



Municipal Service Review

ESCONDIDO REGION

FINAL · PART 1

REPORT SUMMARY | October 2019

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General Themes and Conclusions

The Escondido region encompasses a geographically distinct subarea of “North County” removed from the coast and bisected by two of San Diego County’s most traveled commute corridors in Interstate 15 and State Route 78. The region’s distinctions are also reflected and tenured in local government with two of the earliest city and special district establishments in San Diego County with the City of Escondido incorporating in 1888 and the Escondido Irrigation District forming in 1891; latter being subsequently dissolved with its water system eventually divided between the City and Rincon del Diablo MWD at the time of its formation in 1954. Deer Springs FPD’s formation in 1981 completes the current and relatively confined concentration of local government in the region among these three agencies.

The current estimated population within the region is approximately 182,000 with four-fifths residing within

Escondido with considerable overlap with Rincon del Diablo MWD. Historically, Rincon del Diablo MWD and later Deer Springs FPD have served as unincorporated placeholders ahead of development requiring an expanded range of municipal services and annexing into Escondido. This historical trend is reflected in the rate of population growth in Escondido and the average annual change of 5.5% over a 20-year period between 1980 and 2000. More recently, however, there has been an orientation shift from this historical development pattern in the region with the average annual change in population growth in Escondido decreasing to 0.7% since 2000. This change is attributed to both interest within Escondido to slow the rate of new growth and marked by General Plan Policy E and its provisions to now require voter approval to intensify land uses as well as external pushback to City annexations from neighboring unincorporated residents. This recent shift – notably and as

one of the central themes detailed below – underlies a new and emerging role of Rincon del Diablo MWD and Deer Springs FPD serving as community separators in demarking the urban–rural interface in the region.

Part One of this municipal service review on the Escondido region produces seven central conclusions relative to San Diego LAFCO’s growth management tasks and interests as prescribed under statute and specific to Deer Springs FPD and Rincon del Diablo MWD. These conclusions collectively address the availability, need, and adequacy of these two agencies’ municipal services and range in substance from addressing demand–to–capacity relationships to overall financial standing. The conclusions also address potential sphere changes. The conclusions are independently drawn and sourced to information collected and analyzed by the Commission between 2014 and 2018 and detailed in the agency profiles.

No. 1 Good Financial Standing


Deer Springs FPD and Rincon del Diablo MWD both finished the five–year report period in good financial standing based on standard measurements showing the agencies have relatively high or otherwise strong liquidity, capital, and margin levels. Most notably, both agencies finished each fiscal year with positive operating and total margins near or above double–digit percentages. These positive margins underlie both agencies’ ability to improve their net–positions over the report period as well as double their respective operating reserve ratios.

No. 2 Adequate and Available Capacities

Deer Springs FPD and Rincon del Diablo MWD have established adequate and excess capacities in meeting current demands for their core municipal services involving fire protection and emergency medical and potable water, respectively. This includes – and most pertinent to future growth – Rincon del Diablo MWD’s current average annual potable water demand over the five–year report period equaling no more than 35% of accessible supplies in either of the District’s two distinct service areas.

No. 3 Changing Roles

Rincon del Diablo MWD and Deer Springs FPD have historically served unincorporated areas adjacent to Escondido generally as placeholders ahead of new development requiring a range of municipal services and annexing into the City. These historical roles have begun to transition in recent years due to resident preferences as well as policy shifts and underlie changing roles for the agencies as community separators in demarking the urban–rural interface in the region.



Completed in 1988, City Hall was the first phase of the Escondido Civic Center.



Lake Hodges in San Dieguito River Park near Escondido

» General Themes and Conclusions

No. 4
Need for Additional Service Alignment

Rincon del Diablo MWD and Escondido share four distinct municipal service responsibilities in common: fire protection and emergency medical; potable water; recycled water; and wastewater. The agencies have synchronized the planning and delivery of three – fire protection and emergency medical, potable water, and recycled water – and in doing so delineated immediate and near-term service roles within the overlapping portions of their jurisdictional boundaries. Additional alignment is needed for wastewater to help inform capital planning for both agencies in the region and specifically within Elfin Forest, Eden Hills, and Harmony Grove.

