

# NEWS CLIPS

Published February 28, 2014



**Resource Conservation and Public Outreach**

Organized by date

# Legislature passes \$687M drought plan

*Money will go to conservation, recycling, jobless*

By Fenit Nirappil Associated Press  
Ventura County Star 2/28/2014

SACRAMENTO -Lawmakers on Thursday overwhelmingly passed a \$687 million plan to provide immediate relief to drought-stricken communities.

The package includes emergency money for communities running low on drinking water and farming communities where fallowed fields are leading to sky high unemployment.

Amid one of California's driest years on record, the Assembly and Senate voted to approve Senate Bills 103 and 104 and send the legislation to Gov. Jerry Brown.

The legislative package moved quickly after it was announced last week by the governor and Democratic legislative leaders. It will take effect immediately if signed by the governor, as expected.

The plan redirects money in the state budget and draws from two bonds previously approved by voters.

It includes \$472 million in accelerated grant funding for water conservation and recycling projects. Also, \$15 million will go to communities running low on drinking water supplies and \$47 million will provide food and housing assistance for people in drought stricken communities.

'This is a lot of money that will help thousands of California families dealing with the drought,' said Senate President Pro Tem Darrell Steinberg, D-Sacramento.

The plan also increases penalties for illegally diverting water and expands the State Water Resources Control Board's authority during a state of emergency. One provision was amended Wednesday to limit the board's ability to issue fines, after Republicans raised concern about language infringing on existing water rights.

The bills passed with large bipartisan majorities, even though a handful of Republicans in each house voted against them.

Sen. Jean Fuller, R-Bakersfield, said negotiations in the last week largely satisfied the concerns of water districts and farmers in her district. She noted the high jobless rate in the Central Valley because of drought related cutbacks in the agricultural industry.

'We are willing to reach out and help some of those in my area who will have 30 or 40 percent unemployment,' she said.

Other spending contained in the legislation includes \$77 million in bond money for flood protection, \$40 million for water efficiency and water-saving irrigation projects, and \$1 million for a conservation awareness campaign.

Republicans questioned the tapping of \$40 million from a fund meant for projects that will reduce greenhouse gas emissions, saying water projects are only tangentially related. Assemblywoman Nancy Skinner, D-Berkeley, countered that 20 percent of Californians' electricity consumption relates to water.

"If we reduce water use, we reduce some proportion of electricity and some proportion of methane," she said.

Assemblyman Frank Bigelow, R-O'Neals, said he supported the bills but cautioned that lawmakers have more work to do to solve the state's water shortage.

"We cannot forget this does not fix the long-term water woes," Bigelow says. "The legislation does not provide any real water."

Lawmakers are continuing to negotiate changes to an \$11.1 billion water bond scheduled to go before voters in November. The Legislature originally passed the bond measure in 2009 and has delayed its appearance on the ballot several times since. It is considered too expensive and too full of pet projects.

Among the disagreements over long-term solutions is whether California needs to build more reservoirs and expand existing ones by raising the height of dams. Republicans generally want more storage while many Democrats prefer increased conservation.

California's last major reservoir was completed when the state's population was roughly half of its current 38 million people.

Sen. Mark Wyland, R-Escondido, said he would like to see Thursday's vote on the immediate relief generate momentum for the future debate about long-term solutions.

"I hope this is the beginning of dramatically increasing storage," he said.

# Stored water swells as idea

## *Congress thinks new and higher dams*

By Michael Doyle and McClatchy Washington Bureau  
Ventura County Star 2/28/2014

WASHINGTON — The California drought is stoking a congressional appetite for additional water storage, with new and larger dams back on competing menus.

The latest offering is expected Friday, as House members plan to introduce a package of bills to authorize a larger Shasta Dam, a new dam on the Upper San Joaquin River and an expanded San Luis Reservoir. Next week, a bill is expected that would call for construction of a reservoir northwest of Sacramento.

The water storage flurry comes, not coincidentally, as negotiators seek common ground on broader California drought legislation. Now lawmakers face several important tactical, political and financial questions that will shape whether the dam building proposals sink or succeed.

“We want to use the moment when people are focused and interested,” Rep. John Garamendi, D-Calif., said in an interview. “We’ve got to move these projects forward.”

As part of a multipronged maneuver, Garamendi is crafting a bill to authorize a new Sites Reservoir, northwest of Sacramento. His bill could be introduced next week.

Separately, Rep. Jim Costa, D-Calif., and some allies on Friday plan to introduce several other bills authorizing California water storage projects. One would green-light a new Upper San Joaquin River dam, commonly called Temperance Flat. Another would permit expansion of the San Luis Reservoir on the western side of the San Joaquin Valley, and a third would raise Shasta Dam.

The Republican-controlled House, on a largely party-line vote, previously passed a California drought bill that included authorizations for the same projects, but explicitly ruled out federal funding.

The new House bills, by contrast, leave open the possibility for the standard federal cost-sharing, long a part of western water infrastructure.

“I don’t believe any of these projects are going to become a reality unless there’s a cost-

sharing program,” Costa said.

Garamendi concurred, stressing that “the federal government has to be involved” if the water projects are to stay afloat. Costa’s bills essentially say that once the Interior Department signs off on cost-benefit studies showing the projects are feasible, the projects are authorized for construction.

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Public safety briefs

CAMARILLO

## Water leak gives students a break

Students and teachers got a day off Thursday when a water leak in a main line closed Camarillo High School.

The leak was discovered soon after classes started and forced the school to turn off water to the entire campus.

“We thought if we could have the water back on by 10 a.m., we would continue school,” said Stephen Dickinson, assistant superintendent of the Oxnard Union High School District. “That was not going to be possible, so we decided to release students after second period.”

Students left campus about 9:40 a.m., and buses were there to provide transportation.

The leak was fixed by 1 p.m., and school was scheduled to resume Friday.

The leak was in the center of campus. The cause and extent of damage were unknown.

Any damages will be covered by the district’s insurance, Dickinson said.

Dickinson said the problem was caused by a small leak that made water flow out over the lawn. The biggest issue was having to turn off water to the entire school, he said.

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**PUBLIC HEARING SCHEDULED  
ON WATER RATES AND CHARGES**

The Metropolitan Water District of Southern California (Metropolitan) will hold a public hearing to receive comments from member agencies and the general public on water rates and charges to be considered by Metropolitan's Board of Directors.

The hearing will be held on Tuesday March 11, 2014 at 9:00 a.m. in the Board Room of Metropolitan's headquarters building at 700 North Alameda Street, Los Angeles, California before Metropolitan's Board of Directors.

Public comments are encouraged. Information about the proposed rates and charges may be requested from the Board Executive Secretary at (213) 217-6291, or obtained by visiting: [www.mwdh2o.com/](http://www.mwdh2o.com/)

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CNS#2586561

# Water District shows way to "eliminate the need for the tank."

New options replace controversial \$13 million tank with realistic conservation.

