2025 Urban Water Management Plan

Purpose of the Plan

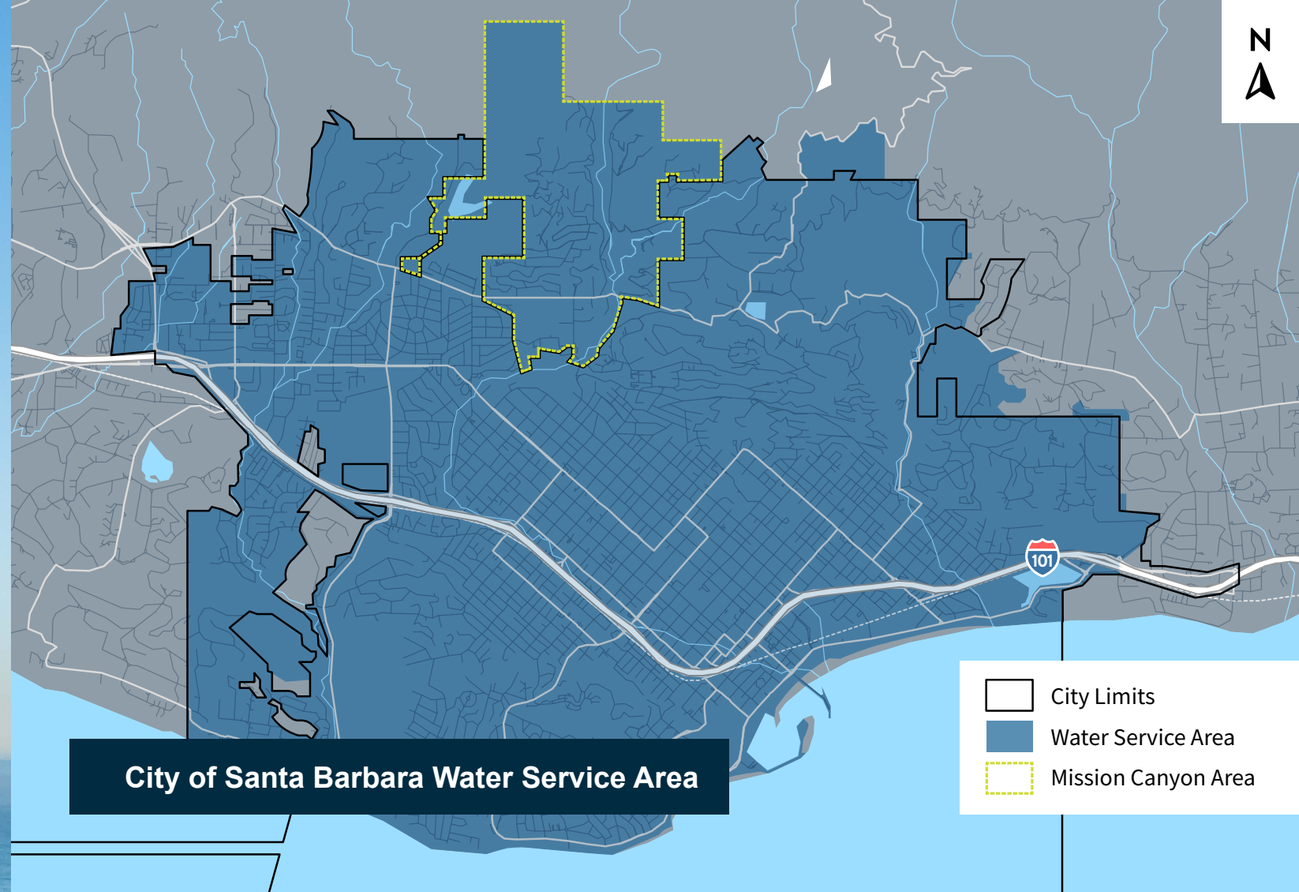
This Urban Water Management Plan (UWMP) provides the California Department of Water Resources with a detailed summary of present and future water resources and demands within the City of Santa Barbara's (City) service area. Specifically, the UWMP provides water supply planning for a 25-year period in five-year increments, identifying water supplies needed to meet future needs out to 2050. The analysis identifies supply reliability under three hydrologic or rainfall conditions: an average (or normal) year, a single-dry year, and multiple-dry years.

The City's guiding water supply planning document is their Long-Term Water Supply Plan (LTWSP), which was updated in 2021 along with their 2020 UWMP. Together these documents are known as the 2020 Enhanced UWMP. This 2025 UWMP is an update to the 2020 Enhanced UWMP, addressing new requirements and regulations while aligning with the City's LTWSP.

