigation water that was provided so the state could come up with a plan, and they did what people do best, which is kick the can for later on <laugh>. But when we threatened to turn the water off in a drought a couple years ago and took the state sort of back to water court with the state board, they did step up and come up, not only with funding, but a plan. There's a long-term restoration study being conducted now by the Army Corps to figure out how to make the pieces of the puzzle work and ensure

Adel Hagekhalil ([00:41:34](#)):

A long-term state

Adel Hagekhalil ([00:41:35](#)):

Presence down there. And the shift on the relationship that Dan and, and Tina was talking about in the beginning of this year, we had representative from the board in San Diego County Water Authority, the chair of the board I believe in, in, in i l d and my chair of Metropolitan Water, distant and representative. We went to DC together the first time you see all of us at the same room talking, advocating for public health and, and also taking care of the community there, we actually reached out to the Secretary of the Health and Human Services and others. So you're seeing a huge shift now because I think we want to take care of the community. That's what water is so for, is you need to take care of people. And, and we believe that the Salt Sea and the community there has to be taken care of, and we advocated all of us together for that kind of investment from the federal government. Yeah.

Scott Lewis ([00:42:23](#)):

Just a shout to everybody who's watching this online. Thank you for joining us. I know there's people throughout Southern California and beyond. So thank you, Michael. Before we leave the Salton Sea

Adel Hagekhalil ([00:42:32](#)):

Itself,

Scott Lewis ([00:42:32](#)):

The topic, obviously we could spend the whole time talking about it, but I, I still can't quite grasp how you save a lake that's drying up without just giving it more water. How does that literally work? Can you, can it happen that it can survive without an infusion of, of water?

Michael Cohen ([00:42:52](#)):

So this, this is the classic question which often hangs up conversations about the Salton Sea, and the, it boils down to what does restoration mean? And we grappled with that, back in 2005 to 2007 was the, the state had this process to look at it and couldn't really decide what restoration meant to we bringing it to some previous historic level. But to my mind it's not bringing the Salton Sea back to some particular elevation. It's we're storing the ecosystem function and protecting public health. Those are the two main objectives here. And the upside is that although there's 250,000 acre feet or so less water flowing with the Salton Sea right now, it's still a million acre feet. That's a staggering amount of water that's more than double what San Diego County uses per year. So even if that goes down under another 300,000 acre feet, that's still 700,000 acre feet.

Michael Cohen ([00:43:46](#)):

So the idea is to optimize the use of that water. You capture it, and you spread it around, just like Tina was talking about. The State's first real project is to build a, a series of berms around the New river, capture that water, spread it out, and we can expand that, doing a lot more shallow cheaper berms. Again, spreading the water out on the landscape, which prevents dust. And we know back in 2006 to 2010, the Bureau of Reclamation and U S G S built a, a 100 acre pilot project that did that and had more than 200 different species of birds that are in a very small area with the listed desert pish in there. So we know it works. You capture the water, you spread it out and then you're gonna have a very different Salton sea. And ultimately what it's gonna look like is, like down in South San Diego Bay, you have a series of salt ponds.

Michael Cohen ([00:44:33](#)):

So think of those as a variety of different salt gradients which will provide habitat for different species or different guilds of birds. And then in the center, you would have a brine sink. So the, you would have water flow through there. You prevent some water quality problems that way. The middle becomes essentially a inert body of water, but collects all the salt, because the biggest challenge with some of these plans to import water from other places is what do you do with the salt? Yeah. And it's 4 million tons per year of salt flowing in. So there's more than 450 million tons of salt in the salt the sea. Where do you put it Right to, to desalinate that water, which some people talk about. You're talking about I think I measured this once. It's like six square miles of salt, a yard deep every year. It's a sta again, scale that the Salton Sea is, is hard to grapple with, but the amount of salt that you would have to deal with is, is staggering. So that, to my mind, the natural solution here is let gravity take that salt down. You have an inert brine pool at the bottom, capture the water on the edges. You have good habitat and you suppress dust on the edges. And then you're gonna have to do more of the projects that i d is doing with dust suppression in, in the dry areas. So

Tina Shields ([00:45:41](#)):

One of the challenges, you can't mitigate a water transfer with water or else you've just canceled Yeah.

