

Nacimiento Water Project

An Available and Reliable Water Supply

Water deliveries from Lake Nacimiento to communities in San Luis Obispo County began in 2010 and, as expected, delivery requests are increasing over time. The Nacimiento Project Commission has declared that 9,287 acre-feet of “surplus” water is available for the current water year. In light of current drought conditions, questions are circulating about the reliability of Nacimiento supplies and how “surplus” water can be available from the project.

Here are responses to frequently asked questions about the availability and reliability of Nacimiento project water supplies.

How much water is available from the Nacimiento project?

San Luis Obispo County Flood Control & Water Conservation District (District) holds a contractual right to 17,500 acre-feet per year in Lake Nacimiento. Of that amount, 1,750 acre-feet is committed to servicing residents in the Lake area and the remaining 15,750 acre-feet is made available to serve the cities of Paso Robles and San Luis Obispo, Atascadero Mutual Water Company, Templeton Community Services District, and a portion of Cayucos. Combined, the participating water agencies hold entitlements to 9,655 acre-feet per year from the project, and 6,095 acre-feet per year remains in reserve.

Is Nacimiento water supply 100% reliable?

No water supply is 100% reliable. Like all surface water systems, the Nacimiento project (see attached map) relies on weather patterns to sustain its yield. However, several factors make the Nacimiento project a very reliable water supply.

First, the dam operator (Monterey County) is contractually obligated to maintain a “minimum pool” for the benefit of the District. That enables the District to maintain deliveries to the participating agencies even when Lake levels are low. In this regard, San Luis Obispo County holds a “senior right” to project water on behalf of the District and the participating agencies.

Further, numerous reliability studies have been completed for the Nacimiento project. The studies evaluate rainfall conditions over a 40+ year period and conclude the project can supply the District’s full entitlement during multiple dry year periods – even in the 5th year of the 1987 to 1992 drought.

2013 was California’s driest single year on record, prompting the Governor to declare a statewide drought emergency. As of April 2014, over 82,000 acre-feet remains in Lake Nacimiento. This is far more than enough to meet projected delivery requests for years to come – even in the unlikely event that no rainfall replenishes the Lake during that time.

Can Nacimiento water be stored or carried over to future years?

No. At this time the District and the participating agencies are not able to store or carry over unused project water in Lake Nacimiento. It is said that we either “use it or lose it.”

How is a “surplus” declared for Nacimiento water?

Each year the participating agencies working together as the Nacimiento Commission determine whether water is available to sell as “surplus” water. That would include reserve water plus any entitlement amounts not delivered to the participating agencies (referred to as “turn back” water). These supplies are made available first to the participating agencies, and then to others who can purchase the water as “reserve water customers” on a temporary basis. The Nacimiento Commission has declared that 9,287 acre-feet of “surplus” water is available for the current water year.

Who is eligible to buy water from the Nacimiento project?

The participating agencies have the first right to project supplies under the entitlement contracts. They also stand first in line to buy any available reserve and turn-back water. Once their requests are fully satisfied, reserve project water can be sold to reserve water customers on a temporary basis not to exceed five years. Water from the Nacimiento project is untreated and not suitable for direct potable use. However, untreated project water can be delivered for irrigation or other non-potable uses.

Who benefits from selling water to reserve water customers?

First, the buyer benefits by having access to a water supply. In addition, ratepayers throughout the project area benefit because the revenues generated from reserve water sales help offset project costs that are paid for by the participating agencies. For example, the current year budget for the Nacimiento Water Operating Fund is \$16.2 million.

Are any requests being processed now?

Yes. A winery north of the City of Paso Robles has requested 250 acre-feet per year over a 5 year period, and that request is under consideration now.

Is reliability compromised by sales to reserve water customers?

No. As noted above, the participating agencies have the first right to project supplies under the entitlement contracts. They also have the first right to purchase any reserve and turn-back water the Nacimiento Commission determines to be available. Thus, project water can only be sold to reserve water customers after requests of the participating agencies are fully satisfied.

Can more water be put to use during the current drought?

Yes. Public water suppliers and various landowners are aggressively considering ways to use supplemental water in San Luis Obispo County. Reserve supplies from the Nacimiento project offer promising opportunities in this regard.

Prepared for Project Participants
by City of Paso Robles