Key Takeaways

The City's 2025 UWMP key takeways include:

- The City’s baseline demands are lower than projected in the 2020 EUWMP, reflecting updated population trends and the absence of a post-drought rebound in water use. Demand projections are updated as new data becomes available, consistent with adaptive water supply planning.
- The City’s diversified water supply portfolio—including surface water, desalination, groundwater, recycled water, and imported supplies—provides flexibility and resilience across a wide range of hydrologic conditions.
- The City has sufficient supplies to meet demands through 2050 in a normal, single-dry, and multiple dry-year conditions. In the event of an extended five-year drought, 20% of extraordinary conservation would be required during the fifth year.
- The five-year drought risk assessment shows that, under current assumptions, the City has sufficient supplies to meet demands even if dry conditions persist.
- The City has decades of sustained investment in water efficiency and operation of a successful water conservation program, resulting in a low per capita water use. The City’s current water demand is comparable to levels observed in the 1950s despite population growth.
- The City’s Water Shortage Contingency Plan serves as the operating manual for proactively managing water shortages and reducing the risk of catastrophic service disruptions.



Service Area

The City is a retail water supplier and serves potable water to a population of approximately 93,000 people through more than 26,200 service connections. These include those located within City limits and in adjacent unincorporated areas such as Mission Canyon, shown in the figure above. The City serves primarily residential water uses, followed by commercial, landscape irrigation, and industrial uses. The City also provides wastewater collection and treatment services and recycled water used primarily for outdoor irrigation at City parks and golf courses.

Outreach and Engagement

The City regularly coordinates with multiple agencies who are directly or indirectly involved in the City's water supplies, including:

- ***Cachuma Operation and Maintenance Board (COMB)***, a Joint Powers Authority that operates portions of the Cachuma Project and coordinates with the US Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) on deliveries of Cachuma Project water. Lake Cachuma is the City's main source of water supply. The COMB member agencies include the Carpinteria Valley Water District, Goleta Water District, City of Santa Barbara, Montecito Water District, and Santa Ynez River Water Conservation District-Improvement District No. 1.
- ***Cachuma Conservation and Release Board (CCRB)***, a multi-agency advisory body that coordinates on water conservation, storage, and release decisions related to Lake Cachuma to support regional water supply reliability.
- ***The Santa Barbara County Water Agency***, which administers the Cachuma Project and contracts with Reclamation. The Santa Barbara County Water Agency also conducts investigations and reports on the County's water requirements, groundwater conditions, efficient use of water, and other water supply related technical studies.
- ***The Central Coast Water Authority (CCWA)***, a Joint Powers Authority that manages and operates Santa Barbara County's local facilities for distribution and treatment of State Water. CCWA's member agencies include the City of Santa Maria, City of Guadalupe, City of Buellton, Goleta Water District, City of Santa Barbara, Montecito Water District, Carpinteria Valley Water District, and Santa Ynez River Water Conservation District, Improvement District No. 1, and the following nonmember project participants: La Cumbre Mutual Water Company (LCMWC), Vandenberg Air Force Base, Raytheon Company, and Morehart Land Company.

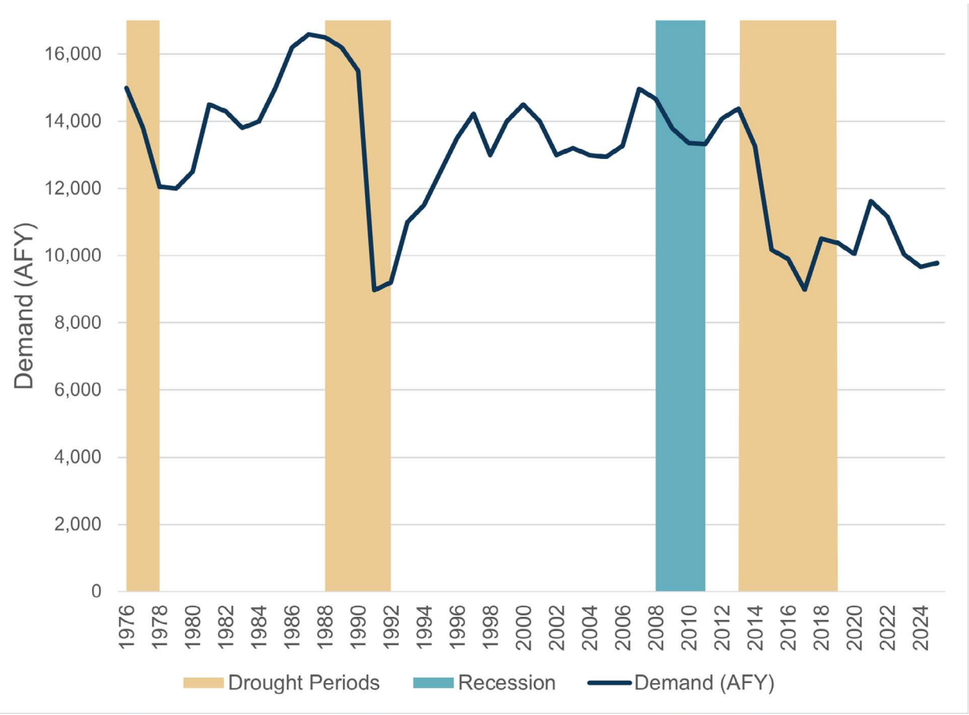
As required for the UWMP, the City notified cities, counties, and other relevant stakeholders of the preparation of the UWMP 60-days ahead of the public hearing and provided notice of the Public Draft for review more than 14-days ahead of the public hearing (see table below).