Scott Lewis ([00:45:46](#)):

Everything

Tina Shields ([00:45:46](#)):

Out. So it is gonna be crucial for a lot of these air quality projects to find dust solutions that are waterless. So there's a lot of innovative going on. Our staff is responsible for implementing some dust mitigation projects. We're taking farm technology. We're tilling the field, we're chunking up that soil where it's conducive to these types of projects, interrupting the air flow and letting those sediments drop out on the areas that don't have water. There's a lot of sand dunes to the west, which are frankly one of the biggest contributing to the air quality problems in Imperial Valley. But as that playa recedes, and as you have all this exposed shoreline that's sandpaper and it's just scouring that playa. So we've sunk some wells. We're trying to see if we can get some of that saline groundwater, and we collect seeds from the native habitat. The state has also put a lot of hay bales out there, which is interesting. But to the extent that it holds down the dust so that those communities aren't further at risk, that's really our goal is preventing these problems. Hmm.

Scott Lewis ([00:46:44](#)):

Well, let's let's go back to the deal. So the, the deal had this massive transfer, and part of it was a, a big payment that you began making to the the San Diego began making to the Imperial County Imperial Irrigation District. You at the, the, the makers of the deal thought that it would create a whole market of water transfers like this, that other people would see how that worked, would figure out other ways that farms could conserve and, and urban areas could buy it. And the, the San Diego in particular thought that that would trigger a new market for water in a way. It, it actually didn't. Why do you think that is Dan?

Speaker 10 ([00:47:26](#)):

I, I, this transfer is, is so unique. It, it's one of a kind both in terms of the, the scale of it, 200,000 acre feet per year. I, I think if you, if you go back to 95, I mean the original m o U for the transfer was 500,000

acre feet worth of water. It eventually got down to 300 before we went to the state water board. And, and of course now it's at two.

Scott Lewis (00:47:48):

Can we put that in perspective? How much is 200,000 acre feet of water?

Speaker 10 (00:47:53):

It's, it's, it's enough for roughly the city of San Diego, I would say. Yeah. It's, it's quite a bit of water. You know, in, in terms of the, the, the total water that the water authority gets from the transfer of 200 plus 2 77 7, it's very close to what the Southern Nevada Water Authority uses their, their allotment of Colorado River Water. So, not insignificant at all. But back to the, the water transfer market, I, I mean, I, I still am hopeful that we can get there. I think being able to use our resources, being able to use Metropolitan's distribution system and distribution systems, quite frankly, up and down the state of California in Arizona, Nevada, I mean, lake Lake Mead really is and should be the clearing house for water transfers, water for the environment has been very successful.

Speaker 10 (00:48:40):

Michael could probably speak to that all day. But you know, I, I think if we get there we have the ability to, to move our resources and develop some flexibility. I mean, we've, we've been at this, this 200,000 acre foot transfer for 20 years now. This was something that we had in mind back in, in 2003. Same thing with the exchange agreement with Metropolitan. If we have the ability to create some flexibility and offload some of that water or, or transfer it to another party while, while still retaining the, the rights to Imperial Metropolitan's rights, I think that's a benefit for all of California.

Scott Lewis (00:49:18):

Let's talk about that for a second. So the, a lot of this is the origin, a lot, not all of it obviously had, there's multiple origin stories I think, of this deal, but a lot of it does come from the, the kind of panic that this region experienced in the mid nineties when there was a drought. And Metropolitan threatened and executed some restrictions on water and threatened much more during that period. And it's, it's almost like San Diego collectively realized how precarious our position at the end of this pipe or canal really was. And everything since then, this transfer the investment in desal, the investment in local storage, the, the discussion going forward, all these costs that rate payers in San Diego have incurred are all about sort of dealing with that panic and, and changing the dynamics. So we don't feel so vulnerable in those moments. But it has just collectively added a, a tremendous amount of, of cost to rate payers and to the community. But it also had, with it a very tense relationship, particularly between Metropolitan, what

Speaker 10 (00:50:25):

Are you talking about? No,

Scott Lewis (00:50:26):

It was all good. Yeah. <laugh>. Yeah. I, my, the first 10, 15 years of my water watching career was about mitigating or dealing with, with the fight between, in particular these two agencies. So to have you both up here, fist bumping is pretty rad. But but so tell me what, what happened to that relationship all of you described when we talked earlier, that you, you went from adversaries to partners because of this deal, but in particular these two agencies, the Metropolitan Water District and the San Diego County



Water Authority are now in a, in a state of partnership. That kind of boggles my mind, what, what happens since the panic of the mid nineties to now that that's, that this fist bump is even possible.

