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Rain to the Rescue: New Report on Stormwater Capture as Drought Buster

NRDC and TreePeople Highlights Stormwater's Power to Combat Drought and Build Long-Term Local Resilience

LOS ANGELES, CA (October 27, 2016) – California could utilize up to 630,000 acre-feet of new, untapped water supply if urbanized areas in Southern California and the San Francisco Bay captured stormwater, an [issue brief](#) released today by the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) and TreePeople shows. The City of Los Angeles could replace almost half (258,000 acre-feet per year) of its 575,000 acre-feet annual water supply – which is mostly imported – if the required infrastructure, programs and policies were implemented.

“There’s no silver bullet to solving California’s water crisis, but there *are* [21st century solutions to build more water supply](#) and replenish the groundwater safety net that’s quickly running out,” said Becky Hayat, an attorney with NRDC’s water program. “Stormwater capture is a big piece of that puzzle. As this historic drought drags on, it’s critical that we take collaborative action – backed by government and community leadership – to invest in cost-effective, environmentally sound options that really work *and* that will help us to weather future droughts.”

[Rain to the Rescue: Stormwater’s Power to Increase California’s Local Water Supplies](#) highlights how stormwater is an obvious source, but often overlooked. As California enters a historic sixth year of drought and the state grapples with the realities of a hotter, drier future due to climate change, communities must consider “new” sources of local water supply.

For example, for each inch of rain that falls onto the City of Los Angeles, 3.8 billion gallons of runoff is flushed out to the Pacific Ocean, dragging animal waste, trash, metals, chemicals and other harmful contaminants with it. This not only puts marine life at risk, but people too, for days after it rains. But if the City locally captured rainfall instead, it could satisfy between 30 percent and 45 percent of its current water demand if the required infrastructure, programs and policies were implemented. And if the required infrastructure, programs, and policies were funded and implemented, these investments could provide billions of gallons of water for public use and decrease the City’s reliance on imported water.

Eighty-nine percent of LA’s water has historically come from imported water supplies (from the eastern Sierra Nevada Mountains via the Los Angeles Aqueduct, the San Joaquin-Sacramento Rivers via the California Aqueduct, and the Colorado River Basin via the Colorado River Aqueduct). Currently, the City actively captures approximately 29,000 acre-feet of stormwater annually, and another 35,000 acre-feet passively (in open spaces and other unpaved areas). Modeling analysis in the City’s first-ever Stormwater Capture Master Plan – created by the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP) and engineering firm Geosyntec, with facilitation by TreePeople – estimated long-term potential capture between 169,000 and 258,000 acre-feet per year, in the conservative and aggressive scenarios, respectively.

“Los Angeles can build a water-resilient future. Instead of importing water from Northern California and the Colorado River Basin, the City can capture it locally, where it falls,” said Deborah Bloome, senior director of policy with TreePeople. “If the City of Los Angeles aggressively invested in capturing rainwater, it would not only drastically reduce the pollution running into our oceans and waterways, but the City could truly become more water-resilient.”

Key takeaways

- **Stormwater capture in urbanized Southern California and San Francisco Bay** region could potentially increase water supplies by 420,000 to 630,000 acre-feet per year – the equivalent of filling the Rose Bowl with water 1,622 to 2,432 times!
- **Groundwater infiltration** offers the greatest stormwater-based opportunity to increase urban water supplies. In areas in Southern California and the Bay area overlying groundwater basins used for municipal water supply, 365,000 to 440,000 acre-feet of runoff could be captured and stored each year through projects such as green streets, park retrofits, building and parking lot retrofits, and infrastructure changes to divert runoff to large-scale spreading grounds.
- **Smaller scale rainwater capture** could increase water supplies by up to 190,000 acre-feet per year in Southern California and the Bay area, of which nearly 145,000 acre-feet could be gained via residential rainwater capture systems, such as rain barrels and cisterns. Yields could be even higher if rooftop rainwater capture were installed in areas where infiltration and groundwater recharge are feasible.

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The Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) is an international nonprofit environmental organization with more than 1.4 million members and online activists. Since 1970, our lawyers, scientists, and other environmental specialists have worked to protect the world’s natural resources, public health, and the environment. NRDC has offices in New York City, Washington, D.C., Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago, Bozeman, MT, and Beijing. Visit us at www.nrdc.org and follow us on Twitter [@NRDCWater](https://twitter.com/NRDCWater).

As the Los Angeles region faces historic drought and a hotter, drier future, **TreePeople** is uniting the power of trees, people, and nature-based solutions to grow a more climate-resilient city. The organization inspires, engages and supports Angelenos to take personal responsibility for the urban environment, facilitates collaboration among government agencies, and promotes leadership by grassroots volunteers, students and communities. Together, we are growing a greener, shadier, healthier and more water-secure Los Angeles for present and future generations. Visit us at www.treepeople.org. and follow us on Twitter [@TreePeople_org](https://twitter.com/TreePeople_org)