In light of the recent DROUGHT CRISIS announcement by the State of California, Concerned Citizens of LVMWD believes there's a better way than the expensive, and dangerous water tank construction project. A way that saves ratepayers serious money; uses less water; and does our part for the drought crisis.

This week, LVMWD confirmed that conservation can replace the tank. Both the water district's web site, and the District President's email responses to customers say the same thing. If we reduce our long-term water use by 1/3 then we would, in his words "eliminate the need for the tank." In the smaller 2009 drought, local resident's conservation efforts lowered water usage by nearly 30% — even without an aggressive District program funding modern water saving and moisture sensing sprinklers!

**It will be even simpler now.** The District can readily redirect the funds from the \$13 million tank to subsidize or pay for installing moisture sensing sprinklers, low flow devices, and modest landscape adjustments. Without giving up lifestyle choices, we will rapidly reach the 1/3 reduction, and we'll have PERMANENT water conservation.

LVMWD's determination of the need for a 1/3 reduction is an unjustifiably high number, but there's no need for further debate — we simply must act immediately to meet it. The Governor has made the water drought emergency clear: we have no choice now but to support major water conservation. It's not only a civic obligation for all of us, but we can do so in a way that is GOOD for all of us. The only question is how to get there: let's make it easy!

**We have options.** Participation requires immediate water saving programs — and a halt to projects that benefit higher water usage like the unnecessary and expensive water tank.

## Be First on the List!

Please put down the paper right now, and immediately call or email the water district. Let them know that you want to shift the tank project funds to conservation, and join the list of those who want to install subsidized conservation devices as soon as they are available. Be the first to watch your water bill drop along with your water usage!

**Tell LVMWD today:**  
**"Conservation, not construction.**  
**You lead, we will follow."**

Call 818-251-2100 or email:

Board Members:

Charles Caspary: charlescaspary@gmail.com

Glen Peterson: glenpsop@aol.com

Lee Renger: trollone@hughes.net

Len Polan\*: len.polan@gmail.com

Barry Steinhardt\*: barrylutcf@gmail.com

\* Already supporting conservation efforts.

General Manager:

David Pedersen: DPedersen@lvmwd.com

Note: If you have a keen interest in water conservation, and have an interest in promoting/influencing these issues and policy for the long term, contact us. In particular, we're looking for representation from Calabasas and Hidden Hills. concerned.citizens.lvmwd@gmail.com



Paid for by Concerned Citizens of Las Virgenes Municipal Water District.  
A group of local area residents.

If you are interested in supporting this effort for conservation, please consider contributing to this cause at <http://www.lvmwd-concerned-citizens.com>



Letters

## Conserve water

The Acorn 2/27/2014

Please conserve water. I ask this as a board member of Triunfo Sanitation District, which owns **Oak Park** Water Service.

Since 2009, we have required residents to irrigate landscapes before 9 a.m. or after 5 p.m. to prevent water evaporation. Hosing sidewalks or other hardscapes is prohibited.

Car washing can only be done using a nozzle that can be turned off, or with a bucket.

Broken sprinkler heads have to be repaired within five days.

These requirements are in effect now.

I also want the Feb. 13 letter writer from **Oak Park** to know that I am quite concerned with the governor's drought declaration. The Triunfo board has possible conservation action on the agenda for our next meeting on Mon., Feb. 24.

Triunfo does have an ordinance in place for mandatory emergency conservation with three stages, mostly having to do with limiting irrigation.

The board can vote these into effect immediately if directed to by our water wholesaler agency, Calleguas Municipal Water District.

**Oak Park** Water ratepayers have dropped water use by 20 percent from our base year in the last decade, meeting California's goal of a 20 percent reduction by 2020. Let's see if we can reduce use even more.

### **Janna Orkney Oak Park**

*Ornkey is a member of the Triunfo Sanitation District board*

Here's an idea, which I have used for many years, that could greatly reduce the need for water rationing. It is a switch that is installed prior to the shower head, which temporarily and easily shuts off the water flow when soap or shampoo is being applied. The switch returns the water flow to the original temperature and pressure when desired.

If every shower in SoCal were fitted with one of these switches, an enormous amount of water would be saved, especially if they were required at all commercial businesses. It annoys me when I stay in a hotel that does not have one, so it would be a win-win for them too. **John Dalrymple Westlake Village**

## Westlake Village mayor blasts water district over new tank



An angry rant by Westlake's mayor was sparked by a plan to build a large water storage tank above the city that has some City Council members and residents worried. FILE-The Calleguas Municipal Water District tore down this old steel tank and replaced it with a buried concrete reservoir in Thousand Oaks.

Ventura County Star 2/27/2014

The mayor of Westlake Village angrily reprimanded the Las Virgenes Municipal Water District on Wednesday night over plans to build a 5-million gallon water storage tank in the hills above the city's Three Springs neighborhood.

Mayor Mark Rutherford's remarks came at the conclusion of a heated debate about whether the council should approve a memo of understanding between the city and the water district. The MOU sets out restrictions and conditions for contractors during the 18-month construction period.

"What you've heard here tonight, in my opinion, is a clear indication that the water board has handled this very, very poorly," Rutherford said at a packed City Council meeting.

"I think you have communicated with our constituents and residents extremely poorly. You have failed to communicate to our residents and constituents the reasons and needs for all this and not really taken into consideration the impacts to this particular community," he said.

Council members voted 4-1 to approve the MOU with an additional amendment stipulating that construction traffic exit Highway 101 at Westlake Boulevard on the way to the construction site and use Lindero Canyon Road to return to the freeway. The amendment is subject to approval by city staff.

Councilwoman Sue McSweeney cast the dissenting vote.

It came after a substitute motion proposed by Councilman Brad Halpern to approve the MOU only on the condition the city seek a temporary restraining order or injunction against the water district to halt construction. That motion was defeated 3-2, with Halpern and McSweeney in the minority.

The only access to the construction site is via the residential streets of Three Springs Drive, which has speed bumps, and Torchwood Place. The route passes a neighborhood park.

During public comments, 17 residents strenuously objected to the district's plans to build the tank and begged the city to find a way to stop the project.

They said they feared for their safety and for the safety of children in the neighborhood, and were concerned about property damage.

"Sixteen years on the council, I don't think I've ever had a situation where everybody testified one way and I can't do a damn thing about it and that's terribly frustrating," Rutherford said.

The MOU is designed to ensure public safety, mitigate the traffic and noise impact on the Three Springs neighborhood, and provide for repairs to any property or street damage that occurs as a result of construction traffic or blasting.

City Attorney Terence Boga told council members the MOU was a voluntary agreement and did not need to be approved in order for the water district to move forward with the tank construction.

He said the city had no legal standing to stop the project.

The water district's general manager, David Pedersen, had earlier addressed the council and stressed the district's commitment to working with the city and residents.

Pedersen said the MOU is "a very robust document. It captures, in my opinion, the essence of the concerns that we've heard."