Speaker 10 ([00:51:10](#)):

You know, Adele I, I think it's the realization of, of our, our two agencies having to work together at, of course, staff level. I, I think that at staff level, we, we have always been on the same page, San Diego County Water Authority, metropolitan staff wise broader politics I think got us sideways in some form. And of course, there's a financial component to all of this, right? I mean, you, you don't just initiate litigation, just, you know, to, to destroy reputations and whatnot. Well, some might, but that wasn't the intent of it all. So I, I, I do think that in hard times, you, you've gotta find a way to, to come together. And I think that that's what we've done at least in the past couple of years. Sure.

Adel Hagekhalil ([00:51:53](#)):

I mean, I mean, when I came to Metropolitan, one of the things I wanted to do is we can't move forward. I mean, what make Metropolitan great is it's a co-op. It's, it's about the 26 member agencies and how we work together and, and, and collaborate and, and what we, you know, what happened in 1990? I can't, you know, speak to what happened then. But we just went through, I think Michael talked about last year when we had 6 million people in the western part of our region suffering almost the same, that they had zero allocation from the state water project. We couldn't get them water from the Colorado River, but then the Colorado River was shrinking. Dominic Valley Lake, which was amazing. Investments and resiliency was shrinking. We couldn't get water to them, and they had to cut 40% of the water use. Right. And to me, what that, hold

Scott Lewis ([00:52:44](#)):

On. What areas are we talking about?

Adel Hagekhalil ([00:52:46](#)):

It's Los Virgins CAAs la upper San Gabriel three Valleys and few others. How

Scott Lewis ([00:52:52](#)):

Bad would it have gotten if the rains hadn't come?

Adel Hagekhalil ([00:52:55](#)):

It would've been really bad because in April last year, we are projecting that we were not gonna have enough water for everyone. Because we had zero allocation, and then we were talking about going back to the same allocation across the entire service area,

Adel Hagekhalil ([00:53:10](#)):

But people were able to reduce by 40%. They were not happy about it. And that, for us, opened the door for us to start thinking, all right, how can we build the future resiliency as a co-op, as a metropolitan? That's what we're doing. The climate adaptation master planning effort underway right now is about looking for how are we gonna build the infrastructure of the future? How are we gonna build the storage of the future? How are we gonna build the local water supply conservation that we're gonna need to do? We've done a great work, you know, 40% of the water you know, has been reduced because of conservation. You know, 40%, I mean, almost half the water we import from Colorado Rivers

because of conservation. But right now we're looking at how we pay for it too, in a fair way. So what San Diego has done and what Dan, what Dan just talked about, it's gonna be part of the discussion on the business model.

Adel Hagekhalil ([00:54:02](#)):

If somebody has surplus water in our member agencies because they created more water, can that be part of the regional solution? Now, can we move to somebody like Kayas Las Virgin that needs the water when they need it? Can we build the infrastructure to move water back and forth to deal with the climate whiplash when we have dry conditions, we can move it from storage, different parts of the system, but when we have a lot of water that we're having right now, can we move the water and store it everywhere in the system and the infrastructure right now is limiting. We need to have infrastructure connected in San Diego with Orange County. Can we build the system to do that? All these things are on the table at Metropolitan, and I think we learned a lot from the 1990s and learned a lot of, I think the, the Q S A actually helped us think in a collaborative way how we're gonna work together.

Speaker 10 ([00:54:51](#)):

So Scott, bringing it back to your question about the water transfer market, right? That that's essentially what a AADE is describing. And I think that what we embarked upon in the nineties and, and those cutbacks on the verge of 50% in the San Diego region, that is in fact what, what Adele and, and the Met Service area were facing. So, fast forward 20 years, maybe now is the time for that wave of thinking that the water transfer sort of market based approach to water. But

Tina Shields ([00:55:18](#)):

We have to clarify, we're not just cutting our order and having met divert the water. We are actively conserving that water on efficiency based conservation. We're investing in canal linings and reservoirs and changing the way we order water for the last a hundred years, and allowing our farmers to have funding so they can convert from flood irrigation to drip, to linear move to sprinkler systems, to continue to have that productive farm ground that our economy is based off of our economy. Imperial Valley is very different, and we don't have another water supply. So I appreciate all these big infrastructure projects, but we have one canal that goes 82 miles to the Colorado River, and if you take that away, we're all gonna be moving up here. Mm-Hmm.

