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AS EL NIÑO WINTER NEARS, CITY-COUNTY PARTNERSHIP COMBINES HIGH- AND LOW-TECH SOLUTIONS TO FIGHT DROUGHT BY CATCHING STORMWATER

#LAStormCatcher pilot project shows how Angelenos can use smart cisterns, rain gardens to cut water use, boost water supply, clean streets and beaches

A groundbreaking collaboration between the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, the Los Angeles County Flood Control District, and the City's Bureau of Sanitation, facilitated by the environmental organization TreePeople, is showing Angelenos how individual homeowners can turn the predicted wet winter into a vital ally against the current Stage 5 drought emergency.

The partnership, known as the Greater Los Angeles Water Collaborative, today unveiled the first pilot site in a set of residential installations that promise to turn Los Angeles' traditional approach to water upside down. Under the Collaborative's "StormCatcher Project," (#LAStormCatcher) homes will be retrofitted to direct rain from the roof into large tanks that can be monitored and controlled electronically. The new water management systems are designed to increase water supply, improve water quality, and reduce flood risk—all the while documenting the role that Southern Californians can play in building a climate-resilient future.

"In the face of a historic drought, Los Angeles is taking action to Capture and Save the Drop at every turn," said Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti. "The scale of our challenges not only call for collaboration, they call for innovation. That is why I'm so pleased that the Greater Los Angeles Water Collaborative has come together for the Storm Catcher Project — a program which will begin with 10 smart cisterns that harness technology to enhance water capture and help us study ways to take this idea citywide."

"It's important for folks to know that the County already captures enough rainwater in a year to meet the needs of two million people. But that is, to coin a phrase, just a 'drop in the bucket'. We need to do much, much more," said Supervisor Sheila Kuehl.

"The Los Angeles County Flood Control District works collaboratively with water managers across the region to integrate, plan and develop sustainable solutions to the region's water supply needs," said Gail Farber, director of LA County Public Works. "The systems we're unveiling today reinvent our region's relationship with the rain—with the potential to turn two million rooftops in LA County into a distributed network of storm-catching sponges."

The pilot project emerged from the Collaborative's unprecedented depth of cross-agency partnership, which illuminates how integrated planning and response to the water challenges facing the region can generate significant efficiencies and benefits. With longtime Los Angeles nonprofit organization TreePeople facilitating communication and investigation, in partnership with the engineering firm Tetra Tech, the LA StormCatcher Project will rapidly deploy and evaluate stormwater capture systems at up to 10 homes, forging a channel to their broad-scale adoption throughout the region.

"LADWP is pleased to be part of this collaboration as we build LA's local water supplies and reduce our reliance on imported water," said Marty Adams, Los Angeles Department of Water and Power's Senior Assistant General Manager for the Water System. "As we work hard to make our water supply more sustainable and resilient than expensive water we bring in from far away, it is important to find opportunities like cisterns and other stormwater capture devices that offset drinking water use and replenish our local aquifer. We look forward to seeing more initiatives like this be implemented across the city of Los Angeles."

More water captured from rainfall will require less water to be taken from our reservoirs and means less reliance on the dwindling snowpack, allowing individuals to become part of Greater Los Angeles's water infrastructure solution.

"With this system, more stormwater is captured, its quality is improved, and it's infiltrated back into our groundwater," said LA Sanitation Executive Director Enrique C. Zaldivar, P.E. "This real-time cistern technology is one more way we can keep our communities cleaner and healthier, helping us honor LA Sanitation's commitment to protecting the public health and the environment."

Additionally, the Greater Los Angeles Water Collaborative is integrating the results from a recent revolution in urban stormwater management from Australia, building on a 2014 delegation led by TreePeople to examine stormwater practices Down Under. Prompted by the Millennium Drought, Australia overhauled its stormwater management—embracing not only the kinds of solutions on display at the LA StormCatcher Project pilot site, but the cross-agency collaboration at the center of the partnership.

"Our region has to adapt to a new normal – a drier normal that threatens our way of life," said Andy Lipkis, Founder and President of TreePeople. "Instead of turning to short-sighted solutions like gravel and astroturf that heat up our homes and neighborhoods and worsen pollution and flooding, let's embrace the gifts we have: our Mediterranean climate and the rain from our skies. By combining smart technology with something as ancient as a cistern and as elemental as the landscaping in our yards, we can greatly reduce our demand for potable water and recharge our local water supply."

The first pilot site, located at a single-family home in North Hollywood, includes the following features:

- a 1,320-gallon smart cistern with cloud-based software that anticipates rain and adjusts settings to prevent overflow and maximize irrigation and infiltration
- 900 square feet of roof retrofitted to capture 7,000 gallons of rainwater in an average year
- a rain garden irrigated by water from the cistern, which will optimize groundwater recharge to the San Fernando aquifer

Anticipated benefits from the stormwater management system include:

- Real-time controls will determine whether to keep or discharge water, maximizing benefits to water supply, pollution reduction and flood avoidance
- Residential water capture prevents stormwater from washing pollutants into municipal system (the road and then storm drain to the sea)
- Discharge of water from the cistern to the rain garden allows rainfall to recharge the groundwater
- Captured rainwater increases local water supply and offsets usage of potable water from city systems and increases local supplies
- Managing water before storms can reduce local flooding and other wet weather problems

“I’m excited to see my home and garden become the laboratory for a new way of living with a changing climate,” said homeowner Carrie Wassenaar, an animation line producer. “Now I have one more reason to love the sound of rain on my roof.”

For more information, please go to <https://www.treepeople.org/lawatercollaborative>

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