"It really looks at real problems and potential solutions," he said. "I think what we've done is we've looked at what are the foreseeable potential impacts and we've done our best to address them and I think we've been very responsible in doing that."

The water district board voted 3-2 in January to approve the new tank as part of a series of districtwide improvements and upgrades known as the Backbone Improvement Project. The board has yet to approve the MOU with the city of Westlake Village.

Construction is scheduled to begin in two to three weeks.

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*'Life as we know it ... is going to change forever.'*

## Water a big draw

*Agency gets earful about pumping less groundwater*

By Gretchen Wenner  
Ventura County Star 2/27/2014



Gail Pringle and Steve Blois, of Calleguas Municipal Water District, address the Fox Canyon Groundwater Management Agency board during a meeting Wednesday to discuss proposed cutbacks in pumping.  
PHOTOS BY ANTHONY PLASCENCIA/THE STAR

The way to fill a meeting hall, apparently, is to say you want to restrict groundwater pumping.

That's what happened Wednesday afternoon when an overflow crowd came out for the Fox Canyon Groundwater Management Agency's monthly session.

A vote ultimately was postponed on a plan that would affect the cities of Oxnard, Ventura, Port Hueneme, Camarillo and Moorpark, as well as major agriculture operations in western Ventura County. But concerns raised by cities, growers and small water agencies show there'll be no pleasing everyone when choices eventually are made.

Longtime staffers said it may have been the agency's largest turnout ever.

As the meeting in county supervisors' chambers drew to a close several hours later, the board chairman said it also may have been the longest.



Lynn Maulhardt (right), board chairman, addresses a packed audience about cutbacks. The board made no decision.

The agency is the local regulator for a system of natural underground reserves beneath the Oxnard Plain and LasPosas Valley. Farmers, cities and industrial users pump supplies that can be replenished by diverting flow released from Lake Piru into the Santa Clara River, then pooling it and allowing it to seep underground.

The current drought has highlighted a decade sold, fundamental system imbalance: Pumpers are regularly taking out more water than is being put back into the ground.

“Life as we know it on the Oxnard Plain and the Las Posas area is going to change forever,” agency board Chairman Lynn Maulhardt said in forceful closing comments.

While local facilities — a diversion dam, pipeline systems — and a complex set of usage rules evolved during the years to deal with overdrawing aquifers, changes in crop patterns and new environmental restrictions mean those solutions are no longer adequate, he said.

“It is not my intent to bankrupt one grower,” Maulhardt said, or to put one city in a financial bind.

But “there is going to be pain across the board” when the heavy lifting begins, he said. During public comments, there was little enthusiasm for the proposal, which called for cities to implement immediate 20 percent pumping reductions and for growers to face 10 to 20 percent cutbacks starting in July.

“This is serious business we’re talking about today,” said John Mathews, attorney for

the Pleasant Valley County Water District, which supplies farmers on the eastern Oxnard Plain south of Camarillo.

The restrictions would cost growers in Mathews' district \$2.5 million to \$13 million in surcharges, he estimated, adding the proposal wasn't fair and made no sense when given a close read.

Pumpers in the Las Posas area also called the plan unfair, saying their problems are distinct from the Oxnard Plain's.

Other speakers pointed out problems with usage calculation methods and assumptions about availability of imported water. Some suggested focusing on long-term plans to increase supply, such as more desalters.

But some emphasized a basic problem with current groundwater management.

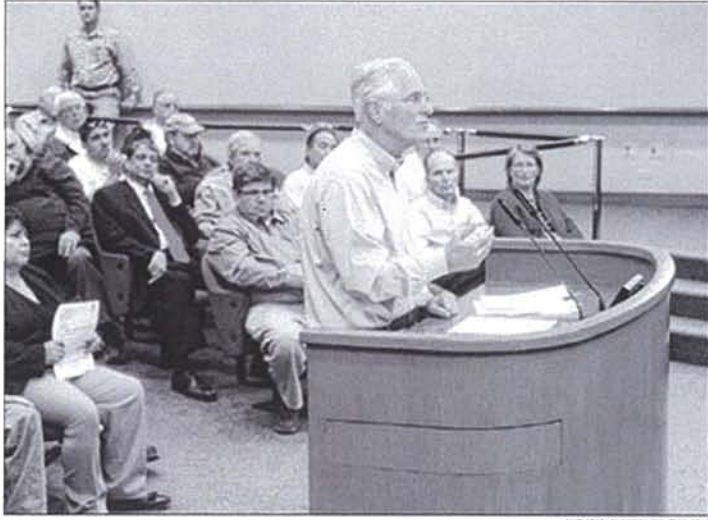
Water is supposed to be banked in wet years to supply pumpers during droughts, but that hasn't been happening, said Michael Solomon, general manager of the United Water Conservation District, which owns Lake Piru and other key facilities.

"We have abused and mined these basins to death," he said, adding that the agency's mission is to "protect people from destroying things because they don't want to make changes."

Though some suggested the committees work on the issue, Maulhardt said he wanted the full agency board to address the proposed cutbacks in a series of special meetings.

"We are going to do this again and again until we get it right," he said.

The board voted unanimously to hold a special meeting on the issue at 1 p.m. March 14.



John Mathews, Pleasant Valley County Water District general counsel, opposes cutbacks on groundwater pumping in comments to the Fox Canyon Groundwater Management Agency.  
ANTHONY PLASCENCIA/THE STAR

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# Committees approve drought plan

*Full vote due today on Brown's \$687 million*

By Fenit Nirappil Associated Press  
Ventura County Star 2/27/2014



Assemblyman Richard Bloom, D-Santa Monica, chairman of the Assembly Budget Subcommittee No. 3 on Resources and Transportation, questions Keely Bosler, of the Department of Finance, about Gov. Jerry Brown's proposed drought-relief package at the Capitol in Sacramento on Wednesday.  
ASSoCiATeD pReSS

SACRAMENTO -A \$687 million drought relief plan is headed for floor votes in the Legislature after winning quick approval Wednesday in legislative committees.

Assembly and Senate budget committees passed the bills, a week after the package was announced by Gov. Jerry Brown and the Democratic legislative leaders. California is facing its driest year on record, putting 17 communities at risk of running out of drinking water while forcing farmers in the nation's agricultural heartland to fallow fields and uproot orchards.

The legislation calls for immediate action on the drought, including \$15 million to address emergency water shortages and an additional \$1 million for a public awareness campaign. Most of the money comes from bonds previously approved by voters and will accelerate existing or planned water conservation and recycling projects.

Both houses of the Legislature are expected to vote on the drought legislation Thursday. If Brown signs the bills, as expected, they would take effect immediately.

AB 79 makes changes to the state's 2013-14 budget, creating grant programs for agencies and local governments to bid for project funding. Some specific projects received more funding, such as an additional \$25 million in bond money for Folsom Dam modifications.