Adel Hagekhalil ([00:56:00](#)):

<Affirmative>

Tina Shields ([00:56:01](#)):

If we can afford to, because that's our reality is we have to take that funding, which has been very beneficial to allow our farmers to implement these technologies and to do good things. And then, you know, our sort of consequential effect is the Salton Sea. So the more we do to become more efficient and create these waters, and I'm not sure Imperial Valley is a big believer in water markets. We're in a, we're a big believer in protecting our community and investing in our community, which is has its own challenges. Well,

Scott Lewis ([00:56:30](#)):

Let me ask you about, so they're, they're talking about transferring water and all this, and the resiliency that, that San Diego had, they're talking about that because of the water that Imperial County gave up,

transferred, sold. In fact, they're, they're talking about the surplus water they could transfer because it's your water. It's not yours. But how does that make you feel? Like, does it like, oh, maybe we should have done that, or

Tina Shields ([00:56:55](#)):

It is our community's water and, and that's what we as a public agency really try to protect. But when you have as much water as we have, and you have as few people politically, you know, you have a huge target on your back. And so we view a lot of these conservation programs as defensive water transfers. We voted it down a couple times and we're very popular. And every single board member that voted for this transfer was then unelected at the next election. That's the local consequences. It's very personal. In Imperial Valley, we're all, if not related, connected is there through the last a hundred years. Right. And so, you know, it's, it's a, it's a local challenge to get these agreements to move forward. We acknowledge there's larger problems on the horizon with the river from climate change and from drought. And certainly since it's the Colorado River is our only water supply, we can't just sit back and do nothing.

Tina Shields ([00:57:44](#)):

But these, this act of conservation is hard. We're conserving 16% of our water supply on an annual basis, a half million acre feet. It's not just transfers to San Diego. We have a hundred thousand acre feet to metropolitan. We have close to a hundred thousand acre feet to the Coachella area, which has other water supplies. And so it's really about protecting our community and our longer term interests and using that funding to invest in that long-term water supply reliability and farming and food security for the rest of the country. If you're eating lettuce in December, it's coming from Imperial Valley.

Scott Lewis ([00:58:19](#)):

Let me ask you, this deal provides a tremendous amount of money to the Imperial Irrigation District and subsidizes a lot. What's about, what's going on? But I imagine that's a good and kind of uncomfortable thing sometimes. Is this a deal that Imperial Irrigation District would like to continue into perpetuity?

Tina Shields ([00:58:42](#)):

Well, we'll, we'll ask our board then a few years. <Laugh> <laugh>. I, I think it's a challenge because we do have these consequential effects, maybe other areas it's easier, but on a daily basis, our growers are out there, you know, trying to make less water work and still grow a crop to feed your families and their families. And it's a very integrated community. We have folks that have been there that their great grandparents helped build the canals that brought the water to our community. And so we have this double-edged sword of trying to become more efficient and continue to grow more with, with less water and still sustain that longevity and that sort of rural community aspect. So, so it's a challenge to,

Adel Hagekhalil ([00:59:24](#)):

To me, I mean, I, I know there's a whole interest is that Imperial is on their own. They're not. We're all together. California is together. And I think there is a whole there partnership now. We all support farming. We all support farming and responsible farming. We, we all also support taking care of their community. I've seen what happens to communities when you take their livelihood away behind every farm. There's a lot of people, you know, working. And so I think what you see in the Colorado River Board, I know the chair is here, of the board. We're all working together as California, and I want to say is by us conserving water in Southern California. We were able to put 20 feet of water in Lake Mead to

help. Right now we're use using less water than before. When we get the state water project water for us, we can actually put more water in Lake Mead to help people like, you know, imperial the same way. But when we create recycled water locally in our region,

Tina Shields ([01:00:23](#)):

That's

Adel Hagekhalil ([01:00:23](#)):

Gonna help the entire watershed on the Colorado River. So there's nobody alone. And I, and I think this is the old school of, of if you are winning, I'm losing. That doesn't work. We all have to be this together. I mean, if we do this together, the, the Salt Sea will be great communities in the imperial irrigation will, will survive and thrive. San Diego will thrive. And people, I mean, this is the future. Mm-Hmm. <Affirmative>. And we can't do it alone. We all have to be in this together collaborating. And I wanna expand this beyond just California. I know there's partners here on the Colorado River. I know, I know Brenda's here and others. It's about the entire watershed in the Colorado River and the country of Mexico and the tribes. I think we can do this together without leaving people behind. And that's what I feel. Let me Michael, finish that point, but I I don't wanna forget my thought for Tina too. Go ahead.

