

# Changing the landscape of Southern California: A conservation success story



Facing a statewide, record-breaking drought, the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California took a bold step: it funded the nation's largest turf removal and water conservation program. The goal was simple: get Southern Californians to use less water outdoors. Beyond slashing immediate water use by replacing thousands of water-thirsty lawns, the turf removal program has helped change the way Californians see their yards and open spaces. Where green grass was once the standard in every yard, beauty and value are now found in colorful drought-tolerant, California Friendly™ landscaping.

## A water-wise investment

Metropolitan invested \$310 million in the regional turf removal program, resulting in more than 160 million square feet of turf being removed as of December 2016. That is expected to annually save 21,600 acre-feet of water – enough to serve about 43,000 households. Metropolitan expects most participants will enjoy their turf-free yards for the long-term. If they do, the rebate ends up reducing water use at a cost of about \$600 per acre-foot.



**Largest turf removal  
and conservation  
program in the nation**



**160 million square feet  
OF turf removed**

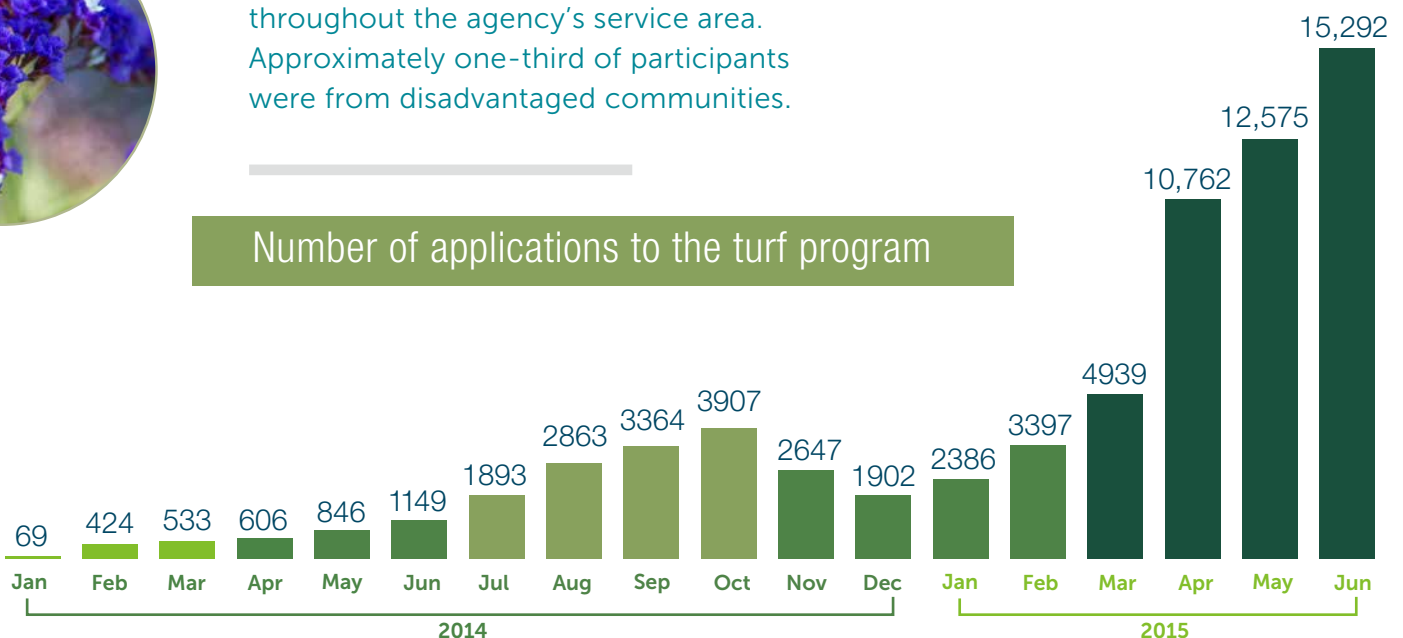


**85,000 applications  
FOR TURF REMOVAL REBATES**

## Unprecedented popularity

Metropolitan received more than 85,000 applications for the program, and they came from diverse communities throughout the agency's service area. Approximately one-third of participants were from disadvantaged communities.

## Number of applications to the turf program



Program closed July 9, 2015

# How we helped transform a region

When Metropolitan first launched the turf removal program in 2008, residents and businesses were offered \$0.30 per square foot of turf removed. In 2013, Metropolitan upped the incentive to \$1 per square foot. Eight months later, as the drought worsened, it was further raised to \$2 per square foot. Interest in the program skyrocketed.



- To receive the rebate, residents, business owners and public agencies first submitted an application to Metropolitan. Once approved, the applicant removed the turf and then provided evidence to Metropolitan in order to receive the rebate.
- Many local agencies provided additional financial incentives.
- Metropolitan and its contractors conducted random inspections to determine compliance.
- An internal audit independently measured 8 million square feet of turf removed through the program and found less than a 2 percent difference between the actual square footage removed and the square footage reported by and rebated to applicants
- With the program now closed to new applications, Metropolitan is studying how much water the program is saving and how many more Southern Californians have replaced their lawns.

## Spreading through neighborhoods

Metropolitan's rebate program, combined with similar programs at our member agencies, was designed to help trigger a market transformation. That Southern Californians continue to remove their turf is a good sign that transformation is happening.

Metropolitan is still studying the extent of this multiplier effect, beyond anecdotal evidence. One study by the Irvine Ranch Water District found that for every three participants who removed their front yard turf as part of that agency's rebate program, four additional people converted their yards to drought tolerant landscaping without financial incentives.



**"We're going to see the ripple effect of this transformation for generations to come."**

**– Deven Upadhyay, MANAGER, MWD'S WATER RESOURCE MANAGEMENT GROUP**

## WHO IS METROPOLITAN

The Metropolitan Water District of Southern California is a state-established cooperative of 26 member agencies – cities and public water agencies – that serve nearly 19 million people in six counties. Metropolitan imports water from the Colorado River and Northern California to supplement local supplies and helps its members develop increased water conservation, recycling, storage and other resource-management programs.

## OUR MISSION

The mission of the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California is to provide its service area with adequate and reliable supplies of high-quality water to meet present and future needs in an environmentally and economically responsible way.

### The Metropolitan Water District of Southern California

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