'I imagine we'd walk right into a veto if we added any earmarks,' said State Sen. Mark

Leno, DSanFrancisco.

Republican lawmakers have raised concerns about how quickly the legislation is moving and pointed to language in AB 80 they say could affect existing water rights.

'In the rush to do it, and to do it now, I think we need to be careful not to do it recklessly,' said Assemblyman Jim Patterson, RFresno, at a committee hearing.

Assemblyman Richard Bloom, DSanta Monica, countered that the package was thoughtfully put together.

'This is an emergency,' Bloom said. 'We do need to move forward quickly to address this very, very real crisis.' Under the legislation, the State Water Resources Control Board would have new powers to issue fines for illegal diversions of water. The bill was amended in the Senate to stave off fines for unintentional diversions, calming some Republicans concerns.

Representatives of the governor's administration say existing water rights laws will not change, and that the new powers are only in effect during the state of emergency.

Republicans also questioned the Democrats' plan to tap \$40 million from a fund created for projects that will reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Under a landmark program, California businesses pay for emissions and the state is supposed to use the money to fight climate change.

'This is beginning to look more and more like an executive slush fund,' said Patterson, who proposed drawing the money from the general fund, the state's main checkbook.

The governor's office says water efficiency and energy efficiency go hand in hand. For example, the State Water Project, which supplies 25 million Californians and 750,000 acres of agricultural land, is the state's largest energy user.

The legislative package also will draw \$47 million from the state's general fund to provide food and housing assistance for Californians hit hardest by the drought, primarily in regions heavily dependent on agriculture.

# Regulators say compliance with fracking rule difficult

## *Well operators having problems*

By Timm Herdt  
Ventura County Star 2/27/2014

SACRAMENTO - A panel of top state regulators told lawmakers Wednesday they have moved quickly to implement California's first regulations governing hydraulic fracturing but that well operators are having problems complying with the new requirements.

Permanent regulations required by a law signed by Gov. Jerry Brown last fall are being promulgated and will take effect next year.

But the state Conservation Department has imposed emergency regulations this year that establish basic reporting requirements and require well operators to monitor effects on groundwater or certify there is no protected groundwater near their wells.

Thomas Howard, executive director of the State Water Resources Control Board, told senators at a joint committee hearing that well operators have not complied sufficiently.

Eight requests covering 141 wells have been submitted to the board, and all have claimed an exemption for the monitoring requirement. Based on the information provided, the board has not been able to affirm any such claim.

'My staff has been unable, with the information submitted, to definitely say the conditions that would require monitoring don't exist,' Howard said.

Of the well certification notices submitted, three have come from Ventura County and the rest from Kern County.

The certifications submitted consist of 'more assertions than evidence,' he said. 'There has got to be sufficient evidence for us to make a finding.' He said the requests have not been rejected but rather deemed incomplete. Howard said his staff is communicating with well operators.

'It's only been in effect a few weeks,' he said. 'It's difficult for them to know what would be acceptable to us.' He added that some operators likely will have to drill monitoring wells rather than rely on records from existing wells.

Jason Marshall, chief deputy director of the Conservation Department, testified that oil drillers are trying to adapt to the regulation of an activity they have been doing for decades.

'This is a new world. These people are trying to figure out how they're going to live in this world,' he said. 'But it's here.' Marshall said once the permanent regulations are in

place next year, the self certification process will end and well operators will have to go through a permit process requiring ontheground inspections by state regulators.

Marshall, Howard and regulators from the Air Resources Control Board and the Department of Toxic Substances Control testified before a joint hearing of the Senate committees on Environmental Quality and Natural Resources and Water.

The hearing on implementation of the law comes as some lawmakers continue to push for a moratorium on the oil drilling practice. Sens. Holly Mitchell, D Los Angeles, and Mark Leno, D San Francisco, have introduced a bill calling for a moratorium. A similar proposal failed last year, and the only fracking legislation to survive was the regulatory measure written by Sen. Fran Pavley, DAgoura Hills.

Pavley, cochairwoman of Wednesday's hearing, praised regulators for working quickly and cooperatively to implement the law.

'There is a lot more transparency in the process,' she said. 'We're finding out a lot more today than we knew a year ago.' The law also requires that an independent scientific study on fracking issues such as seismic safety be done by the end of this year. Lawmakers were told the Brown administration has selected UC Davis chemical engineering professor Robert Powell to lead the study panel and that a contract to conduct the study is expected to be executed soon.

# City urges 20% less water use

*Oxnard's call same as what governor asked*

By Gretchen Wenner  
Ventura County Star 2/27/2014

A suggested 20 percent cutback in water use received approval from a unanimous Oxnard City Council.

The voluntary conservation effort aligns with Gov. Jerry Brown's requested target when he declared a statewide drought emergency last month.

Although the discussion at Tuesday night's council meeting took place on the eve of expected rainfall, the state's water woes will remain severe even after two storms move through the area in the next few days, Mayor Tim Flynn told the audience.

'Water has become platinum,' he said.

Oxnard residents and businesses already have done well at cutting back in the past five or six years, Water Resources Manager Anthony Emmert told the council, and the city is on track to meet an earlier goal of a 20 percent permanent reduction by 2020.

The city will emphasize public education and rebate opportunities. Residents can get help buying efficient toilets, clothes washers and irrigation nozzles, for example, with other items available for commercial and industrial customers. Ocean-friendly landscaping classes are offered regularly, Emmert said.

The Metropolitan Water District of Southern California has doubled funds for rebates this year, he added, but people should act soon because programs end when the money runs out.

Details are available by following the 'Sustainability Programs' icon at <http://www.ci.oxnard.ca.us> or calling the city water division at 385-8136.

About 40 percent of Oxnard's water comes from Northern California, provided locally by Metropolitan member Calleguas Municipal Water District. Calleguas is not getting reduced water allocations, Emmert said, but that could change.

An additional 30 percent, pumped groundwater provided by the United Water Conservation District, as well as 30 percent from city pumps, could be affected by other

agencies' decisions.

Emmert suggested an update in six to eight weeks when more information on snowpack, rain and outside decisions is available.

Councilwoman Carmen Ramirez suggested the city display leadership by replacing the grass at City Hall and other city property with less thirsty vegetation.

"I recommend the first place we do it is right in front of chambers," she said.

The council also heard an update on the city's Feb. 1 operational takeover of its Del Norte Regional Recycling and Transfer Station. The city-owned solid waste facility been run by contractors.

Already, 15 to 20 tons a day are being recycled from waste brought in by self-haulers, said Todd Housley, environmental resources superintendent.

Previously, the private firm diverted 1 ton or less from that source each day, he said.

Other changes have reduced daily truck trips to landfills.

In other business, the council hired Alliance Resource Consulting Inc. to recruit a city attorney for \$18,000 and up to \$6,500 in expenses.

Interim City Manager Karen Burnham also mentioned fatal shootings in recent weeks and encouraged community members with information on the cases to call the Oxnard Police Department's violent crime hotline, 9 8 2-70 70.