Agency	Sent Notice of Preparation	Coordination for Projections	Sent a copy of the Public Draft for review
CCWA	✓	✓	✓
COMB	✓	✓	✓
CCRB	✓		✓
Santa Barbara County Water Agency	✓		✓
United States Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation)	✓	✓	✓
Goleta Water District	✓		✓
Montecito Water District	✓		✓
Carpinteria Valley Water District	✓		✓
Santa Ynez River Water Conservation District, Improvement District No. 1	✓		✓

Water Demand

Total water use includes customer potable water deliveries, water losses in the distribution system, recycled water use, and sales to Montecito Water District. The City tracks total water demand based on production to the potable water and recycled water distribution systems. The combined total is referred to as “system” demand. Figure ES-1 illustrates the system demand and its response to severe drought in the late 1980s, early 1990s, and mid 2010s. Outside of the economic demand drivers of the 2008 recession, variations from 1998 through 2012 are primarily the result of year-to-year variations in weather. Beginning in 2013, the dramatic drop in demand indicates the response to the most recent drought, officially declared by the City in 2014. As shown, demands have partially recovered following the 2014-2019 drought and again show variation based on weather.

Figure ES-1: Historic System Demand



Note: Total water demand (dark blue) is quantified as production to the potable water and recycled water distribution systems.

As shown, variations in historic system demand have been influenced by economic drivers, droughts, and weather.

Future water demands were estimated for the City as part of its Water Conservation Strategic Plan (updated 2026). The major assumptions incorporated in the future baseline demand projection include:

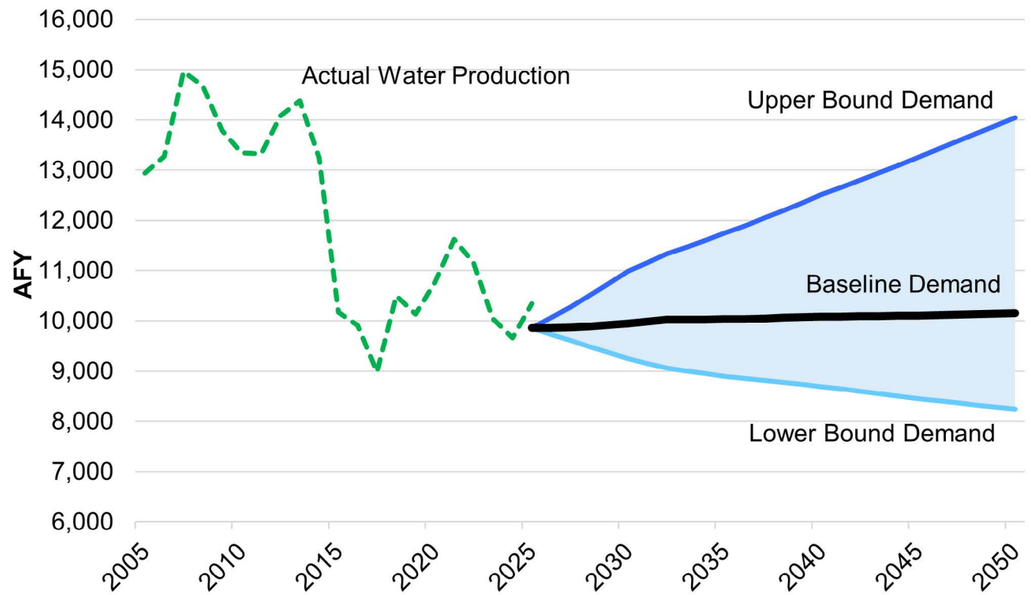
- Baseline customer water use estimated from 2021 to 2024 average water use.
- Population growth projections from the Regional Growth Forecast 2050 Santa Barbara County.
- 2023 Housing Element quantified objectives of 3,083 new units to be constructed between 2023 and 2035, including 162 new multi-family units, 78 accessory dwelling units, and two single-family units per year from 2025 to 2035.
- Employment projections from California Employment Development Department for the Santa Maria–Santa Barbara Metropolitan Statistical Area.

