



# On the Water Front

May 2022 | A Message from John Balliew, P.E., President/CEO

## Despite short river season, water supply is plentiful

A river drought and a lack of snowpack undoubtedly pose a challenge to El Paso's water supply. For decades, however, El Paso Water has been planning and preparing for a year like 2022 in which we won't receive our full share of Rio Grande water.



June 1 marks a late start to the river season, and we are anticipating a short one. During an abundant season, our community's river water supply is dependent on snowpack from Southern Colorado and Northern New Mexico. The snowmelt flows downstream into Elephant Butte Reservoir, where it is held in storage.

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River water sometimes accounts for half our water supply. But this year, we are due to receive about 16% of our normal season allotment.

### Drought impacts region

El Paso is no stranger to severely reduced river water supply and drought cycles. We endured 2013 – when we received just 16% of our normal river water supply. In recent years, our region has grappled with a now-familiar pattern of a short irrigation season and diminished snowpack within our Rio Grande Watershed Basin.

As we head into another shortened river season this spring, Elephant Butte is near a record low storage. Cyclical droughts have always been a part of our southwestern environment. Diversifying our supply beyond the river and fresh groundwater from the aquifer has served us well.

When river supply is limited, we supplement our water supply by pumping groundwater from our aquifers, relying on our desalination plant, and turning on Lower Valley wells that are specially equipped with desalination technologies.

Our two plants that take in river water – the Robertson/Umbenhauer and Jonathan Rogers – are already at work. The Robertson/Umbenhauer plant is bringing in 2.5 million gallons of water per day pumped from wells in preparation for when river water is received. Jonathan Rogers plant is preparing basins for the start of the season.

### Power in diversification

EPWater possesses other alternative water resources that we can turn to when one resource is limited. For many years, water reuse has been an effective water management strategy, whether using reclaimed water for irrigation of parks, golf courses, a cemetery and industry or treating reclaimed water to drinking water standards to replenish the Hueco Bolson aquifer.



Basins at the Jonathan Rogers Plant will soon take in water from the Rio Grande.

We can also count on our world-renowned Kay Bailey Hutchison Desalination Plant, which has helped us meet our water needs in times of drought or freeze. The world's largest inland desalination plant can produce up to 27.5 million gallons of fresh water per day. Work to expand the plant is underway.

Conservation continues to be an important tool to reduce demand. As always, we will rely on our attentive customers to be prudent as temperatures climb because living in the Chihuahuan Desert means conservation is a way of life. We encourage our customers to water smarter and stick to our time-of-day watering schedule.

Our planning process, looking 50 years into the future, will allow us to thrive well into the future. We will diversify our water sources further to include:

- Advanced Water Purification, which will transform treated wastewater into fresh drinking water. This facility will send purified drinking water straight into the water distribution system.
- Expanded desalination will draw on vast brackish portions of the aquifer, and strategically placed wells will provide a buffer to protect fresh portions of the aquifer.
- Expanded aquifer recharge will allow us to bank a combination of river water, reclaimed water and stormwater in our Hueco aquifer.
- Decades from now, we will import water from the Bone Springs-Victorio Peak aquifer beneath Dell City, while still safeguarding the sustainability of this Hudspeth County farming community.

EPWater is well prepared to take on drought and prove our resiliency by employing our innovative portfolio of water resources to keep taps flowing. I'm proud of our commitment to ensure our community continues to enjoy a sustainable and resilient water supply in our arid region.

Because of years of careful investment and responsibly managing our water sources, EPWater is an industry leader. Customers can trust we have drought-proof, reliable options that enable our community to thrive.



On the Water Front is a publication of El Paso Water. Contact Christina Montoya at 915.594.5596 or [cmontoya@epwater.org](mailto:cmontoya@epwater.org) with any comments or questions.

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