Media line: 408-681-9265
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Valley Water conducts successful water release through new Anderson Dam Tunnel

MORGAN HILL — On Oct. 27, 2026, Valley Water successfully conducted the first controlled release of water from Anderson Reservoir into Coyote Creek through the newly constructed Anderson Dam tunnel. This milestone clears the way for construction to begin on the dam's seismic reconstruction.

During the initial test, contractors operated the tunnel's two fixed cone valves, gradually opening each valve to 10% of its capacity and releasing water into Coyote Creek. The valves were tested separately to allow time for the flows to move downstream. In total, about 4 million gallons of water passed through the new tunnel, enough to fill about six Olympic-sized swimming pools.

The completion and testing of the 1,736-foot-long tunnel is a significant step forward for Valley Water in managing Anderson Reservoir during dam construction and heavy rain events. With the possibility of a strong El Niño this winter, the tunnel will provide essential control over water levels throughout the rainy season. Valley Water will use the new tunnel as needed to maintain Anderson Reservoir at the approximate 3% restriction.

"Seeing water flow through the new tunnel for the first time is a big moment and a major milestone for Valley Water and our community," Valley Water Chair Tony Estremera said. "It represents years of hard work by our staff and strong collaboration with our contractors. This tunnel improves our ability to manage reservoir levels as we move forward with rebuilding the dam to current seismic standards."

With the new tunnel ready to help manage reservoir levels, Valley Water is preparing for the next phase: rebuilding Anderson Dam. Valley Water awarded the $1.88 billion construction contract for the reconstruction of Anderson Dam to the Flatiron Dragados Sukut ADSRP Joint Venture in July 2026.

"Rebuilding Anderson Dam is an investment in the safety of our communities and the reliability of our water supply," said Valley Water Director John Varela, whose district includes Anderson Dam. "This milestone shows the progress we're making toward returning our county's largest reservoir to full capacity for future generations."

Construction will intensify in 2027 with the development of haul roads, temporary bridges and additional tunneling to further expand water-release capacity. From 2028 through 2032, crews will rebuild the dam and spillway, install new outlet pipes, and complete essential seismic safety upgrades. Dam embankment construction is expected to be completed in 2032, followed by site restoration through 2033.

Once rebuilt, Anderson Dam will meet modern seismic standards and be designed to withstand a major earthquake. The project will restore Anderson Reservoir to its full operating capacity as the largest surface water storage facility in Santa Clara County.

Visit this Dropbox for video and photos of today's valve test and the project site. This Dropbox also includes soundbites from Valley Water Board Chair Tony Estremera and Deputy Operating Officer Ryan McCarter.

For more information about the Anderson Dam Seismic Retrofit Project, visit ValleyWater.org/AndersonDam.

The Santa Clara Valley Water District manages an integrated water resources system that includes the supply of clean, safe water, flood protection and stewardship of streams on behalf of Santa Clara County's nearly 2 million residents. The district effectively manages 10 dams and surface water reservoirs, three water treatment plants, an advanced recycled water purification center, a state-of-the-art water quality laboratory, nearly 280 acres of groundwater recharge ponds and more than 350 miles of streams. We provide wholesale water and groundwater management services to local municipalities and private water retailers who deliver drinking water directly to homes and businesses in Santa Clara County.