

NEWS

From the Victor Valley
Wastewater Reclamation Authority



VWRA Receives \$5.8 million from FEMA

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More than three years after federal funds were withheld from VWRA due to a report from federal auditors from the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) which sought to defund the project and claw back more than \$33 million from VWRA, the California Office of Emergency Services (CalOES) and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) have finally reimbursed VWRA \$5.8 million dollar for the Upper Narrows emergency and pipeline realignment projects. This constitutes the final reimbursement from the project by Cal OES and FEMA and a rejection of the OIG audit and its findings. “This payment is an exoneration of VWRA and how it applied for and handled Federal funds”, said VWRA General Manager Darron Poulsen. “VWRA always contended the grant money was procured and spent legally and in good faith and this payment affirms what we have said all along.”

After a series of record-breaking storms in December of 2010 knocked out a primary sewer line in the Mojave River, VWRA was forced to conduct a bypass and later replacement project to continue to serve its member agencies. The ensuing temporary bypass and eventual realignment of the sewer line cost approximately \$42 million and had letters of support from many local agencies, including the Regional Water Quality Control Board. The project was completed in 2016. In 2017, an audit report by the OIG alleged that VWRA and its engineering consultants had misled FEMA into approving the project and had mishandled a portion of the Federal funding. The OIG report recommended that FEMA disallow and take back \$33.1 million dollars in grant funds. VWRA vehemently disputed the audits findings and produced thousands of records and interviews to support FEMA’s funding of the project and show that no federal funds were ever improperly procured, misplaced or wasted.

In October of 2020 VWRA’s position was upheld and checks and warrants totaling \$5.8 million from Cal/OES, acting as the agency administering the project for FEMA, were received December 1. The payment effectively resolves the lingering financial and legal issues surrounding the Upper Narrows project and constitutes the final disbursement of federal funds to VWRA.

“Integrity is one of our core values at VWRA”, said Poulsen. “I believe this payment will go a long way in assuring the public that we are good stewards of the resources we use.”