- Distribution water losses align with the City's water loss standard in gallons per service connection per day and grow with the growth in service connections.
- Estimated water savings from the plumbing code.
- The City's existing Water Conservation Program B and plumbing code implementation, with some additional measures.
- Recycled water demand is based on the average use over the last five years and is projected to be constant through 2050.
- Includes 1,430 AF of sales based on the City's Water Supply Agreement with Montecito Water District.

There are uncertainties associated with demand projections in general. The City considered a range of potential future demand scenarios, presented together as a "demand envelope" (see Figure ES-2). The demand envelope was developed by analyzing multiple demand scenarios that adjust key variables of the baseline demand, including population, employment, an increase in the baseline water use by customer (demand creep), and incorporating climate change and water rate change impacts. Each variable has the potential to put upward or downward pressure on the City's future water demand. The demand envelope can be thought of as a range of plausible water demand futures that may materialize depending on which pressures occur and influence water demand.

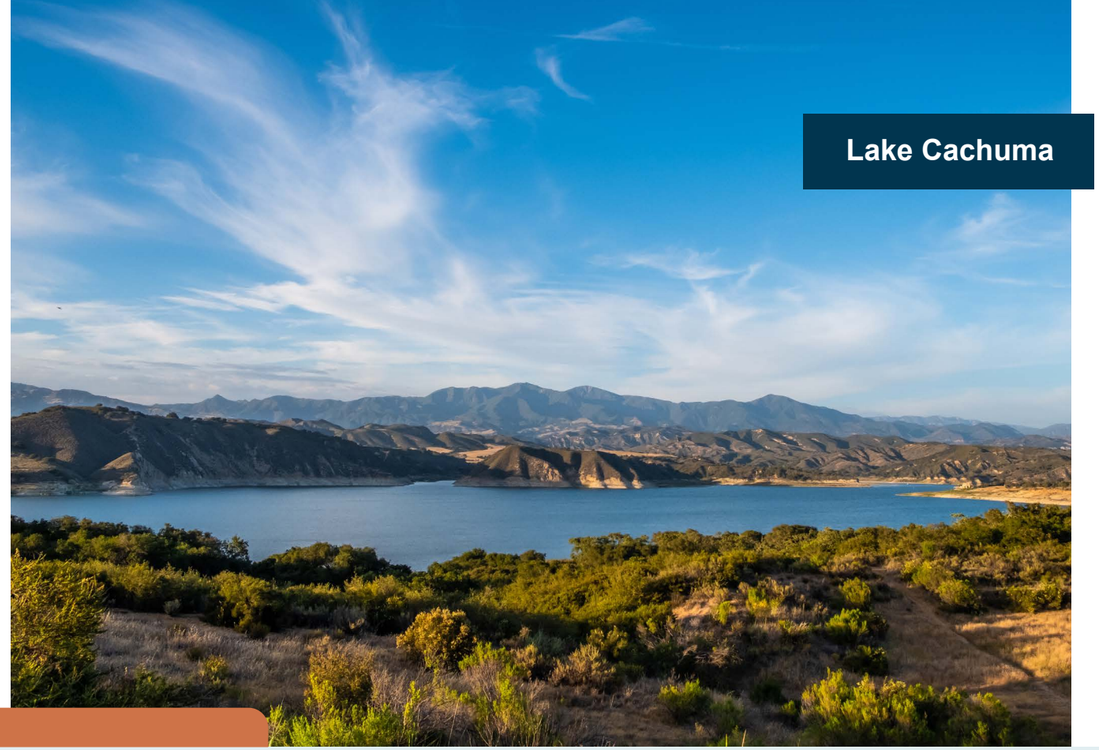
The upper bound of the demand envelope is the demand creep scenario. The lower bound of the demand envelope combines the two demand scenarios that cause demand to decrease the most, water rate impacts and slower job growth.

Figure ES-2: Demand Projection Envelope



Note: Demand scenarios include total customer potable demand, excluding recycled water demand and sales to other agencies.

The baseline demand projection is used in the UWMP and the City's Water Conservation Strategic Plan (updated 2026). The demand envelope analysis allows the City to track its demand moving forward as part of its adaptive management strategy and understand trends as they unfold within the demand envelope.



