

# City of San Diego's Capacity Rights in the All-American Canal

## BACKGROUND

Over the past 75 years, the City of San Diego (City) has been a partial "owner" of the All-American Canal (AAC) and Imperial Dam (Dam). The story of how San Diego came to have an ownership position in facilities that are more than 100 miles from the City's water system unfolds over decades. Some of the historic decisions are well documented and well understood. Others are not.

Understanding the need for imported water supplies, the City wisely staked a claim for Colorado River (CR) water in the 1920s. The City of San Diego was granted 5th priority water rights of 112,000 acre-feet per year. The plan at the time was to join other water agencies in Arizona and Imperial County to build and maintain the Imperial Dam and AAC. At the terminus of the AAC, the City would build and operate its own aqueduct to transport the Colorado River water to the City's San Vicente Reservoir.

That independent aqueduct was never built. Instead, the emergency demands of World War II resulted in the rerouting of the City's CR water to the Parker Dam and the aqueducts of the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California (MWD) which delivered the water to San Diego's border with Riverside County. The San Diego County Water Authority (SDCWA) was formed to build the connecting aqueducts in San Diego County.

The City assigned its CR water rights to MWD but held onto its capacity rights in the AAC.



Early construction on the All American Canal

- 1931** The City signed the Seven-Party Water Agreement with other California entities wherein the City agreed to a City/County fifth priority share of California's allotment of Colorado River water.
- 1933** The City signed a contract with the Secretary of the Interior entitling the City to a diversion of Colorado River water of 155 cubic feet per second (cfs) (112,000 acre-feet/year) in accordance with the quantity and priority set forth in the Seven-Party Agreement.
- 1934** The City signed a contract with the Secretary of the Interior for construction of diversion and conveyance capacity in the AAC for the City's 155 cfs of Colorado River water.



**1941  
to  
1945**

- United States enters World War II. The presence of the Navy diminishes San Diego's water supply reserve.
- President Roosevelt directs the Navy to build San Diego aqueduct from MWD aqueduct to San Vicente reservoir.
  - SDCWA was formed to facilitate future delivery of the Colorado River water to San Diego County.
  - World War II ends. Navy intends to stop work on San Diego aqueduct.



First delivery of Colorado River water to San Vicente Reservoir in November 1947

**1945** The City and the United States Navy entered into a contract that would accelerate construction of water conveyance facilities to convey water to the City's San Vicente Reservoir. Two supplemental agreements established the City's obligation for payment of the All-American Canal and Imperial Dam facilities.

**1946** The United States, the City and MWD entered into a Merger Contract (SDCWA was also a party to the Contract) articulating the inclusion of the City within the SDCWA and the intention of the SDCWA to be included within MWD and assigning the City's Colorado River entitlements to MWD. City voters approved the transfer of the City's Colorado River rights to MWD in November 1946.

**1947** The City, in light of SDCWA's annexation into MWD, granted, conveyed and assigned to MWD its rights and interests in storage and delivery of Colorado River water. SDCWA and the County of San Diego also executed the 1947 Merger Agreement.

**1947** The first delivery of Colorado River water to San Vicente Reservoir via MWD's San Diego Aqueduct.

**1965  
&  
1971** The City attempted to sell or cancel its capacity rights in the AAC twice in order to terminate its contractual (financial) obligations related to the AAC and Dam.

**1983** The City signs an Operating Agreement with the Imperial Irrigation District (IID), the remaining Imperial Dam Water Users, and the Bureau of Reclamation (USBR) for continued financial support of the AAC and Imperial Dam.

**2005** The International Boundary and Water Commission's (IBWC) Acting Commissioner expresses an interest to the City on the part of Mexico to lease the City's capacity in the AAC. The IBWC requests that the City determine a price for allowing Mexico to wheel its own supply of water via the AAC.

**2006** The USBR verbally relays its finding that the City may transfer its capacity rights in the AAC, according to mutually agreed upon terms.



Aerial view of the All-American Canal