



AGENDA

Communications and Customer Service Committee Meeting

Board Room
3707 Old Highway 395
Fallbrook, CA 92028

Tuesday, December 17, 2024
1:00 PM

1. **CALL TO ORDER**
2. **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**
3. **ROLL CALL:** Bill Shute (Chair), Bill Stewart (Vice Chair), Hayden Hamilton, James Kozak, Alternate Harp, Alternate Cruz
4. **SEATING OF ALTERNATES**
5. **ADDITIONS/DELETIONS/AMENDMENTS TO THE AGENDA**
6. **APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA**
7. **PUBLIC COMMENT**

Any person may address the Committee at this time upon any subject not identified on this Agenda, but within the jurisdiction of Rainbow Municipal Water District; however, any matter that requires action will be referred to staff for a report and action at a subsequent meeting. As to matters on the Agenda, an opportunity will be given to address the Committee when the matter is considered.

Members of the public may make comments in person by submitting a Speaker Slip to the Board Secretary, virtually through virtual or teleconference options, or by submitting an email to tquintanar@rainbowmwd.ca.gov no less than one hour prior to the posted start time of the meeting. Comments shall be made in an orderly manner, and profanity, slander, or abusive language which is disruptive to the meeting will not be tolerated. Individuals have a limit of three (3) minutes to make comments and will have the opportunity when called upon by the presiding officer.
8. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**
 - A. November 19, 2024
9. **COMMENTS & REQUESTS**
 - A. General Manager's Comments
 - B. Committee Member's Comments
10. **DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION REGARDING COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP**
11. **UPDATE ON RECENT USE OF THE HELI-HYDRANT**

12. **COMMUNITY EVENTS UPDATE**
13. **NEWSLETTER CONTENT PLANNING**
14. **PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS AND RELATED MEDIA STORIES**
15. **SUGGESTED AGENDA ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING**
16. **ADJOURNMENT - To Tuesday, January 21, at 1:00 p.m.**

ATTEST TO POSTING:

/s/Terese Quintanar
 Terese Quintanar
 Secretary of the Board

12/12/2024 6:50 AM
 Date and Time of Posting
 Outside Display Cases

Rainbow Municipal Water District (RMWD) provides remote attendance options solely as a matter of convenience to the public. RMWD will not stop or suspend its in-person public meeting should a technological interruption occur with respect to the Zoom or call-in line listed on the agenda. We encourage members of the public to attend meetings in person at 3707 Old Highway 395, Fallbrook, CA 92028, or remotely utilizing the options below:

For Online Participation:

Go to: <https://rainbowmwd.zoom.us/j/82688515149>

If members of the public attending virtually would like to ask a question or make a comment on any item listed on this agenda, please utilize the "Raise Hand" button, located at the bottom of the screen. We will be alerted that they would like to speak. When called upon, please unmute the microphone and ask the question or make comments in no more than three minutes.

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*Those who have joined by dialing a number on their telephone, can dial *9 to alert us of a request to speak, and *6 to unmute, once called upon by the presiding officer.*

In accordance with the requirements of California Government Code Section 54954.2, this agenda has been posted at the District's Administrative offices not less than 72 hours prior to the meeting date and time above. All public records relating to each agenda item, including any public records distributed less than 72 hours prior to the meeting to all, or a majority of all, of the members of District's Board, are available for public inspection in the office of the District Secretary, 3707 Old Highway 395, Fallbrook, CA 92028

If you have special needs because of a disability which makes it difficult for you to participate in the meeting or you require assistance or auxiliary aids to participate in the meeting, please contact the District Secretary, (760) 728-1178, by at least noon on the Friday preceding the meeting. The District will attempt to make arrangements to accommodate your disability.

**MINUTES OF THE COMMUNICATIONS AND CUSTOMER SERVICE
COMMITTEE MEETING
OF THE RAINBOW MUNICIPAL WATER DISTRICT
NOVEMBER 19, 2024**

1. **CALL TO ORDER** – The Communications and Customer Service Committee Meeting of the Rainbow Municipal Water District on November 19, 2024, was called to order by Chairman Shute at 1:00 p.m. in the Board Room of the District, 3707 Old Highway 395, Fallbrook, CA 92028. Chairman Shute presiding.