Lake Cachuma

Water Supplies

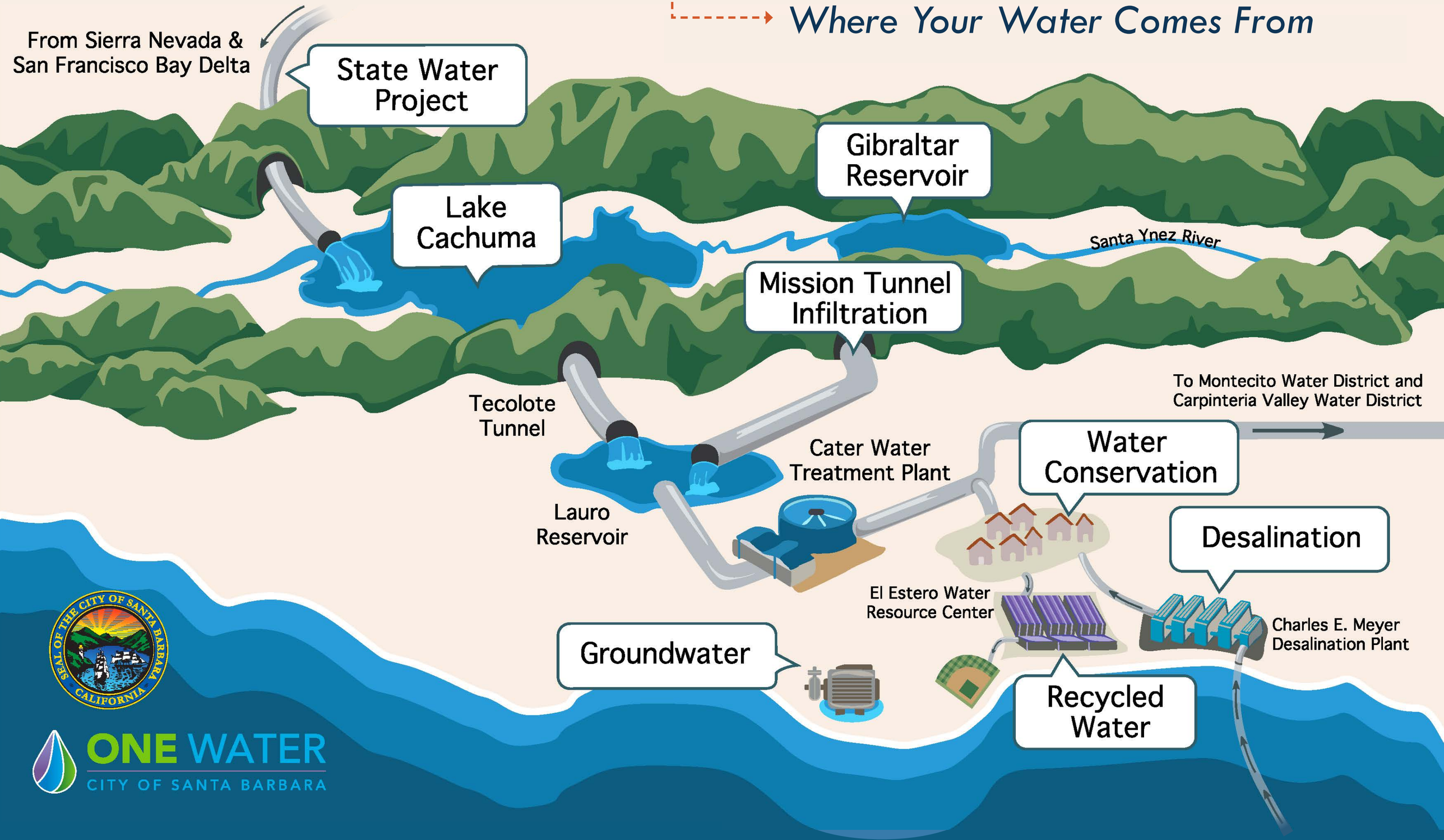
The City's water supply is comprised of the following sources, also illustrated on page 14-15:

- ***Lake Cachuma:*** Reclamation constructed Lake Cachuma and Bradbury Dam in the early 1950s. The City's share of the annual project yield is 8,277 AFY (Acre-feet per Year). Water is delivered for treatment at Cater Water Treatment Plant (WTP) via the Tecolote Tunnel and South Coast Conduit. The City can store allocated water in Lake Cachuma as carryover, allowing the City to use other available supplies and build up a reserve supply in Lake Cachuma.

