



SAN GORGONIO PASS
WATER AGENCY
A California State Water Project Contractor

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Firefighting Helicopter System Takes Flight in the San Gorgonio Pass

BEAUMONT, CA (July 1, 2025) – In a powerful show of innovation and collaboration, San Gorgonio Pass Water Agency (SGPWA) and its partners unveiled the first of seven life-saving Heli-Hydrants after just 18 months of development. More than 100 water leaders and elected officials attended the June 12th ribbon-cutting ceremony near the first Cabazon Water District Heli-Hydrant. The event highlighted how these tank-based systems allow helicopters to refill with water in under 10 seconds, often the difference between containment and catastrophe.

“As a retired Fire Captain Specialist, I know personally how every second matters when fighting wildfires,” said SGPWA Board Secretary Kevin Walton. “These Heli-Hydrants give our firefighters a critical edge, and we are already seeing their impact as they are being used right now to fight the Wolf Fire. SGPWA is proud to lead this effort and work with local water agency partners to protect lives and property across the region.”

The Heli-Hydrant concept was born from the lived experience of retired firefighter Mark Whaling and brought to life with \$1.8 million in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding secured by Riverside County Fifth District Supervisor Dr. Yxstian Gutierrez. Seven Heli-Hydrants will soon serve the Pass area, strategically located on both sides of Interstate 10 for maximum coverage and speed.

“With recent wildfires ravaging our community and Southern California, including the Wolf Fire, these Heli-Hydrants have never been more important,” Supervisor Gutierrez said. “Our community deserves rapid response and safety during fires. I am proud of the local agencies that came together to bring this project to fruition in record time. We are all safer for it.”

The ceremony brought together the region’s firefighting and water partners, including Riverside County Fire, Cal Fire, Beaumont Cherry Valley Water District, City of Banning, High Valleys Water District, Banning Heights Mutual Water Company, and Cabazon Water District.

“This project is proof of what we can achieve when we unite around public safety,” SGPWA Board President Mickey Valdivia added. “Thanks to Supervisor Gutierrez’s commitment and the collaboration in our community, we are giving our region the tools it needs to face devastating wildfires head on.”

For more information about the Heli-Hydrant project and water reliability in the Pass, visit sgpwa.com.

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About San Geronio Pass Water Agency

Formed in 1961, SGPWA is a State Water Contractor that serves a 225-square-mile area of western Riverside County. The service area includes the cities of Calimesa, Beaumont, and Banning, and the communities of Cherry Valley, Cabazon, and the Banning Bench. In addition to importing State Water Project (SWP) water from Northern California to augment local groundwater sources, the Agency builds local system infrastructure, participates in water transfers, partners in statewide water projects and collaborates on regional water reliability and conservation efforts.