2. **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

3. **ROLL CALL:** Member Shute, Member Hamilton, Member Kozak, (Member Stewart Joined at 1:15 p.m., remotely)

Also Present: General Manager Wiley, Technology Specialist III Espino, Administrative Analyst Weber, Chief Financial Officer Aragon, Alternate Harp, District Secretary Quintanar, Customer Service Supervisor Cruz

Also Present Via Teleconference Or Video Conference Safety and Risk Management Officer Johnson, Construction and Meters Supervisor Lagunas, CIP Program Manager Williams

4. **SEATING OF ALTERNATES**

None were seated.

5. **ADDITIONS/DELETIONS/AMENDMENTS TO THE AGENDA**

There were none.

6. **APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA**

Motion:

To approve the Agenda as presented.

Action: Approve, Moved by Member Hamilton, Seconded by Member Kozak

Vote: Motion carried by unanimous vote (summary: Ayes = 3)

Ayes: Member Hamilton, Member Shute, Member Kozak

7. **PUBLIC COMMENT**

There were no members of the public present.

8. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

A. September 5, 2024

B. October 15, 2024

Motion:

To approve the September 5, 2024, and October 15, 2024, Minutes as presented.

Action: Approve, Moved by Member Hamilton, Seconded by Member Kozak

Vote: Motion carried by unanimous vote (summary: Ayes = 3)

Ayes: Member Hamilton, Member Shute, and Member Kozak

9. COMMENTS & REQUESTS

- A. General Manager's Comments
- B. Committee Member's Comments

Mr. Wiley reported on the well-coordinated efforts to successfully complete and commission the three pump stations required to operate Rainbow Water's systems independently from the SDCWA, by November 1, 2024. The Notice of Completion was filed with the Counties of San Diego and Riverside and the first Exit Fee payment has been made. Kudos were expressed for SDG&E's coordination and efforts, and to the Board of Directors and all staff involved with this endeavor. Brief discussion followed regarding information to share with our customers.

Member Kozak noted that discussions about forever chemicals, are on the horizon. Chairperson Shute added that it will be important to explain to our customers how healthy our water is. He also relayed appreciation for the Customer Service team for their assistance with a customer experiencing unexplained high water usage.

10. CROPSWAP PROGRAM UPDATE

Ms. Weber and Mr. Wiley provided an update. Funding has been exhausted for the first-come-first served projects and there is currently a wait list for funding that is being pursued. Some agencies have not utilized all their allotted funding, which has to be allocated by next year. We have 76 submissions from customers in our service area, to date, and Ms. Weber relayed the types of projects applied for.

11. DISCUSSION OF FINANCIAL OPTIONS FROM ONE TIME SAVINGS FROM EARLY DETACHMENT FROM THE SDCWA

Mr. Wiley provided background information and the options discussed by the Board of Directors and two other Standing Committees to date. There is about \$770,000 in fixed cost savings due to the early detachment from the SDCWA that can be utilized in several ways. One option would be to refund customers as a one-time rebate or a monthly rebate spread out over six months. Member Kozak opined that his preference would be to divide the savings between reserves and water purchases, and to relay to our customers what we are doing to financially strengthen the District. Member Stewart relayed agreement and Chairman Shute expressed that although a rebate sounds good, it may be problematic or confusing to customers expecting additional savings and rebates. In addition, contributing to capital improvements needed will result in cost avoidance down the line. Member Hamilton voiced favor of contributing to the reserve fund.

12. CUSTOMER SERVICE CALL METRICS

Mr. Cruz reported that average hold time has been under one minute, consistently. Average talk time increased in October due to the billing discrepancy. The District received 1,500 calls in October, concentrated within a few days. Staff successfully kept this high volume of calls to about

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a minute each. Brief discussion followed, contemplating reasons for increased call volumes over the years, despite excellent outreach. Mr. Cruz concluded that the average hold time for surrounding agencies is 3-3.5 minutes. The Committee encouraged the addition of tools on our website to assist customers.