Gibraltar Reservoir

- ***Gibraltar Reservoir:*** The City has pre-1914 water rights to divert water from the Santa Ynez River. Construction of Gibraltar Dam was completed in 1920. The reservoir had an initial storage capacity of 15,793 AF. As of 2025, siltation has reduced the reservoir capacity to 4,559 AF. Water from the reservoir is conveyed through Mission Tunnel for treatment at Cater WTP.
- ***Devil's Canyon Diversion:*** The City has pre-1914 water rights to divert water from Devil's Canyon Creek and maintains a small diversion works on Devil's Canyon Creek below Gibraltar Dam, which diverts water from Devil's Canyon Creek into Mission Tunnel.
- ***Mission Tunnel Infiltration:*** Mission Tunnel is 3.7 miles long and conveys water from Gibraltar Reservoir through the Santa Ynez Mountains to the City. Infiltration through cracks and fissures into the tunnel from watersheds on both sides of the mountains contributes to the City's water supply. Infiltration to Mission Tunnel is dependent on rainfall, and averages approximately 942 AFY.

Where Your Water Comes From



ONE WATER
CITY OF SANTA BARBARA

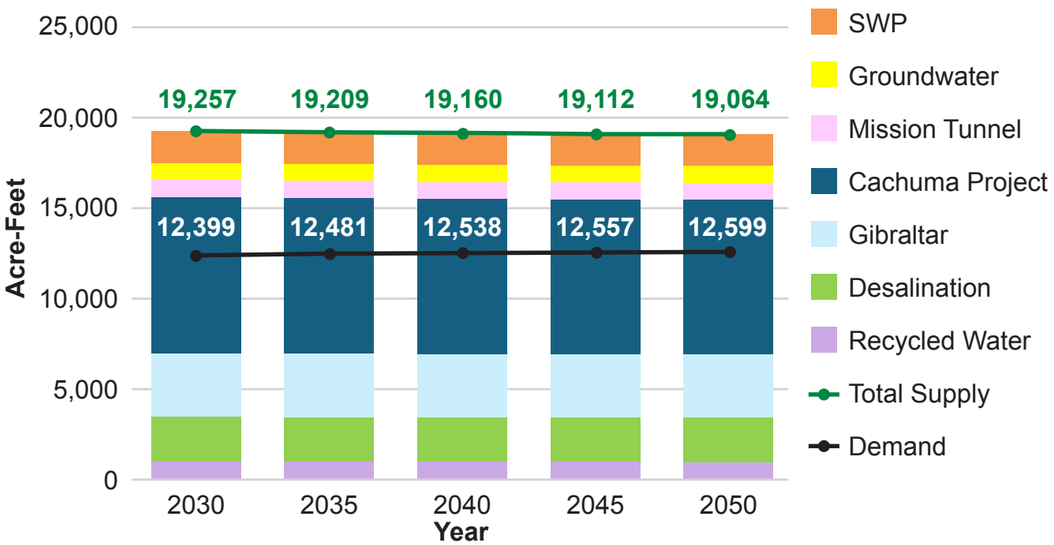
- ***State Water Project (SWP):*** The City's SWP Table A amount is 3,300 AFY. The water is conveyed to Lake Cachuma from SWP facilities in the Central Valley via the Coastal Branch of the California Aqueduct. Once in Lake Cachuma, the water is conveyed along with Cachuma Project water, via the Tecolote Tunnel, to Cater WTP for treatment and distribution.
- ***Supplemental Water:*** The SWP pipeline allows the City to convey supplemental water purchases to augment drought-year supplies. During the recent drought, the City purchased water from other SWP contractors.
- ***Desalination:*** The Charles E. Meyer Desalination Plant was reactivated in 2017 in response to the recent drought. The plant can provide three million gallons per day (MGD) of supply with a design capacity of 3,125 AFY. For conservative planning purposes, the desalination production is assumed to be 2,500 AFY, or 80% of the design capacity.
- ***Groundwater:*** The City pumps potable groundwater from Foothill Basin and Storage Unit 1 to supplement their surface water supplies during droughts and allows the groundwater basins to recover during non-drought periods. The City's sustainable groundwater production is 2,720 AF in the Foothill Basin and 7,000 AF in Storage Unit I over a 10-year period.
- ***Recycled Water:*** Recycled water is produced at the El Estero Water Resource Center. Recycled water is distributed through the City's recycled water system for irrigation of large landscapes and toilet flushing at a handful of public locations. Under normal conditions, the existing recycled water customer demand is ranges from 700 to 900 AFY plus approximately 250 AFY of process water used internally for treatment operations at El Estero WRC.

