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Increased Water Storage Positions Banning for Faster Fire Response

BEAUMONT, CA (May 4, 2026) – A new one-million-gallon reservoir built by Banning Heights Mutual Water Company (BHMWC) with gap funding assistance from the San Gorgonio Pass Water Agency (SGPWA) is expanding drinking water capacity and strengthening wildfire readiness in the hills above Banning. The new reservoir supports SGPWA's Heli-Hydrant network, providing critical refill access for firefighting helicopters during emergencies.

"This project shows what is possible when agencies come together with a shared purpose," said SGPWA Board President Robert Ybarra. "We have strengthened our water system and made it easier for first responders to do their jobs safely and effectively. This is about protecting lives and supporting our community."

The new reservoir serves 552 residents across 170 connections. BHMWC secured a \$3.756 million Department of Water Resources grant through SGPWA and the California Rural Water Association's Small Systems Water Assistance Program to complete the project, with construction beginning in late 2025.

The new reservoir will complement SGPWA's Heli-Hydrant network, expanding critical aerial firefighting capacity in the area. A planned Banning Heights site will be the seventh and northernmost in the system. The site is funded in partnership with the Riverside County Flood Control and Water Conservation District. Located on the BHMWC property, it will serve the City of Banning, Banning Heights, Banning Canyon, and the Morongo area. The site was strategically selected based on lessons from the 2020 Apple Fire, which burned more than 33,000 acres nearby and forced widespread evacuations.

Wildfire risk in the region continues to intensify. Fires not only threaten homes but also increase the risk of severe runoff and water quality impacts. Expanding water storage and enabling rapid helicopter refill ensure firefighters have immediate access to water when conditions escalate.

SGPWA's gap funding made the timely construction of this project possible. As a short-term bridge loan, gap funding covers upfront costs while agencies await grant reimbursement, preventing delays to critical projects. This support helped BHMWC deliver infrastructure that improves reliability and regional preparedness.

"Completing this reservoir reflects the kind of long-term planning our community depends on," said BHMWC Board President Steve Romberg. "We are proud to partner with SGPWA to strengthen water reliability across the region. Our customers count on us to deliver safe, dependable service, and projects like this help make sure we are ready when it matters most."

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The project will be recognized at a ribbon-cutting ceremony scheduled for June 11, 2026. To learn more, 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.