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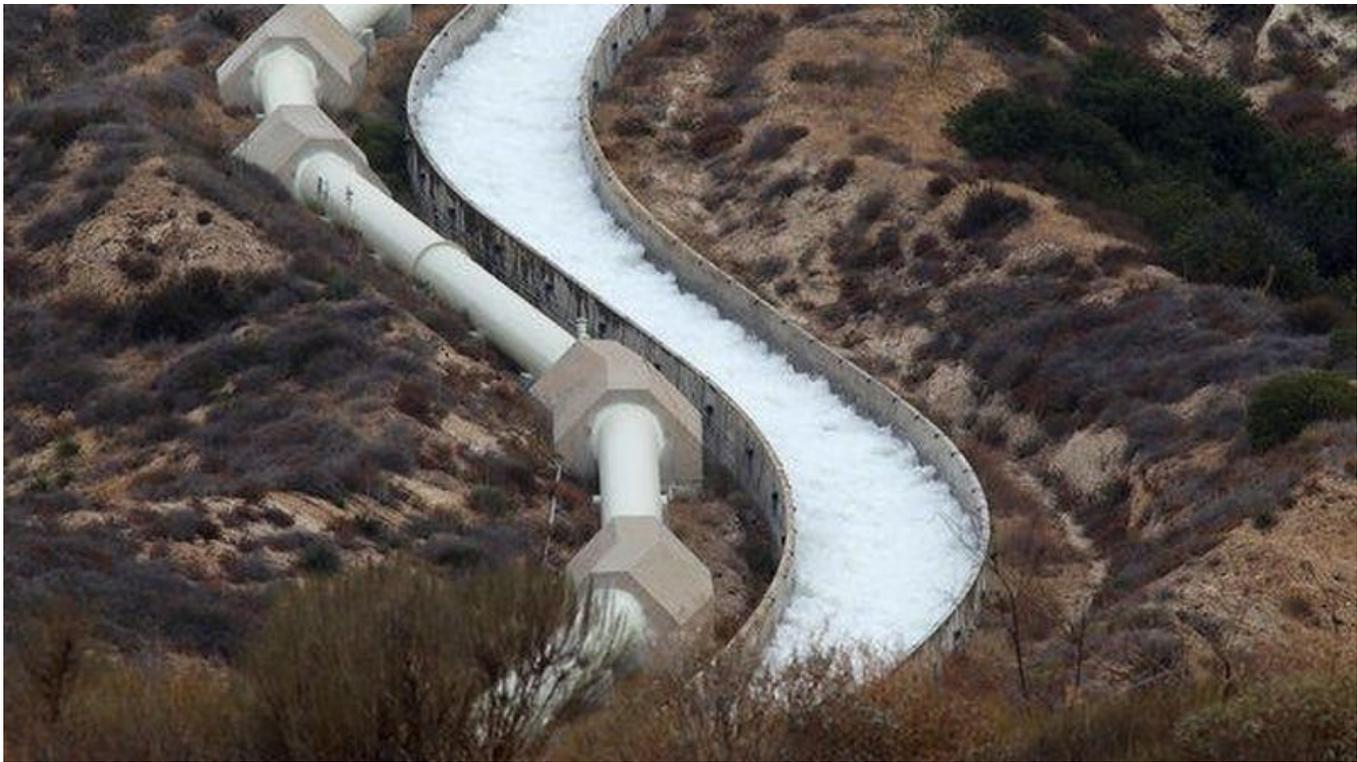
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OP-ED OP-ED OPINION

2019 will be the year L.A. starts to wean itself from imported water

By MARK GOLD
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Water imported from the Owens Valley flows down the Los Angeles Aqueduct's Cascades section in Sylmar. (Los Angeles Times)

It's been hard to see 2018 as a good year for water in California.

In November, voters rejected a bond that would have provided almost \$9 billion for water resource infrastructure and protection projects across the state. Congress, with support from Gov. Jerry Brown and Sen. Dianne Feinstein, worked to sidestep important environmental protections for the San Francisco Bay and the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta. And the Trump administration rolled back protections for hundreds of miles of streams and rivers in the Southwest as well as thousands of acres of wetlands.

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There's every reason to expect that 2019 will be far better, largely because of Measure W, which was passed by voters in November. The initiative imposes a Los Angeles County parcel tax that will generate \$300 million per year to reduce pollution from runoff and capture storm water to add to the water supply.

Our local beaches, bays, rivers and lakes have been in violation of the Clean Water Act for decades. Every time it rains, the resulting runoff leaves beaches and rivers looking like trash dumps, and makes the ocean unsafe for swimming and surfing because of pathogens in the water pouring out of storm drains. Measure W gives Los Angeles County and its 88 cities the chance to transform urban hardscapes into more nature-based, green infrastructure that will reduce water pollution, augment local water supplies, ease the risk of flooding and beautify neighborhoods.

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Having the money to transform a public system isn't the same as transforming the system, however, and spending the money effectively will be a key challenge.

Currently, Los Angeles County imports 58% of its water from more than 200 miles away, and the city of L.A. imports about 90% of its water. A key goal of Measure W spending must be to change that.

To take full advantage of this rare opportunity, local leaders will need to coordinate across agencies and jurisdictions. New spending should be planned in tandem with park projects funded by 2016's Measure A and with transportation infrastructure projects funded by Measures R and M, passed in 2008 and 2016, respectively.

Going forward, every street improvement initiative should be viewed as an opportunity for greener streets that facilitate water absorption and ensure that remaining runoff is treated. New park projects should include ways of capturing runoff on site for local irrigation or to augment groundwater supplies. With funding from Measure W to supplement existing funds, these goals now seem possible.

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Weaning ourselves from imported water is starting to seem possible. Santa Monica recently approved a plan that will enable it to be 100% water self-sufficient by 2023: a Herculean achievement given that the city was fully dependent on imported water just 20 years ago.

Storm water capture, done right as part of Measure W, has the potential to meet as much as 30% of the county's water demand. The city of Los Angeles and the Los Angeles County Sanitation Districts could become the source of another 30% of the county's water supply by turning all of their large, coastal sewage treatment plants into full water-recycling plants. Cleaning up the long-polluted San Fernando Valley aquifer, already underway, could further add to the local water supply.

Reliance on local water supplies will make L.A. County far more earthquake-resilient and will become increasingly important as climate change brings longer and more severe droughts to the region, and to our imported water sources in the Sierras and the Colorado River watershed.

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