13. COMMUNITY EVENTS UPDATE

Information is being shared about the December 18, 2024, blood drive. We will also have 2025 calendars available in the office, in December, and another poster contest is being launched in January. She also announced the Bonsall Chamber Christmas tree lighting ceremony on November 30th, from 3-5:00 p.m. and she encouraged everyone to attend.

14. NEWSLETTER CONTENT PLANNING

The current newsletter was shared, which included information about the detachment from the SDCWA, Customer Feedback, the December Blood Drive, and more. In December, we will include a rate update, information on the Value of Water, how to read your bill, Bonsall Highschool Classroom Visits, and holiday reminders. Mr. Kozak suggested inclusion of a summary of what the District has done for its customers that have resulted in savings, through grant funds and detachment, in the December publication. In January we will have a bill overview, information on the Calendar Contest, rebates from Metropolitan Water District, and a customer survey.

15. PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS AND RELATED MEDIA STORIES

Ms. Weber reported that a Press Release was prepared regarding the detachment from the SDCWA, and that we've received positive media coverage regarding our response to the Garden Fire. CBS 8 did a feature on the District's response and ABC 10 also covered the event. The District provided aerial footage and sound bites highlighting the Heli-hydrant, and Mr. Wiley reported that a second potential site has been identified as a fitting location for another Heli-hydrant. Funding for a second Heli-hydrant is being pursued.

16. LIST OF SUGGESTED AGENDA ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING

The Committee requested an update on Heli-Hydrant planning and an update regarding Item 12, Customer Call Metrics. Mr. Wiley also announced that EMWD may visit the District in January, and he will keep the Committee updated.

17. ADJOURNMENT - To Monday, December 16, 2024, at 1:00 p.m.

The meeting was adjourned by Chairperson Shute at 1: 58 p.m.

Bill Shute, Committee Chairperson

Terese Quintanar, District Secretary

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION

Item No. 10

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

December 17, 2024

SUBJECT

DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION REGARDING COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

BACKGROUND

Administrative Code Section 2.06.010.02, states that Members of the committees serve at the pleasure of the Board. The Board has authority to remove committee members at any time in the Board's sole discretion. It has been the practice for Committees to consider and recommend Board action to appoint Committee Members.

DESCRIPTION

Each committee shall have at least four and no more than seven regular members appointed by a simple majority vote of the Board.

The Communications and Customer Service Committee currently has four regular members, and two staff alternate members, as listed below:

Hayden Hamilton (Board Representative),
Bill Shute (Public Representative)
Bill Stewart (Public Representative)
James Kozak (Public Representative)
Karleen Harp (Staff Alternate)
Josh Cruz (Staff Alternate)

In the effort to continue to provide support for the community, Ms. Julie Johnson has expressed interest in participating on the District's Communications and Customer Service Committee. Staff requests the Committee's consideration to make a recommendation to the Board of Directors to appoint Julie Johnson to the Communications and Customer Service Committee as it's fifth regular member. The Board of Directors will consider appointment and re-appointment of its Standing Committee members on January 28, 2025.

POLICY/STRATEGIC PLAN KEY FOCUS AREA

Strategic Focus Area Four: Fiscal Responsibility
Strategic Focus Area Five: Customer Service
Strategic Focus Area Six: Communication

ENVIRONMENTAL

In accordance with CEQA guidelines Section 15378, the action before the Board does not constitute a “project” as defined by CEQA and further environmental review is not required at this time.

BOARD OPTIONS/FISCAL IMPACTS

There are no fiscal impacts in connection with action to appoint Committee Members.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff supports direction.