Michael Cohen ([01:01:17](#)):

So I, I just wanna point out the underlying theme here, which is that there's been a, a dramatic shift over the past 20 years. 20 years ago, they were all thinking about, we need more supply. We need, we've got a growing populations, we've got growing economies, we need more water. And San Diego is reaching out to increase its water supply at the expense of i d metropolitan was looking around and was entering to a number of deals to, to get additional supply. But what we've seen is that demand has decreased dramatically. So I think last year your board chair said 40% decline in 30 years in San Diego County Water Authority, something similar. Yes. In Metropolitan as well. San Diego 1990, I think the, or maybe it was in 2000. The annual report projected that a couple years ago, your water supply, your demand was going to increase from something like 500,000 acre feet to almost 800,000 acre feet. This year it's what, 440,000 acre feet? There's been a a 28% decline in water demand in your service area, which is thanks to you guys for using less water. So there's been this portfolio

Adel Hagekhalil ([01:02:19](#)):

Approach. Appreciate that. Yeah.

Michael Cohen ([01:02:21](#)):

Towards, towards water supply, which is now thinking about a range of different, different solutions. And conservation is key in that, because if your service areas, if you people hadn't been decreasing your demand, there would've been dramatic cuts, massive rationing throughout the service area.

Scott Lewis ([01:02:39](#)):

I think that that comes up a lot. People are like, well, we can't add more housing 'cause we, we don't have the water for it. We have added so much population, so much housing, and used less water in that period since then. But Tina, I'm not gonna let you away from this real quick. <Laugh>, the, you said it would be up to your board to decide whether to continue this sort of transfer and sale. What would keep your board from being thrown off if they make another deal like that? What are they worried about? What are the politics there?

Tina Shields ([01:03:08](#)):

Well, I think politics are, one thing I have to say, and I do appreciate Adela Michael's comments. I think we had a tenuous start. I mean, the whole San Diego transfer deal started with a bunch of people coming down and buying land and i i d and they were gonna steal the water. And then it sort of worked its way into a partnership with

Scott Lewis ([01:03:25](#)):

Guns or

Tina Shields ([01:03:26](#)):

No, by following land and, and allowing it to be left unused and available for other users. But that didn't work. Well, they didn't, turns out their attorneys weren't that great

Scott Lewis ([01:03:36](#)):

<Laugh>.

Tina Shields ([01:03:37](#)):

But I think to the extent that we rural areas see the conservation efforts in the urban areas and we see the sacrifices being made, we see the lower per capita water uses, that makes it easier for us to go work with our farmers and help them conserve water because we see that we're not sort of taking one for the team so that other folks can have really nice lawns and swimming pools and sort of the accoutrements that we don't necessarily have in our community. So the more we're sort of all in this together and frankly, droughts, forge relationships with folks because you have to come to the table and you have to put aside whatever your biases are and whatever your previous perspectives were, because you have to get deals done. We've done a lot of partnerships with Metropolitan on Storage over the years and continued to work with San Diego. And now we have new crises that we're facing on the river and, and how do we make that work and make sure that while there are beneficiaries, there aren't losers to the deal. And I think that's what we've done the last 20 years.

Scott Lewis ([01:04:39](#)):

So Dan we did this transfer, we did the desalination. We've added so much infrastructure, so much capacity so much water. And I know that that's come at a tremendous cost to our rate payers that we're all dealing with. And one of the answers to that question that you've introduced is, we could get investment now because of what we've built here. Maybe other entities would want to invest in our desal plant. Maybe other entities would wanna invest in our, in our connection through i i d that we've made to the Colorado River and maybe alleviate some of that. Is that, is that real? Is that that something that rate payers could hope for?

