



El Monte Valley Project

Myths vs. Facts

The El Monte Valley Project, as currently envisioned, has three major components:

1. Purified water – The El Monte Valley Project will produce up to five million gallons of purified water per day – over a year’s time, that’s enough water to serve 15,000 families – or approximately 15 percent of the Helix Water District’s (District) total water demand. The project will purify recycled water using proven advanced water purification technologies. In addition, the project will improve the groundwater quality and availability in the El Monte Valley.
2. Riverbed restoration – The riverbed restoration element is a new and visionary approach, combining a water supply solution with the additional benefits of habitat protection and community recreational use. The purified water will help raise the water table in the El Monte Valley to allow restoration of the riverbed with native plants and creation of a public recreation area. The recreation area will provide many benefits for generations to come, including trails for hiking, mountain biking, and equestrian use, as well as wildlife habitat and educational opportunities.
3. Surface (sand) mining – The mining project will take place over a 10 year period in the central areas of the project site. The mining will help re-contour the riverbed for the restoration project, produce aggregate to address San Diego County’s aggregate shortage and generate needed funding for the water and riverbed restoration components. The mining will be sequenced with restoration of the site in phases to minimize impacts.

Myth: The sand mining project is the main goal.

Fact: The project was conceived as a groundwater recharge, river restoration, and sand mining project, although the groundwater recharge is the primary focus of Helix. The project was originally planned to be implemented in phases; however, due to the worsening drought and water supply reductions, the project is being processed as one complete, integrated project by Helix. The project as currently proposed includes three main elements: 1) purified water groundwater recharge, 2) riverbed restoration, and 3) sand mining.

Myth: The sand will be extracted and sold for monetary gain by Helix.

Fact: Helix is not a profit-making agency, however, it is true that revenues from the sand mining will help pay for part of the water recharge project, along with grants and funds from Helix’s Capital Improvement Program Budget. Sand mining revenues are projected to pay for only about 30-50 percent of the project. The sand mining revenue and grants will lessen the impact of the project cost on water ratepayers. In addition, the sand will also help meet San Diego County’s need for high-quality sand, which is currently being imported from outside the County. The sand mining will allow the re-contouring of the Valley floor for restoration of the riverbed for equestrian trails, better habitat, and other public recreational uses.

Myth: Sand is not a very marketable item at this point.

Fact: According to the California Department of Conservation and SANDAG, there is a growing shortage of high-quality sand in San Diego County. High-quality sand, as found in the El Monte Valley, is being imported from outside San Diego County, including Imperial Valley and Mexico, raising the cost of construction in San Diego County. The Valley has been designated by the State as a critical sand resource. Helix has conducted a sand mining market analysis which validates the need for high-quality sand in San Diego County.

Myth: The El Monte Valley aquifer provides abundant water for Valley and other area residents.

Fact: El Monte Valley has a groundwater aquifer in which the level to groundwater has dropped and the quality over time has degraded. The effects are due to the drought conditions, limited recharge, and waste discharges. The El Monte Valley Project will recharge the groundwater aquifer with high-quality water and return the level to near full conditions. Area residents have told us that their wells produce poor quality water, and many use bottled water for drinking.

Myth: The Valley is zoned agricultural.

Fact: The El Monte Valley floor is zoned for aggregate extraction (sand mining). This zoning has been in place for many years. Only a small portion of the Valley floor is zoned agricultural – about 18 acres of the 580 acres owned by Helix.

Myth: The project will last for 10-20 years.

Fact: The duration of the sand mining project has always been 10 years - one year for start up, eight years of mining, and one year for shutdown and closing. The construction of the water recharge facilities would be completed during the first two years of the project, and would begin producing water for Helix shortly thereafter.

Myth: The project will pollute the air with dust and Valley Fever spores and impact property values.

Fact: Noise, dust, traffic, and Valley Fever will be studied as part of the environmental review process. Helix will implement required mitigation measures for significant impacts identified in the EIR. Sand mining is highly regulated in all these areas and will be controlled by a permit from the County of San Diego through their land use approving authority.

Myth: The project impacts five miles of the Valley floor.

Fact: The El Monte Valley Project will cover approximately three miles of the Valley floor (580 acres) and benefit more than 260,000 East County residents.

Myth: The mining project will deplete the Valley's existing aquifer and Valley residents would need water augmentation.

Fact: The mining portion of the project will not deplete the existing aquifer. Water needed for the mining would be used temporarily from the groundwater basin. Purified water would begin recharging the groundwater basin after the first two years of the project. Water levels in the Valley will be enhanced and improved by the project.

Myth: Some Valley residents who make their living with agriculture will be put out of business because they can't afford to purchase water for irrigation.

Fact: Residents will be able to use well water for all agricultural (crops and animals) purposes. Some Valley residents (approximately 40 households), who live within the six-month groundwater retention area near the recharge basins, will be provided potable water for indoor use. Infrastructure for indoor water and a determined amount of water for indoor

use will be provided by Helix at no cost to the homeowner. These details will be negotiated with the affected property owners.

Myth: The County of San Diego is not involved in the approval of the project.

Fact: The County of San Diego must approve a Major Use Permit for the sand mining component of the project. An Environmental Assessment (EA) will be prepared by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation. Helix must prepare an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the entire project in accordance with the County's standards. Therefore, the EIR/EA must be prepared in accordance to County, State, and Federal Standards.

Myth: The project will be disruptive to the Valley way of life.

Fact: Helix is committed to being a good neighbor. We are also committed to developing a project that can be enjoyed by current and future generations. The mining and restoration will occur in segments in order to reduce potential disruption to the surrounding community, wildlife, and vegetation. Replanting will begin after each segment is complete, and complete restoration will be staged at the end of the project.

Myth: After the sand mining project is terminated, horse traffic will be restricted to a boring perimeter, multi-use trail.

Fact: The proposed project includes five miles of meandering multi-purpose trails that can be used by equestrians and hikers. There will be a staging area and multiple entry areas around the perimeter. Valley area equestrians have provided input on the trail design. Trails will be re-routed and open during construction of the project. The California Department of Fish and Game restricts horses within the river in order to protect habitat.