Jake Wiley, General Manager

Dec. 17, 2024

Fallbrook, Bonsall, Valley Center voters elect new leaders

November 13, 2024

Samantha Nelson

REGION — Voters in the northern reaches of San Diego County decided on school board candidates, school bond measures, planning group leaders and other special elections on Nov. 5 in Fallbrook, Bonsall, Valley Center and other surrounding communities.

The county has processed nearly 69% of votes, with about 140,000 ballots to go as of Nov. 12.

In Bonsall Unified School District, incumbent Trustee Eric Ortega, representing Trustee Area E, has 700 votes for 54% to lead challenger Lindsay Jones with 592 votes, or 45%.

In Fallbrook Union High School District's race for Trustee Area 4, Board Vice President Oscar Caralampio holds a strong lead with more than 60% of the vote over challenger Joshua Tiller, who now trails by an insurmountable vote count.

Voters have also appeared to turn down bond measures for Bonsall, Fallbrook and Valley Center-Pauma Unified School District.

Bonsall voters defeated Measure V, which would have authorized \$59 million in bonds to upgrade classrooms, labs and safety systems, repair facilities, add space to reduce overcrowding and support hands-on learning in Bonsall Unified School District. If it had passed, the bond would have required a \$0.04 per \$100 assessed value levy.

Fallbrook's Measure BB failed, with 51% opposed to issuing \$56 million in bonds to fund school facility improvements in Fallbrook Union High School District, requiring an estimated property tax levy of \$24 per \$100,000 in assessed value.

Voters also opposed Measure SS, which would have issued \$84.6 million in bonds to fund school STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics) facility improvements in Valley Center-Pauma Unified School District. This would have required an estimated property tax levy of \$54 per \$100,000 in assessed value.

Voters also decided on several special districts.

In the Fallbrook Community Planning Group, up to eight members could be chosen. Candidates with the most votes as of Nov. 12 included Aldo Alvidres, Ross Pike, Thomas Gerald Harrington IV, Roy Moosa, Stephani Baxter, Kathie Morris, Lee J. De Meo and Jim Loge.

Voters also chose the top eight candidates for the Valley Center Community Planning Group, including Delores Chavez Harmes, Dori Rattray, Karen A. Lieber, Bob Littlejohn, S. Michelle Bothof, Mary Hope L. Hodson, Chris Barber and Tom J. Stinson.

The top three vote-getters for the Morro Hills Community Services District were Jeff Walker, Thomas Harrington III and Jeanine Roskos.

In the Pauma Valley Community Services District, voters selected Lolo Levy and Michael Esparza.

Two board seats in the Rainbow Municipal Water District were also up for election. Challenger Lisa Hoffman is leading incumbent Julie Johnson to represent Division 1 by 75 votes. In the race for a short-term Division 3 seat, challenger Greg Irvine has bested incumbent Cari Dale by nearly 400 more votes, eliminating her from contention.

FALLBROOK & BONSALE VILLAGE NEWS

Rainbow area added to Division 2 of EMWD

Joe Naima, Village News Reporter
November 28, 2024

The reorganization in which the Rainbow Municipal Water District detached from the San Diego County Water Authority and annexed to the Eastern Municipal Water District as a retail agency is now complete. Eastern has adjusted its division boundaries to add Rainbow to Division 2 for EMWD election purposes.

The 4-0 EMWD board vote Nov. 20, with Jeff Armstrong absent, adopts a resolution adding Rainbow to Division 2. The board also authorized EMWD general manager Joe Mouawad or his designee to execute a billing and service agreement between Rainbow and Eastern for Eastern to be Rainbow's wholesale water provider.

EMWD staff was also authorized to continue the redistricting process to rebalance the populations of the five EMWD divisions which also reflects the addition of the Fallbrook Public Utility District into the EMWD service area.

The Metropolitan Water District of Southern California began delivering water to San Diego County in 1947. MWD's San Diego Aqueduct conveys water to a delivery point six miles south of the Riverside County line, which allowed MWD and the San Diego County Water Authority to provide equal contributions for the connection between MWD's Colorado River Aqueduct and the San Vicente Reservoir in Lakeside.