No. 5
Exploring Long-Term Governance Roles

It would be beneficial for San Diego LAFCO to prepare an addendum to separately assess governance options involving Rincon del Diablo MWD and Escondido given overlap in boundaries and services. The addendum would respond to existing questions in the region regarding the agencies’ ultimate service roles and primarily premised as an informational document and potentially transition with sufficient merit and consensus to facilitate a functional or political consolidation.

No. 6
Aligning Rincon del Diablo MWD’s Jurisdictional Boundary to Services

Close to one-half of Rincon del Diablo MWD’s jurisdictional boundary lies outside its improvement districts and do not receive municipal services from the District. Irrespective of other conclusions, San Diego LAFCO should work with Rincon del Diablo MWD to better align the jurisdictional boundary with existing and planned service provision and remedy otherwise misplaced boundary markers.

No. 7
Prepare Comprehensive Sphere of Influence Updates

A preliminary review indicates comprehensive updates to Rincon del Diablo MWD and Deer Springs FPD’s spheres of influence are merited to consider one or more changes. These updates should be performed in conjunction with an anticipated update of Escondido and be formally added to the current workplan with the expectation the work may extend into the subsequent fiscal year.



Recommendations

The following recommendations call for specific action either from San Diego LAFCO and or one or more of the affected agencies based on information generated as part of this report and outlined below in order of their placement in Section 5.0 (Written Determinations). Recommendations for Commission action are dependent on a subsequent directive from the membership and through the adopted work plan.

1. San Diego LAFCO should coordinate with the County of San Diego and SANDAG to develop buildout estimates specific to Deer Springs FPD and Rincon del Diablo MWD and incorporate the data into the next scheduled municipal service review.
2. Rincon del Diablo MWD should continue efforts to encourage the production and use of recycled water, including further partnering with the City of Escondido on the significant investments being made in recycled water production.
3. San Diego LAFCO should revisit the analysis in this report as appropriate in conjunction with Part Two of the municipal service review on the City of Escondido and its contract role to provide fire protection and emergency medical to Rincon del Diablo MWD.
4. Deer Springs FPD should explore opportunities to extend and/or expand its contract relationship with the County of San Diego consistent with San Diego LAFCO's policy objective to facilitate the orderly expansion of the Fire Authority and its role to organize and improve fire service in unincorporated San Diego County.
5. San Diego LAFCO should proceed to determine wastewater service responsibilities within the Elfin Forest, Eden Hills, and Harmony Grove areas and incorporate the analysis into subsequent sphere of influence updates.
6. San Diego LAFCO should add to a future workplan an addendum to separately assess long-term governance options involving Rincon del Diablo MWD and the City of Escondido given the existing overlap in boundaries and service activities.
7. San Diego LAFCO and Rincon del Diablo MWD – and irrespective of other recommendations – should pursue realignment of the District's jurisdictional boundary to more succinctly reflect existing and/or planned services.



Kit Carson Park
in Escondido



Pedestrian Bridge
across Lake Hodges,
the world's longest
stress ribbon bridge

» Recommendations

- 8. A preliminary review indicates comprehensive updates to Rincon del Diablo MWD and Deer Springs FPD's spheres of influence are merited to consider one or more changes involving both agencies. These updates should be timed in step with the Escondido update and formally added to the workplan for 2019-2020.
- 9. San Diego LAFCO should consider existing automatic aid agreements and the delivery of actual services in helping to inform potential changes to the Deer Springs FPD sphere of influence and – as appropriate – enact boundary changes.

Hodges Reservoir was created with the building of Hodges Dam on San Dieguito Creek in 1918. The City of San Diego purchased the dam and reservoir in 1925. When full, the reservoir has 1,234 surface acres, a maximum water depth of 115 feet and 27 shoreline miles.