# Ventura County strawberry growers get grim news about water

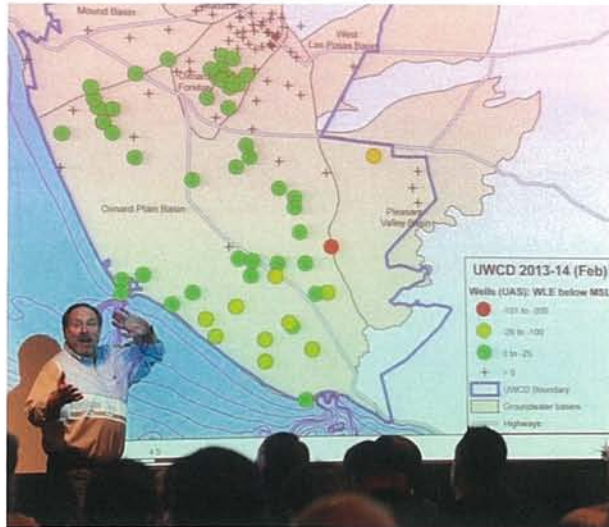


PHOTO BY [JUAN CARLO](#) // [BUY THIS PHOTO](#)

Mike Solomon, general manager of the United Water Conservation District, shows a chart of pumping wells from Santa Paula to the Oxnard Plain Thursday at the Camarillo Public Library Community Room. Users of the Pumping Trough Pipeline, operated by United Water, may not get water after September.

Ventura County Star 2/27/2014  
By Carol Lawrence

There will be no water to irrigate strawberries on the Oxnard Plain during the big October planting season unless Mother Nature sends a lot more rain and pumping from wells is significantly reduced.

Scientists from United Water Conservation District delivered the news Thursday morning to a packed room at the Camarillo Public Library, filled with probably most of the 40 growers who plant on the 4,600 acres that the five-well pumping trough pipeline system serves.

“After September, it will be impossible to make PTP deliveries, unless we throttle back the wells and have significant rain,” said Tony Morgan, manager of groundwater for the district. United Water manages the surface water used to recharge aquifers that provide water to the users through the pipeline.

Each well is expected to go dry in phases, starting in June, Morgan said.

The Saticoy and Oxnard Hueneme wells that provide backup water to the system — and supplied growers with just enough water last year to get through the October peak season — are no longer available, the United Water scientists said. The Saticoy wells

have gone dry and the Oxnard Hueneme wells must be flushed to get rid of nitrates in the potable water the district delivers.

Most of those water demands were met last October because people were very cautious with their use, there was only one Santa Ana wind event in the area, growers staggered their plantings and people used their own wells, said senior hydrologist Murray McEachron.

Thirty five properties have active private wells, but the system was designed to discourage the use of private wells because they pull water from the upper aquifer, which is susceptible to seawater intrusion, McEachron said.

General Manager Mike Solomon told the growers he cannot tell them how much or what to plant, or even not to plant. The purpose of the meeting was to present growers with the facts. "Here's the glass. Here's the water. You figure out what you're going to do with it," Solomon said.

Half the acreage served by the system is used to grow strawberries, according to United Water. The fruit, worth \$691 million to the county and its most valuable crop, also happens to use the most water on a per-acre basis, said John Krist, CEO of the Farm Bureau of Ventura County.

In the county, strawberries account for 11,419 acres. "Strawberries drive peak demand, and it's the peak demand that the PTP can't meet," Krist said.

Audience members responded to the grim news with apprehension, concern, frustration and defiance. "Am I going to be farming in September?" an audience member asked. Mike Ellis, operations manager for United Water, answered, "It doesn't look like we're going to get to September."

Brian Fukutomi, of El Rio Berry Farms, which has 90 acres of strawberries in Oxnard and one well, said his operation is forming a drought plan to deal with the situation. It is considering, like others are, he said, cutting back on plant orders for the fall planting season.

"What you're going to do if the PTP isn't supplying water, you're going to turn on your well." Fukutomi said.

Pulling from private wells won't solve the long-term problem, Morgan said after the meeting, because that will just aggravate seawater levels and take longer to bring water levels back to typical amounts.

Compounding the issue are the increasing levels of chlorides and nitrates in well water in some areas.



The drought is forcing United Water to react in several ways, Solomon said. The district will be updating contracts with users of the system and also will potentially ask growers to give back the credits they received last year for their allocations so United Water can pay the Fox Canyon Groundwater Management Agency the \$2 million it owes for exceeding allotments last year, Solomon said.

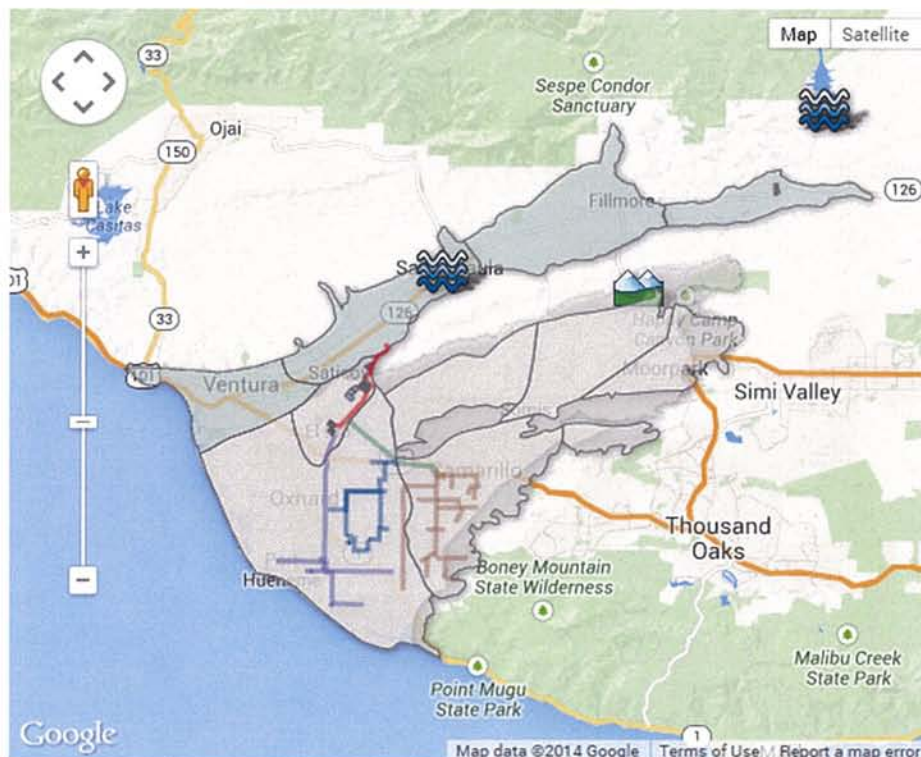
Audience members challenged United Water to find solutions.

The solutions are expensive, there are no tools in place now and ultimately, "things will have to be done differently," Solomon said.