Speaker 10 ([01:05:20](#)):

I, I think it is. I mean, I, I think that that has to be the future. I, I think that it's a tool that we all possess. It's just the willingness to make it happen. I, I, I think in many ways again, I I go back to the Met distribution system you know, that's infrastructure in place, moving water up and down southern California, that on its face, that's, that makes complete sense. Think about the high runoff years in the Eastern Sierras. We saw this in in 2017. We saw it last year. If, if there's not a parking space for that water, any good water manager should be able to see that it should come down through Mets

infrastructure to San Diego. And instead some of that Colorado River water is left in the river, or, or perhaps it's used for farming in the valley. Right. I mean, I, I think when you start thinking of, of things in that manner, more creative and flexible, I do think there's a future for it.

Scott Lewis ([01:06:14](#)):

Let's end this with a discussion about the future. The next panel is how do we share the Colorado River? And a lot of you have talked about how the quantification settlement agreement that we did here 20 years ago is a model that other states could use to make to make a bigger deal about the future of the Colorado River. 'cause The crisis at the Colorado River is all of this assumes a level of an, an amount of water from the Colorado River that we cannot, with a straight face say, will come from the Colorado River Fair. Right? There's, we all assume, or are built to assume that there's more water from the Colorado River than there will be, especially if climate change wreaks the havoc that we worry about. So I'll start with Michael and come around. Is there is there a way to use what happened here 20 years ago to to talk about the, the whole basin, the Colorado River Basin?

Michael Cohen ([01:07:05](#)):

Well, so this year, i, I d has proposed an additional conservation of 250,000 acre feet as part of this effort to shore up critical elevations at Lake Mead. So for the next couple years, that deal is still on the table waiting for federal funding to come through to, to make that happen. So there's some steps that could be taken, but as Tina mentioned, it's already been 16% cuts

Speaker 10 ([01:07:25](#)):

In

Michael Cohen ([01:07:25](#)):

In the district. So how

Speaker 10 ([01:07:27](#)):

That's gonna occur I

Michael Cohen ([01:07:28](#)):

Think is something that the board is grappling with. And at the Salton Sea, we're wondering what those impacts are gonna be. So that was part of this new \$250 million federal investment contingent on these

Speaker 10 ([01:07:38](#)):

Additional reductions.

Michael Cohen ([01:07:39](#)):

So what we, the good news is that we're seeing additional federal interest in the Salton Sea, which I think is critical to moving these

Speaker 10 ([01:07:45](#)):

Additional reductions forward. Because

Michael Cohen ([01:07:47](#)):

Absent that, again, the people north and south of the sea feel those impacts most directly. So getting that federal investment, we've laid out some ways that you can address the problems that the Salton Sea build really good habitat there. So

Speaker 10 ([01:07:59](#)):

I think that's, that's a

Michael Cohen ([01:08:00](#)):

Good foundation to move forward.

Speaker 10 ([01:08:02](#)):

But we need to

Michael Cohen ([01:08:02](#)):

Think about what those impacts are gonna be. And really one of the sticking points at the Salton Sea has been how are you gonna maintain that? What's the operations and maintenance

Speaker 10 ([01:08:10](#)):

Funding going forward? So there's

Michael Cohen ([01:08:11](#)):

Funding for capital projects, but the state is still grappling with how to maintain those projects in the future. So that potentially is a federal funding source or some other funding source can, can make that happen. But we're, we're seeing some progress. And I think there, there's opportunities there, whether it's at the scale of the reductions needed on the Colorado River Yeah. Remains to be seen.

Adel Hagekhalil ([01:08:32](#)):

I'll, I'll, this is probably something that we all need to learn from and every state needs to figure out how to quantify and create this partnership between AG and, and, and urban. You know, we shared a lot with the urban communities and what we've done is actually entered into an M O U with all of the urban communities in the Colorado watershed to use water efficiently. And I said that publicly one time I was down in Santa Fe, I said, doesn't give anybody the right to waste water, even if you had the rights for that water. Right. Nobody should waste it. And, and, and in metropolitan we've done amazing work in investing. Billions in investing in conservation. We just partnered with N R D C and he bay to co-sponsor a bill AB 1572 Laura Friedman's bill about non-functional turf. And it's at the governance desk to sign potentially in Metropolitan Service area if we replace non-functional turf turf that only the person mowing it is using is using it, it can save 300,000 acre feet of water that we can store and help everyone.

