

VOTE YES · 2026 VCTA VOTER GUIDE

United Water Measure D: \$350 Million Water Bond

VCTA's yes: public information, an open door, and a two-thirds vote

By the Ventura County Taxpayers Association · September 2026

The Ventura County Taxpayers Association recommends a Yes vote on United Water Conservation District Measure D. This is a defined, voter-approved capital investment — not an open-ended general tax. It authorizes up to \$350 million in general-obligation bonds for three mandated projects: Santa Felicia Dam seismic and spillway work, Freeman Diversion fish passage and screens, and seawater-intrusion / groundwater protection on the Oxnard Plain.

The district's own engineering report under Water Code sections 74800–74804 puts the three priority projects at about \$469 million combined. Santa Felicia Dam Safety Improvements are estimated at \$314 million. The dam, completed in 1955, stores Lake Piru and feeds the Santa Clara River system that recharges groundwater from the valley to the Oxnard Plain. Roughly 237,000 people live in the federally designated inundation zone downstream. The California Division of Safety of Dams and the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission require a seismic retrofit of the outlet works and intake tower and a spillway that can pass about 220,000 cubic feet per second. That is a safety mandate, not a wish list.

The Freeman Diversion Improvement Project is estimated at about \$104 million. It implements a binding federal court judgment and Endangered Species Act obligations for fish passage and modern screens, and is expected to increase groundwater recharge by 5,000 to 8,000 acre-feet a year. The Extraction Barrier and Brackish Water Treatment Project, about \$51 million, is aimed at seawater intrusion into the Oxnard Plain basins and is a piece of the region's Groundwater Sustainability Plan. Saltwater in the aquifer is a permanent loss of supply.

United Water has already stacked outside money against that \$469 million: about \$31.5 million in grants and up to \$83 million in low-interest federal financing, including WIFIA. The remaining gap is why the bond is capped at \$350 million. Bond proceeds are legally restricted to capital. They cannot pay salaries, operations, or administration. The tax is ad valorem: about \$24 per \$100,000 of assessed value, roughly \$121 a year or \$10 a month for an average homeowner, over about 30 years (the district describes a term from fiscal year 2028 through 2057). Eligible voters live in the district — Oxnard, Santa Paula, Fillmore, Port Hueneme, Piru, and parts of Ventura and Camarillo.

General Manager Mauricio Guardado said the projects “are not optional. They are required by regulators, driven by court obligations, and essential to protecting the groundwater our communities depend on.” Board President Lynn Maulhardt added that “there is a great deal hanging in the balance, and it was important to this Board that voters have their say.”

VCTA's usual posture on bonds is skepticism. We said yes on Measure D for four reasons that are as important as the project list. First, United Water ran a comprehensive informational campaign: the costs, the mandates, the outside money already in hand, and the remaining gap were put in front of the public in writing, not sprung in a 75-word ballot question. Second, the

district has been transparent about the process — a published Water Code report, a unanimous June 10 board vote, and numbers that can be checked. Third, it kept an open door. Taxpayers who wanted the backup could get it. VCTA's team spent more than a year working on water issues and meeting with United to ask questions. That is how a public agency should ask for \$350 million. Fourth, and decisive, Measure D cannot pass on a slim majority. General-obligation bonds of this kind require a two-thirds vote of district voters under Proposition 13 and local bond law. Two-thirds is a high bar. It is supposed to be. If the case is as strong as United Water has made it, the measure will clear that bar. If it cannot, it should not become debt.

The alternative to a voter-approved bond is not free water. It is court or regulator default, or a rate spike on the same ratepayers without a two-thirds vote. That is a taxpayer choice, not a blank check. Vote Yes on Measure D.

Sources

United Water Conservation District Board, June 10, 2026 (unanimous); Water Code §§ 74800–74804 report (project costs, \$31.5 million grants, ~\$83 million low-interest loans, \$350 million cap).

UWCD bond page and July 1, 2026 news release (Guardado and Maulhardt quotes; DSOD/FERC; federal court judgment; GSP).

VC Star, June 26, 2026, and Sept. 3, 2026 Measure D explainer (\$24 / \$100,000; ~\$121 average home; ~30-year term; 237,000 downstream).

California Constitution, article XIII A, and local general-obligation bond two-thirds requirement.