But Solomon said he and the staff would sit down with any grower who wants discuss ideas on how to address the situation and will ask the board of directors how to proceed at a March 12 meeting.

"Pray for rain," several audience members said.

Read more: <http://www.vcstar.com/news/2014/feb/27/oxnard-strwaberry-growers-get-grim-news-from/#ixzz2udU8wk9m>- vcstar.com



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# California Legislature sends drought relief package to Gov. Brown

*The \$687.4-million emergency drought relief package would free up California's water supplies and aid residents facing hardship due to the drought.*



President Obama speaks to the media on California's drought situation in Los Banos, Calif. The federal government has allocated \$160 million in drought-relief funds to the state. (Wally Skalij / Los Angeles Times / February 14, 2014)

By Melanie Mason and Patrick McGreevy  
LA Times February 27, 2014

**SACRAMENTO** — A \$687.4-million emergency drought relief package is on its way to Gov. [Jerry Brown](#)'s desk after easily clearing the Legislature on Thursday.

Brown and legislative leaders unveiled the proposal last week to free up the state's water supplies and aid residents who face hardship due to the drought.

"Today we provide significant relief," state Senate leader [Darrell Steinberg](#) (D-Sacramento) said in a floor speech. "This is a lot of money and will help thousands of California families dealing with the drought."

Although recent storms have offered slight relief, the state has been suffering from dramatically parched conditions. Last year was the driest calendar year on record in California.

The proposal would direct \$15 million to address water scarcity. The state Department of Public Health last week identified 10 rural areas at risk of acute drinking water shortages due to the drought.

The two-bill package also would provide \$25.3 million in food aid and \$21 million in housing assistance for those affected by the lengthy dry spell. It would expedite funding

for projects to improve conservation, clean up contaminated ground water, and make irrigation more efficient.

The plan also would stiffen penalties for those who illegally divert water.

The bulk of the package, \$549 million, would be funded through borrowing already approved by voters. Forty million would come from fees the state collects on polluters and the remainder from the state's general fund.

The relief package follows \$160 million in federal aid for farmers, cattle ranchers and others harmed by the drought that President [Obama](#) promised while touring the San Joaquin Valley this month.

Ann Notthoff, California advocacy director of the [Natural Resources Defense Council](#), commended the package, saying it reflected "the desire of Californians to invest in measures to squeeze the most water out of the supplies we have on hand."

But Mike Wade, executive director of the California Farm Water Coalition, said there's more to be done.

"Any assistance is appreciated, but it doesn't solve the long-term water supply challenges California faces," he said. "We just don't want the public to get the idea that this is fixing California's water situation."

Assemblyman Frank Bigelow (R-O'Neals), who supported the plan, voiced similar concerns on the Assembly floor.

"We are proposing to spend a lot of money for a public relations campaign and some relief effort for those hit hardest," Bigelow said. "But we haven't produced any water."

Republican Sen. [Tom Berryhill](#) (R-Modesto) also voted for the bill but likened it to "a Band-Aid on a shark bite."

Assemblywoman [Nancy Skinner](#) (D-Berkeley) vowed that more action was coming.

"The package today is the first step," Skinner said. "It is not the only, and it is not the last. It is the first step to deal with an urgent crisis."

The legislation, SB 103 and SB 104, passed both houses by wide bipartisan margins. But other water battles, typically fought along geographical rather than partisan lines, loom.

Lawmakers have been trying to rework an \$11-billion bond measure to address water infrastructure that is set to go before voters in November, for example. Some fear it carries too high a price tag and have introduced alternative measures.

Steinberg told reporters Thursday that he wanted to pare the measure to \$7 billion to \$9 billion, so it has a better chance of passing.

"Certainly the drought and water issues have the people's attention," he said. "We need the bond, and we ought to do everything we can reasonably do to amend the current bond and put it before the voters and pass it."

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## San Gabriel Mountain dams could get major fill-up from storm system

*Although there is no danger the dams will be breached, officials still warn of the possibility of mudslides in fire-ravaged areas.*



By Ralph Vartabedian  
LA Times February 27, 2014

The reservoirs behind 14 major dams that line the front range of the San Gabriel Mountains — nearly empty after two years of drought — could rise significantly from the forecasted deluge over the next three days, public works officials said.

The storm system could drop up to 6 inches of rain, which would dramatically reverse the current conditions, in which water levels are 70 feet below the maximum in some cases, officials said.

Although there is no danger the dams will be breached, officials on Thursday still guarded against the possibility of mudslides in fire-ravaged areas.

In response to the possibility of debris flows from areas burned in January's [Colby fire](#), Azusa and Glendora issued a mandatory evacuation order for residents whose homes are nestled along the foothills.

In Glendora, 1,000 homes were in the path of possible mudslides. City officials want to avoid a repeat of a 1969 mudslide disaster that killed 34 people and destroyed 200 homes.

A relatively small storm Thursday deposited about 1,000 acre-feet of water — worth \$1 million on the wholesale market — in the aquifers under Los Angeles.

The system over the next three days will probably deposit a windfall behind the dams that typically hold a third of Los Angeles County's water supply, said Adam Walden, senior civil engineer at the public works department.

"Right now, we have a lot of room in our system and the goal is not to let anything escape to the ocean," he said.

Because of the vast drainage from the mountains surrounding the L.A. Basin, the dams could fill at a stunning rate.

It's happened before.

In 2005, Morris Dam — the 1930s-era Art Deco structure that holds back the San Gabriel River — was full to the top, with water blasting through its penstocks and pouring uncontrolled down its concrete spillway.

The lower San Gabriel River was carrying 24,000 cubic feet of water per second, more than the average unconstrained flow of the Colorado River.

A little farther to the east, a rain gauge in San Antonio Canyon recorded rainfall of 90 inches that year, vastly more than any major U.S. city gets in an average year. In Devore Canyon, a debris flow sent refrigerator-size boulders down residential streets. People were skiing on Mt. Baldy until July 4.

And that was far from the heaviest potential downpour.

Someday, Southern California is expected to experience a "maximum probable flood." An atmospheric river would drop up to 20 inches of rain in 24 hours, filling every reservoir to capacity and sending so much water down the major rivers that they would overtop levees and leave large parts of the low-lying basin underwater, according to official projections.

"There is no system that can handle that," said Cuong Ly, chief hydrologist for the [U.S. Army Corps of Engineers](#). "It hasn't happened, but that doesn't mean it won't happen."

The dams' capacity has been limited by the tons of sand, rock and other debris that washed down after the 2009 Station fire.

At Devil's Gate Dam in Pasadena, so much debris is clogging the reservoir that it could fill the Rose Bowl about four times over. Hauling the stuff out would require about one truck per minute over a 12-hour day for the next five years, according to a draft plan by the county.

And that's just one dam. By 2032 the county will have to find a way to get rid of debris that could fill the Rose Bowl 170 times over.