Water Supply Reliability

Water supply reliability reflects the City's ability to meet the water needs of its customers with water supplies under plausible hydrological variability, climate conditions, and other factors that affect the City's water supply and demand. The diversity of the City's water supply portfolio and the ability to store multiple years of water demand in Lake Cachuma are key factors in assessing the reliability of the water supply under a variety of hydrologic conditions.

In normal conditions, the City's primary water supply is surface water from Lake Cachuma (including carryover storage from unused previous Cachuma allocations), Gibraltar Reservoir, and desalination. These supplies are augmented with groundwater production that is typically preserved by the City for droughts and emergencies, SWP deliveries, and recycled water. As shown in Figure ES-3, the City has sufficient supplies in normal years and would use available supplies to prepare for dry periods. For example, unused Cachuma Project water could be stored for use in future years as carryover water. Also, a safety margin of 10% is maintained, consistent with City water supply policies, in case of unanticipated added demand, such as in the case of annexations or supply shortages.

Figure ES-3: Projected Potable Water Supplies vs Demand, Normal Year



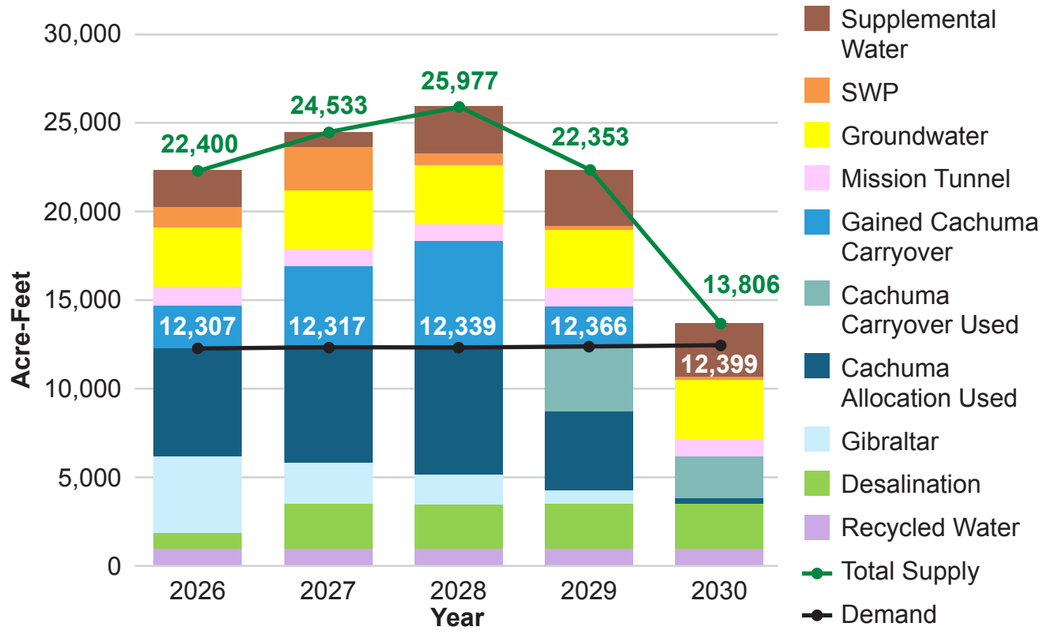
A single dry year (such as 2016) has little effect on availability of Cachuma supplies since the multiyear reservoir typically has storage available from previous years. However, available supply from Gibraltar Reservoir could potentially be significantly reduced, because Gibraltar is a much smaller reservoir than Cachuma. In this situation, demand could be met by supplemental SWP water, increased groundwater pumping, or additional use of Cachuma supplies. In the single dry year evaluation conducted for the 2025 UWMP, the impacts of a single dry year were found to be minimized by the City's diverse water supply portfolio and carryover storage at Lake Cachuma.

Due to limited supplies, in Year 5 of a drought, demand is assumed to be reduced by 20% of normal through extraordinary conservation measures, above and beyond those in the City's normal conservation program. During the 2014-2019 extended drought, City customers achieved 40% conservation, so the City is confident that extraordinary conservation can be achieved during an extended drought if necessary.

2026–2030 Drought Risk Assessment

Based on projected demand and available supplies and assuming drought conditions, Figure ES-4 presents the projected supplies used to meet demand and the remaining available supply each year over the next five years. This analysis considers current conditions, including loss of the City's Cachuma carryover water after the January 2026 spill event. With the City's diverse supply portfolio and the assumptions used for the drought risk assessment, the analysis projects that Cachuma carryover volume is gained over the next few years for use in 2029 and 2030 as Cachuma allocations decrease under drought conditions. In this scenario, the City still has supplies available at the end of the five-year drought. Note that these projections contrast with the need to implement extraordinary conservation measures during the 2014–2019 drought due to the reactivation of the desalination facility. The desalination facility provides a reliable annual water supply, and the City is now able to build carryover storage in Cachuma, eliminating the need to implement extraordinary conservation measures.

