The Delhi cabinet chaired by CM Arvind Kejriwal on Wednesday decided to pay Rs 77,000 per acre annually to farmers for leasing their land on the Yamuna floodplain for the execution of the recently-announced water conservation project.

The project involves the use of the floodplain to conserve rainwater to fight the city’s fast depleting water table. No concrete would be used in the construction of the reservoir and the river’s normal flow would not be disturbed.

The decision was taken on the recommendations of a five-member interdepartmental committee that was formed to negotiate the rental with the farmers. The water conservation project will stretch from Palla to Wazirabad.

The AAP government has described the project as the first of its kind in the country. It aims at creating small depressions that will catch water from an overflowing Yamuna during the monsoon and recharge the groundwater to deal with water shortage, particularly during the summer months.

To roll out the project, Delhi government requires the concurrence of central government agencies such as Central Ground Water Board, Central Water Commission and Upper Yamuna River Board. Most of the approvals have been received for the pilot project, barring two from National Green Tribunal (NGT) committees, the government said in a statement. The approval from NGT is expected soon.

After the cabinet meeting, Kejriwal called up Union Jal Shakti minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat and thanked him for the quick approvals by the Centre for the pilot project. The government wants to roll out the project this monsoon so that its effectiveness at conserving water can be tested and the plan can be executed at a mega scale later.

The project was given a nod by the cabinet last Tuesday. “The pilot project has moved at a fast pace due to the hourly monitoring by the chief minister. He has been keenly pushing for the ambitious pilot project which is going to be a game changer for Delhi,” the government statement said.

Recycling water and recharging groundwater are significant to address the scarcity in the capital. A report by the consultant and IIT-Delhi already indicates that the project will be a big success based on the Yamuna’s vast floodplain and the huge potential for water conservation.

Placing the project on the fast track has given a month’s time to the irrigation and flood control department to prepare the project. The government wants to proceed on the full project next year. After the conservation effort augments the water table, borewells would be used to draw out water and solve the capital’s shortage.