The SDCWA northern boundary was the county line. All but one of FPUD's connections are from MWD pipelines rather than from CWA pipelines, and four of Rainbow's eight connections are to the MWD portion of the pipeline. FPUD and Rainbow sought to reduce their cost of purchasing water – and thus their rates – by detaching from the CWA and joining Eastern.

The Western Municipal Water District is also a member of MWD and provides retail water sales of MWD supply to the Elsinore Valley Municipal Water District and to the Rancho California Water District. The status of FPUD and Rainbow is thus similar to that of the two water districts which obtain MWD water from Western.

In July 2023, San Diego County's Local Agency Formation

Commission approved a reorganization for FPUD and Rainbow to detach from the CWA and join Eastern contingent upon approval by the FPUD and Rainbow voters. The voters of both districts overwhelmingly approved the reorganization in November 2023.

After the LAFCO decision, the CWA filed a lawsuit against LAFCO, FPUD, and Rainbow. The four agencies agreed to a settlement in December 2023. FPUD's detachment from the CWA and annexation to Eastern became effective Jan. 1, 2024. The Rainbow detachment required the completion of pump stations to allow all Rainbow water to be taken from turnouts north of the MWD/CWA boundary. The Rainbow reorganization took effect Nov. 1, 2024.

Although Riverside County's LAFCO had delegated the reorganization process to San Diego County's LAFCO, both LAFCO agencies filed certificates of completion with their respective county recorder's office. The certificates of completion for the FPUD reorganization were recorded in December 2023. The San Diego LAFCO certificate of completion for Rainbow was recorded Nov. 5 and the Riverside County LAFCO certificate of completion was recorded Nov. 7.

The water billing and service agreement between Eastern and FPUD for Eastern to be FPUD's wholesale water provider was approved by the EMWD board Jan. 3 and by the FPUD board at a Jan. 4 special meeting. Rainbow's board held a special meeting Nov. 19 to approve the billing and service agreement between Rainbow and Eastern.

Other than the receiving agency and the specific MWD turnouts, the EMWD billing and service agreements are identical for FPUD and Rainbow. Six MWD pipelines carry water along the San Diego Aqueduct from the Robert A. Skinner Water Treatment Plant in Temecula.

Pipelines 1, 2, and 4 convey treated water while Pipelines 3, 5, and 6 deliver untreated supply. (Pipeline 6 currently carries untreated water for seven miles from Lake Skinner to Anza Road and De Portola Road; the southern portion which would serve San Diego County is not expected to be needed in the

near future so that part of the project has been deferred.)

Eastern will provide both FPUD and Rainbow with treated potable water from Pipeline 1 and Pipeline 4. The Rainbow turnouts which will be used are identified by MWD as SD-09, SD-05, SD-10, and RB-1.

Eastern will receive water delivery orders from Rainbow and will communicate that demand to MWD. The cost of the water will be based on MWD and EMWD rates including Rainbow's pro-rata share of MWD's Readiness to Serve Charge and Capacity Charge. Eastern will also add an administrative overhead fee, which is currently \$11 per acre-foot. Eastern will not guarantee the reliability of MWD supply nor will Eastern guarantee water quality standards.

Eastern will take over administration of MWD programs for Rainbow which had been administered by CWA. That includes MWD's Local Resources Program which provides financial incentives for the development of local supplies which increase supply reliability and reduce imported water demands. Rainbow will also be eligible for other EMWD programs.

As a retail agency of a wholesale agency, FPUD and Rainbow residents will be eligible to vote both for their FPUD or Rainbow division board seat and for their EMWD division seat. Every 10 years, the EMWD director divisions are adjusted to account for population changes recorded in the decennial census.

The maximum allowable variance from the highest-populated to the lowest-populated trustee area is 10%. Local agencies are allowed to revise their trustee area boundaries, contingent upon the areas having approximately equal population and the boundaries not being drawn to disenfranchise any specific group, as the district feels is warranted so the boundaries may change earlier if growth in an area creates an unequal population – or if a populated area is annexed to the district.

