

Project

San Diego Airport shows sustainability leadership through water stewardship plan

$3 million

saved on stormwater compliance and potable water requirements

80%

of non-potable water needs offset through new stormwater management approach

Summary

- The San Diego International Airport spent millions annually on water management.
- It needed a more efficient program that also addressed conservation, water quality, and flood risk.
- Aligning needs and goals, we created a plan to offset most of the airport's non-potable water usage with stormwater collection and reuse.

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Client challenge

San Diego International Airport is partly defined by its relationship to water. Its bayfront location puts it at risk of flooding caused by storms and sea level rise, while California's recurring droughts threaten the airport's operations. The San Diego County Regional Airport Authority, which operates the airport, spent millions annually on stormwater quality management, while costs and regulatory complexities rose.

Also, with $800,000 per year in potable water costs, pressure was mounting for the airport to curtail its water use. As a nationally recognized leader in sustainability, the Authority is playing a central role in the region's climate resilience discussions, and with that comes an intention to maximize the airport's sustainability efforts. With plans to increase passenger volumes, the complexity and magnitude of the airport's water stewardship challenges would only increase. The Authority knew a bold water stewardship program was needed and called on Haley & Aldrich, its decade-long trusted advisor, for help.

Our approach

Through a series of facilitated workshops and technical analyses, Haley & Aldrich helped align disparate needs and goals toward a common vision for water stewardship. We helped Authority stakeholders recognize interconnections among water use and reuse decisions, new programs to accommodate future passenger growth, airport developments, and a changing climate.

The resulting Authority's Water Stewardship Plan addresses issues of water conservation, water quality, and flood risk, while leveraging crucial opportunities within the Authority's Airport Development Plan and Capital Improvement Program. Rather than accommodating future development simply by building new stormwater outfalls that pose both regulatory and flood risks, the Authority is now investing in stormwater collection and reuse efforts to offset the 80 percent of its needs that do not require potable water. Furthermore, because staff co-created the plan, they are vested in realizing the goals of the actionable strategy and incorporating the plan into the Authority's regular decision-making processes.

Value delivered

- Generated potential annual savings of over $3 million on stormwater compliance and potable water requirements
- Articulated a vision for a closed-loop water system that minimizes stormwater discharge and maximizes water reuse
- Established the Authority as a world-class steward of water resources

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