Adel Hagekhalil ([01:09:38](#)):

That partnership happens. We're building the largest recycled water project in the country at Pure Water, Southern California. And we're looking at partnering with LA to make it even double that to 300 million gallons, 300,000 acre feet a year. But also it's, the partnership has to go beyond just our local area. That's why we are on, on the project, on Pure Water SoCal. We're partnering with Arizona and Nevada on how we do it together and the future as we negotiate, look at that post 2026, we negotiate cuts. And I, I'm gonna keep saying it's not just cuts, it's about solutions. We can't just keep cutting,



cutting, cutting. It's about what are the solution to create partnerships across the watershed. And I'll, I want to use a term that I want keep challenging, and I just used it the other day. We talk about our reservoirs of water to store water.

Adel Hagekhalil ([01:10:32](#)):

I'm gonna challenge that the federal money would run away soon. We're not gonna be able to get more money. This is a, a lifeline that we got. But I would say, can we create the reservoir of money? Reservoir of money where the 40 million people across the Colorado River watershed with the country of Mexico can contribute to reservoir of funding. We all agree that now we find ways how we invest across the entire watershed to make a sustainable everyone ag urban environment and, and, and tribes. So we need to think differently. We need to take the blinders off this thing about me versus you cannot work anymore. You see that happening? You know, you saw the news, the

Speaker 10 ([01:11:13](#)):

Six states versus California and it was like, we're not gonna jeopardize the priority system, but we can work with it and work around it. So that's the collaboration we're doing. And I think we need to do it because time is not on our side. I'll tell you, a few years from now, you're gonna say, we need to do something more. And I think it's on us, all of us, right? Payers, environmentalists, community, business, water leaders, legislators, we all have to come together and get it done.

Scott Lewis ([01:11:40](#)):

Thank you. Couple last time.

Tina Shields ([01:11:43](#)):

So I'm glad we're recording this. And we have these partnerships that will continue into the future. 'cause It is gonna be tough. When Adele talked about 300,000 acre feet of savings that can be made, that's 60,000 acres of lettuce, of cantaloupe, of onions, of crops that fill your refrigerators and, you know, healthy food supplies. I think we have a grower that says, I don't grow hot Cheetos. Well, we wanna make sure that we continue to provide those supplies to the nation. We also wanna make sure that we're not following a farm so that other folks can have a really green lawn. And we're gonna face some of these tough challenges moving ahead. It's, it's good. We're at a point in the partnerships where they're mutual and not one-sided. 'cause I think they sort of started off that way. But we really have grown, I think, as agencies and the long-term relationships between staff and management and our elected officials that have created hopefully some new opportunities moving forward because it's not gonna get any easier from a water supply standpoint. And we are gonna be more dependent on one another.

Scott Lewis ([01:12:42](#)):

You have 22 seconds. Okay. I'm kidding.

Speaker 10 ([01:12:44](#)):

I'll be, I'll be quick. It, it, I, I think what, what I inherited at the Water Authority, I've been there 20 years. I've, I've seen how the sausage is made, right? I I, the relationships that that, that I have up here on the stage have been great and I know they're gonna continue. I need to be able to get the water authority or help the water authority evolve, continue to evolve. The transfer agreement, the Canal lining projects the Salton Sea agreements that we have you would think that they're static. That there are 2003

agreements that are only relevant in 2003. There's incredible flexibility within those agreements that we can all work on together to, to bring this to the next level. And I think that, that, that's kind of gonna be my focus going forward. Okay.

Scott Lewis ([01:13:27](#)):

Well folks do me a favor. And when you drive on the eight through the desert, you'll see the All American Canal and you'll see that it's concrete lined. That's a result of this deal. When you fly over and come into San Diego, you'll see the Salton Sea, you'll see the the green part, and then you'll see the desert part right next to it. This is all part of that same system and it's all it's all being affected by this deal and being and, and the whole Colorado River Basin is depending on, on some sort of similar situation. So thank you to everybody who came up. Let's give 'em a ham for getting together on this. Thank you. Stay tuned for the next panel. And Andrea, you got something?

Tina Shields ([01:14:11](#)):

Yeah.

Andrea Lopez-Villafañá ([01:14:11](#)):

Thank you Scott. Great job. Wow. This is why we keep you. Yeah. Thank you for joining us. The next session in this room is the Colorado River. How will states learn to share? That starts at 1115, so you have a couple minutes if you wanna join that one. Thank

Scott Lewis ([01:14:27](#)):

You.

Speaker 12 ([01:14:28](#)):

Thank you. Oh, this one looks like this. Yeah.