The 2020 census had a total EMWD population of 870,579 consisting of 178,018 in Division 1 which includes French Valley and Winchester; 165,186 in Division 2 which is the Temecula portion of the district; 182,661 in Division 3 covering Hemet and San Jacinto; 177,198 in Division 4 which has Menifee and Perris, and 167,156 in Division 5 which is Moreno Valley.

The total population of 870,579 equates to a target population of 174,116 in each division. When the revised maps were created, EMWD staff also anticipated growth throughout the decade, and divisions which are expected to grow faster relative to the total growth in the district were allocated slightly lower populations in an attempt to keep the division populations balanced through 2030.

The boundary map adopted had 167,364 people in Division 1; 176,879 residents of Division 2; 182,712 Division 3 community members; 166,790 Division 4 residents, and 176,834 people in Division 5. The new boundaries, which became effective for the November 2022 elections, were approved during a February 2022 EMWD board meeting. Divisions 1, 2, and 5 had elections in November 2022. The first elections for Divisions 3 and 4 under the new boundaries were in November 2024.

FPUD and Rainbow are adjacent to Division 2. A Feb. 21 EMWD board vote placed the FPUD area into Division 2 for EMWD election purposes. EMWD staff was also authorized to initiate the redistricting process to rebalance the populations of the five EMWD divisions, although that redistricting was deferred until after the annexation of the Rainbow Municipal Water District to Eastern was complete so that the boundaries would not need to be adjusted twice.

Division 2 is currently represented by Stephen Corona, and since that seat is not subject to election until November 2026, the redistricting did not need to occur until after Rainbow joined Eastern.

FPUD had a population of 34,738 when the 2020 census was conducted. Rainbow's current estimated population is approximately 24,000. Without redistricting, the variance between Division 2 and the lowest-populated division would be approximately 37%.

The California Elections Code prevents any change in division boundaries within 180 days prior to the election of any director although Rainbow staff expects the redistricting to be complete by June 2025. A January 2025 public workshop will discuss the process and solicit feedback.

Draft maps will be prepared, and a public hearing targeted for February or March will review the draft maps and solicit feedback. The comments will be incorporated into a proposed final map which would be adopted at a public hearing targeted for spring 2025.

FALLBROOK & BONSTALL VILLAGE NEWS

Rainbow MWD to elect board officers in December

Joe Naima, Village News Reporter
December 5, 2024

The president and vice-president of the Rainbow Municipal Water District board will now be elected at December board meetings.

Normally Rainbow's November and December board meetings are combined, but items related to Rainbow's detachment from the San Diego County Water Authority and annexation to the Eastern Municipal Water District resulted in a Nov. 19 special meeting which was in addition to the previously scheduled Dec. 10 board meeting.

The Nov. 19 meeting included a 5-0 board vote to amend Rainbow's Administrative Code section regarding the election of board officers and the appointment of committee members.

"This is a little bit of a process change," said Rainbow General Manager Jake Wiley.

The organizational meeting for board officers occurs every two years. The Administrative Code had stipulated that the board hold an organizational meeting as part of the January regular meeting in odd-numbered years. The Nov. 19 action changes that organizational meeting to December of even-numbered years.

The county's Registrar of Voters is required to certify the general election results within 30 days of the election, so that certification can be no later than Dec. 8 (and no later than Dec. 5 this year) and the board composition will be known prior to the December meeting.

The board president and vice-president must be board members. The board officers also include a secretary and a treasurer. The Administrative Code had allowed the district's executive assistant staff member to serve as the board secretary, and the changes updated that title to allow the district secretary to be the board secretary. The district's chief financial officer and finance manager may serve as the board treasurer, and that portion of the Administrative Code has not changed.

Rainbow has three standing committees: the Budget and Finance Committee, the Communications and Customer Service Committee, and the Engineering and Operations Committee. Committee officer appointments are made annually in January. That has not changed, but the selection of board officers in December and the selection of committee members and officers in January will separate those two organizational tasks and allow additional planning for committee selections.