Figure ES-4: 2026–2030 Drought Risk Assessment, Supply and Demand Projections



Water Shortage Contingency Plan

The Water Shortage Contingency Plan (WSCP) is a strategic plan that the City uses to prepare for and respond to foreseeable and unforeseeable water shortages.

A water shortage occurs when the water supply available is insufficient to meet the normally expected customer water use at a given point in time. A shortage may occur due to a number of reasons, such as water supply quality changes, climate change, drought, regional power outage, and catastrophic events (e.g., earthquake). Additionally, the State may declare a statewide drought emergency and mandate that water suppliers reduce demands, as occurred in 2014 and 2022. The WSCP serves as the operating manual that the City will use to prevent catastrophic service disruptions through proactive, rather than reactive, mitigation of water shortages.

The WSCP establishes clear shortage stages, decision-making criteria, and response actions to ensure reliable water service, protect public health and safety, and equitably manage limited supplies. Through proactive planning, diversified supplies, and adaptive management, the WSCP provides a framework to maintain resilience under both short-term disruptions and prolonged drought conditions. The WSCP is included as Appendix F and is a standalone document from the UWMP.

Water Shortage Contingency Plan Stages

City Shortage Stage	Normal Supply	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4
Supply Reduction	0% Reduction	0–15% Reduction	15–25% Reduction	25–50% Reduction	>50% Reduction
Coordination for Projections		Water Shortage Watch	Water Shortage Alert	Water Shortage Emergency	Catastrophic Water System Emergency
Water Supply Condition	Full Cachuma entitlement is projected for the coming water year, and there are no extraordinary shortages in other City supplies.	Reduction in Cachuma entitlement is projected for the coming water year, or an extraordinary reduction in other City supplies has been identified.	Low rainfall conditions have resulted in continued decline in Cachuma storage and/or entitlement, or an extraordinary reduction in other City supplies.	Cachuma supplies are projected to be exhausted during the coming water year, or a catastrophic interruption to City water supplies has occurred.	Catastrophic interruption to City water supplies has occurred.
Standard Water Shortage Levels		LEVEL 1 (0–10%)	LEVEL 2 (10–20%)	LEVEL 3 (20–30%)	LV. 4 (30–40%) / LV. 5 (40–50%)	LEVEL 6 (>50%)

Water Efficiency and Conservation

Since the severe drought in the late 1970s, the City has been a leader in implementing progressive water conservation programs that support a growing community while keeping water use efficient. The City's water conservation programs strongly emphasize education and the distribution of incentives and water-saving devices across all customer types. These proactive programs, in conjunction with passive conservation measures such as City ordinances and landscape standards, have resulted in significant reductions in the City's water demand and a low per capita water use.

To promote conservation and reduce water demand, the City offers several water conservation programs, which together represent one component of the City's demand management measures.

Let's Save Together
waterwise
City of Santa Barbara

Water Conservation Program Participation from 2021–2025

9,674
School Education Programs
Including K-6 classroom presentations, 6th grade LivingWise kits, field trips, and musical assemblies

138,000+
Water e-Sources Newsletter emails opened
Water Resources Division Newsletter

870
Water Efficient Landscape Standards Reviews
City staff perform plan checks and inspection for land development projects that include new/revised landscaping

413
Mulch Rebates
Rebate of up to two dump truck loads of County mulch delivered per year

259
High-Efficiency Clothes Washer Rebates
$150 rebate for replacing high water using clothes washers with eligible high-efficiency washer models

54
Irrigation and Landscape Rebates
Rebates to replace lawn with water wise plants and/or efficient irrigation

345
Green Gardener Program Graduates
Educates local gardeners in resource-efficient landscape management

211,000+
Educational Video Views
Videos on how to read your meter, check for leaks, adjust sprinklers, design water wise gardens, etc.

42,000+
WaterSmart Leak Alerts
Automated leak alerts sent via email or mail to alert customers of continuous use or burst leaks

1,289
Flume Rebates
Rebate on Flume device to monitor water use down to the minute and catch water leaks quickly

VIEW THE FULL URBAN WATER MANAGEMENT PLAN

VIEW THE WATER SHORTAGE CONTINGENCY PLAN

To stay involved in Santa Barbara's ongoing programs and efforts, check out our website at SantaBarbaraCA.gov, and follow us on social media.

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