



County of Monterey

Item No.10

Board Report

Board of Supervisors
Chambers
168 W. Alisal St., 1st Floor
Salinas, CA 93901

Legistar File Number: WRAG 26-115

April 20, 2026

Introduced: 4/6/2026

Current Status: Agenda Ready

Version: 1

Matter Type: WR General Agenda

Consider adopting a release schedule for Nacimiento and San Antonio reservoirs for 2026

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends that the Monterey County Water Resources Agency Board of Directors:

Adopt a Release Schedule for Nacimiento and San Antonio Reservoirs for 2026.

SUMMARY/DISCUSSION:

In most years, continuous reservoir releases are made during the “conservation season” (April-October) to optimize Salinas Valley groundwater recharge as well as Salinas River Diversion Facility (SRDF) operations. These conservation releases are guided by a schedule developed each year in late winter to early spring by staff to approximate the expected sequence of reservoir withdrawals that fully account for a complex set of obligations, constraints and, to the extent possible, hydrologic conditions.

Key obligations include annual withdrawal limits and conditions-based flow prescriptions supportive of federally listed species. Both are stipulated in the water rights that authorize the Agency to store, withdraw and re-divert water within the Nacimiento, San Antonio and Salinas River watersheds. Constraints are of physical, administrative and environmental nature. Physical constraints include elevation-dependent limits on methods and rates of releases as well as safe operating limits of release outlets; administrative constraints include guaranteed water allotments established by contractual agreements. Require release minimums, required lagoon bypass flows, as well as limits on release rate changes are among the environmental constraints accounted for in the development of the annual release schedule.

The Agency has made releases during 13 of the 17 summer conservation seasons since the Salinas River Diversion Facility (SRDF) began operating in 2010. Two extended droughts resulted in insufficient reservoir levels to operate from 2014-2016 and in 2022. More recently, 2023-2025 marked a return to wet conditions providing large storage increases at both Reservoirs and enough water to fully operate in all years since 2023. Combined storage as of April 14, 2026, is sufficient to plan a fourth consecutive full SRDF diversion season this year.

The attached proposed 2026 release schedule assumes no new inflow events for the remainder of the calendar year. The proposed schedule limits releases from Nacimiento Reservoir to 280 cfs or lower due to planned maintenance activities expected to be complete by July 1. Releases from Nacimiento Reservoir may exceed 280 cfs once maintenance activities are complete.

SRDF startup occurred in the first week of April. The proposed schedule reflects maintained conservation flows to recharge the Salinas Valley groundwater basin and operate the SRDF into mid-October while meeting the operational requirements of State Water Resources Control Board appropriative water rights held by the Agency for the Nacimiento and San Antonio Rivers.

As is the standard procedure each year, the release schedule will be updated monthly based on actual weather and river conditions, changing SRDF demands, and other reservoir operational considerations as may be necessary subsequent to the development of this draft release schedule.

OTHER AGENCY INVOLVEMENT:

None

FINANCING:

None

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Attachments:

2026 Reservoir Release Schedule