"The system is unsustainable," said Tim Brick, managing director of the Arroyo Seco Foundation, a nonprofit environmental group.

Until only a week ago, nobody was thinking about how much a single storm could fill up reservoirs. The drought has been so severe that some reservoirs are holding only 5% of capacity.

At Morris Dam, operator Jim McGowan grimaced at the meager amount it held. He has watched the water levels rise and fall for 20 years, he said, adding: "I've never seen it this low."

Officials intend to keep a close eye during the impending storms.

"This reservoir can rise 40 feet in a 24-hour period," Walden said about Morris Dam.

Even with the substantial rainfall this week, without more storms there will be hardships for the area. Allocations of local water over the next year could be reduced.

Tony Zapiello, the San Gabriel River Basin's court-appointed watermaster, said the 180,000 acre-feet allocated to rights holders last year almost certainly will be reduced in the water year that begins July 1.

A single well in Baldwin Park, dubbed the "key well," is used to gauge the overall condition of the basin's aquifer, and last week that well was 16 feet lower than it was a year ago, Zapiello said.

"We are going to be in a very tight situation if we don't get rain this spring," he said. "It is kind of depressing."

Imported water is expected to make up any local shortfall, and so far cities have not imposed mandatory rationing, a policy that seems shortsighted to Bill Patzert, a climatologist for the [Jet Propulsion Laboratory](#) in La Cañada Flintridge.

Analysis of tree rings in the local mountains shows that Southern California can have mega-droughts of up to half a century, Patzert said, while the 1980s and 1990s were some of the wettest decades in history.

"People think of droughts as lasting one or two years, but history tells us they can be decades long," he said. "We got lulled into complacency."





CAPTIONS

2/6



CAPTIONS

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CAPTIONS

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CAPTIONS

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CAPTIONS

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# Ready for the rain

*Authorities will watch potential problem areas*



Jayme Laber (left), a hydrologist with the National Weather Service, and Marti Witter, a fire ecologist for the National Park Service, survey cliffs near Big Sycamore Canyon Trail. PHOTOS BY TROY HARVEY/THE STAR

A winter storm that's expected to be the wettest in more than two years promises to bring some much needed rain to Ventura County this week.

But while that's welcome news for drought watchers, authorities will keep a close eye on areas burned in last year's Springs Fire, which have a higher risk of flash floods and debris flows.

'As much as we need the rain and as much as we want it, we hope it comes nicely and gently,' said Bill Nash, a spokesman for the Ventura County Fire Department.

The department plans to have additional personnel ready in burn areas near the DosVientos and Camarillo Springs neighborhoods and CSU Channel Islands. Whether those areas see any flooding really depends on how much rain they get and how fast it falls, Nash said.

The first of two storms is expected to bring less than an inch of rain Wednesday and Thursday. A second, stronger system is expected Friday and Saturday, causing officials more concern.

It could bring as much as 2 inches of rain in coastal areas and double that in the mountains, along with gusty winds and possible thunderstorms.

It won't come close to ending the drought. It's the type of storm forecasters would expect to see several times during a normal California winter.



Laber talks Tuesday about effects that upcoming storms could have on the Big Sycamore Canyon Trail in the area burned in May's Springs Fire.

But the past few winters have been far from normal. The county had one of its driest rainfall seasons on record in 2012-13, and this winter has seen more of the same.

“Even an average storm is the most rain we would have had in three years,” said Jayme Laber, a hydrologist with the National Weather Service. “We certainly need it, but we need it to be gentle.”

On Tuesday, Glendora and Azusa residents, living at the foot of the steep San Gabriel mountains east of Los Angeles, picked up sandbags to protect their homes. A wildfire burned there in January, and city officials worked to clear drainage areas and sandbagged properties before the storms hit.

Ventura County officials have had a lot longer to prepare. The Springs Fire burned 24,000 acres from Highway 101 in Camarillo to the Pacific Ocean in May. About 60 percent of the burn area is in Point Mugu State Park, the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area and other parks.

Caltrans has installed barriers and netting along the Pacific Coast Highway where the fire burned down some steep hillsides. State parks staff members have cleared retention basins and channels. Heavy equipment has been staged and ready to go for months.

Park rangers will keep a close eye on what happens Wednesday and Thursday, checking for any potential problems before the bigger storm hits.

“Vegetation was the glue that kept rocks and earth from sliding,” said Craig Sap, state parks district superintendent. Without those shrubs, plants and grass, the risk for rock slides and debris flows is much higher.

On Friday, parks officials will watch rainfall and be ready to close areas if necessary.

Laber and others from the National Weather Service toured the recreation area's

Rancho Sierra Vista near Newbury Park and the adjacent Point Mugu State Park on Tuesday. Point Mugu's backcountry took the biggest hit in the Springs Fire.

Steep, bare slopes above Sycamore Canyon and low-water crossings along trails and roads are areas of concern, Laber said.

Even outside the burn areas, the storms could cause problems, be it flooded gutters, clogged storm drains or slick roads. But officials said they're prepared.

Major channels are clear of debris and should be able to handle the storm, said Scott Holder, a hydrologist with the Ventura County Watershed Protection District.

"If we had a lot of rain leading up to these storms, we'd have issues, but because things have been so dry, the only place we're expected to see any runoff are in urban areas," Holder said.

"Hopefully, we will get enough rain from the first storm to be able to identify issues and have them resolved before the big storm on Friday," he said.

Officer Steve Reid of the California Highway Patrol said mudslides and rock slides are a concern, and the patrol will be watching for those. The main concern is that motorists drive safely.

"The two most important words are 'slow down,' " Reid said.

Rob Roshanian, Oxnard's interim public works director, said his staff is ready, but the city hasn't had serious problems in recent decades.

"Oxnard is so flat that it doesn't get real flooding," he said. "It is subject to shallow flooding."

Crews will monitor a section of Ventura Road near Highway 101 and the railroad tracks that flooded in 2005, Roshanian said. But even then, only the roadway was inundated, not homes, he said.

Ventura Public Works Director Rick Raives said maintenance crews know where flooding is most likely, so they'll be checking those areas.

"The other issue in Ventura, because of the hillsides, is sometimes we have mudslides," Raives said. "We don't anticipate problems, but it's something else we tend to keep an eye on."

John Krist, CEO of the Farm Bureau of Ventura County, said the rain will be welcomed by farmers. The only potential problem is for strawberry growers, who could lose some ripe fruit.

“I think for the growers, every drop of rain will be a great thing, and they’ll be pretty happy to see some of that coming,” Krist said.

The Associated Press and staff writers Gretchen Wenner and Arlene Martinez contributed to this report.



A man-made catch basin near the Big Sycamore Canyon Trail.  
TROY HARVEY/THE STAR

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## PARTNERSHIP

### NASA assesses areas of drought

By Scott Smith Associated Press

FRESNO -NASA scientists have begun deploying satellites and other advanced technology to help California water officials assess the state's record drought and better manage it, officials said Tuesday.