"This is just a little bit of a more structured process," Wiley said.

Committee officers serve one-year terms. The committee vice-president cannot be a board member. Committee members serve four-year terms and may be reappointed, and the only change to the Administrative Code section on committee members clarifies that if an appointment is made as the result of a vacancy, the mid-year appointee will serve for the remainder of the calendar year (but may be reappointed). The Administrative Code changes regarding committees also include a non-substantive wording modification about meeting recordings and minutes.

The January board meeting also includes designating Rainbow board members to serve as representatives for outside agencies or other organizations, and that was not changed by the Nov. 19 action.

FALLBROOK & BONSAILL VILLAGE NEWS

First use of Rainbow Water's Rapid Aerial Water Supply aids in protecting Fallbrook homes

Joe Naima, Village News Reporter
November 22, 2024

FALLBROOK – Fire protection agencies utilized Rainbow Municipal Water District's Rapid Aerial Water Supply (RAWS) tank to aid in suppressing the Garden fire, a fast-moving brush fire that broke out Friday afternoon, Nov. 8 near Lake Garden Drive in Fallbrook.

Fueled by Santa Ana winds and dry, flashy vegetation, the fire spread quickly, threatening nearby homes, and prompting precautionary evacuations. The North County Fire Protection District, Cal Fire, and several assisting agencies stopped the spread of the fire at 48 acres with no structures destroyed.

Central to the success of the firefighting efforts was the air response, including the first-ever use of the RAWS tank, also known as a "Heli-Hydrant." This system, the first of its kind in San Diego County, was commissioned by Rainbow Water in 2021 as a joint project with North County Fire Protection District and Cal Fire.

The RAWS tank provided a critical water supply for close to 30 aerial water drops, significantly increasing the effectiveness of the air response and protecting homes in the fire's path. RAWS enables helicopter pilots to access up to 5,000 gallons of water within two minutes via an automatically filled open-top tank supplied by Rainbow Water's infrastructure. The RAWS tank was in an ideal location to expedite emergency aerial water drops during the Garden fire.

"This incident marked the first deployment of the RAWS in a real-world setting, and it performed exactly as we'd hoped," said Keith McReynolds, Fire Chief of North County Fire Protection District. "More than 30 water drops were made from the RAWS tank, which enabled us to quickly control the spread of the Garden fire and minimize the threat to homes in the area."

The RAWS tank was installed as a proactive measure following the devastating Lilac fire in 2017, underscoring the need for an efficient, high-volume, aerial accessible water source in San Diego's fire-prone areas.



A helicopter makes one of the close to 30 area water drop from the nearby RAWS tank, significantly increasing the effectiveness of the air response and protecting homes in the Garden Fire's path.

"We didn't lose a single structure in this incident," said Tony Mecham, Unit and Fire Chief Cal Fire/San Diego County Fire. "Rainbow's RAWS tank played a major role in that outcome, and we're proud to see how interagency cooperation is making a difference for our community."

Jake Wiley, General Manager of Rainbow Municipal Water District, emphasized the importance of forward-looking solutions and partnerships to meet community needs. "RAWS resulted from planning and close collaboration between Rainbow Water, North County Fire, and Cal Fire. Our agencies are continually working together to protect the region, and we'll continue to find ways to support emergency responders and protect our residents," said Wiley.

A second RAWS location near Rainbow Water's Gomez tank has been approved by Cal Fire and the San Diego County Board of Supervisors. The site was selected for its elevation, 360-degree visibility, lack of power lines, and adequate water pressure, which will further bolster regional fire response. Rainbow Water is actively pursuing grant opportunities to help fund this new RAWS installation, which will provide additional fire protection for Fallbrook and surrounding communities.

This rapid, highly effective response highlights the success of joint efforts between public agencies and the vital role of advanced firefighting tools like the RAWS. Through proactive planning and interagency partnerships, Rainbow Municipal Water District, North County Fire Protection District, and Cal Fire remain committed to safeguarding the communities they serve.