The California Department of Water Resources has partnered with NASA to use the space agency's satellite data and other airborne technology to better measure the snowpack, groundwater levels and predict storms.

'It sounds like a cliché, but if they could put a man on the moon, why can't we get better seasonal forecasting?' Jeanine Jones of the state's Department of Water Resources said in an interview after the Sacramento announcement of the partnership.

Now they will. NASA scientists said they are also embarking on projects that use satellite images to help more accurately measure the number of fields farmers have chosen not to plant and where land is sinking because of excessive groundwater pumping .

Gov. Jerry Brown directed state officials to form such partnerships as part of his drought emergency declaration last month.

California's relationship with NASA began shortly after the dry year of 2009, when officials sought answers to problems exacerbated by the lack of rain and snow, such as the sinking land. This year's drought has made that research all more important, Jones said.

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# Poll: Voters aren't gushing over Delta water tunnels

## *Local works favored over import system*

By Timm Herdt  
Ventura County Star 2/26/2014

SACRAMENTO — As top state water officials briefed lawmakers Tuesday on the \$ 37 billion Bay Delta Conservation Plan, which includes construction of two large tunnels, a leading environmental organization released a survey that shows only 10 percent of Californians approve of it.

Testifying before a joint hearing of the Assembly and Senate water committees, Doug Obegi of the Natural Resources Defense Council said the poll of 1,000 California voters found strong support for projects that invest in increasing local and regional water supplies but little support for spending money to bolster water supplies imported from elsewhere in the state.

Asked about approaches to address issues with the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, Obegi said 40 percent of voters prefer building no new major projects to move water from the Delta; 45 percent support the idea of a smaller, cheaper tunnel that would supplement local water conservation and recycling projects; and 10 percent support the two-tunnel project, the preferred approach of Gov. Jerry Brown's administration. The last proposal is designed to improve water exports to Southern California.

The poll was conducted Feb. 1-9 by Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates, one of the state's leading public opinion research firms. It was commissioned by the council, an advocate of what it calls a "portfolio approach," which would include a single Delta tunnel that would supplement regional water recycling, reclamation and conservation programs.

The poll's findings show the challenge facing state water officials as they move forward with a plan to address the goals of restoring degraded Delta ecosystems while increasing the reliability of water exports that serve 25 million Californians and 750,000 acres of irrigated farmland.

It demonstrated Californians consider the drought the most critical issue facing the state and that three-fourths of voters say they are willing to pay higher water bills to finance projects to increase water supplies.

The Bay Delta Plan, however, is a long-term project designed to ensure reliable water exports for decades to come. It would not immediately address the effects of the current drought.

Even if the tunnels were in place today, they would not provide immediate help.

“We would not be considering delivering more water this year with that infrastructure in place,” testified Mark Cowin, director of the Department of Water Resources, which estimates it will be unable to deliver water from the Delta this year. “We’re not going to droughtproof California.”

Cowin said, however, that had the tunnels been in place during torrential late-December storms in 2012, the State Water Project could have released more water last year that could have been stored to help address drought problems this year.

“The BDCP is the best and possibly only opportunity we have in a generation to invest in the Delta to help future Californians,” he said.

Natural Resources Secretary John Laird said that while local projects are essential to California’s water supply, imported water from the Delta is a baseline need for many communities.

“You can’t conserve, you can’t reuse, unless you have the underlying reliability of supply,” he said. “The drought adds urgency to us in making sure we get the long-term plan right.”

The Bay Delta Conservation Plan and its draft environmental impact report were released late last year. The public comment period on the report has been extended until June.

Lawmakers pressed Cowin, Laird and Department of Fish and Wildlife Director Chuck Bonham on issues including financing, operational decision-making and effects on communities in the Delta region.

State Sen. Lois Wolk, D-Davis, a leading critic of the tunnel plan, said the cost of the tunnels, estimated at \$ 25billion, will be borne exclusively by State Water Project contractors, principally the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California and the Westlands Water District, which serves farms on the west side of the Central Valley.

She cited a recent analysis from Standard & Poor’s that said those agencies would have to commit to long-term debt that would have to repay regardless of the amount of water delivered.

Steve Arakawa, of Metropolitan, the district that supplies state water to Ventura County, said his agency is analyzing the costs of building the tunnels and the alternative.

“What is the cost of doing nothing?” he said. “We try to value that.

“The Delta system today is not capable of capturing reliable supplies.”





COLUMNIST

## Guarding the water we can't see

Ventura County Star 2/26/2014

When the California Legislature put together its big water package in 2009, the one that paved the way for the Bay Delta Conservation Plan and included an \$11 billion water bond about which lawmakers are now having second thoughts, Sen. Fran Pavley put forth what she thought was a modest proposal.

She thought that, since groundwater accounts for more than a third of California's water usage, it might be a good idea to take inventory. Such an inventory would require sending people out into the field to measure well depths and collect pumping data.

The response was swift and furious, and evoked images of farmers standing in front of their wells, pitchforks or shotguns in hand, to prevent anyone from the government from coming onto their land to inspect their water wells.

Pavley had to back off the idea, but she remains perplexed about how California will ever be able to assess all its water issues without first obtaining reliable data about its groundwater basins. "It's like trying to get a handle on your finances," she told me, "but you're not allowed to know how much money you have in the bank."

Five years later, driven by drought and regional groundwater crises, the thinking is beginning to change.

Many people, including high-level officials in Gov. Jerry Brown's administration, are taking a fresh look at how best to manage the vast amount of water stored where no one can see it.

"If you have less ability to import water," said Pavley, chairwoman of the Senate Natural Resources and Water Committee, "you'd better pay attention to your groundwater."

The enlightenment is being driven by scarcity and crises.

Dozens of small communities across the state are without safe drinking water because their wells have become contaminated.

In Paso Robles, an explosion of new vineyards has caused the level of the groundwater basin to drop so quickly that some wells have gone dry.

In the Central Valley, the U.S. Geological Survey reported last year, groundwater basins have become so depleted that 1,200 square miles of land are sinking, in some areas by nearly a foot a year.

In the coastal agricultural regions of the Oxnard Plain and the Salinas Valley, seawater intrusion into freshwater aquifers remains a serious concern. As The Star reported over the weekend, pumpers on the Oxnard Plain are taking about 25,000 more acre-feet from the basin each year than can be sustainably withdrawn.

In Los Angeles, the Department of Water and Power is making plans to spend up to \$900 million to build and operate treatment facilities to clean more than 100,000 acre feet per year of contaminated groundwater in the San Fernando Basin, as part of a long-term strategy to reduce by half its reliance on imports from the State Water Project.

A Water Action Plan finalized this winter by the Brown administration calls for “a systematic evaluation of major groundwater basins to determine sustainable yield and overdraft status” and proposes legislation to protect basins and give state officials greater authority to force regional entities to adopt sensible, sustainable policies.

In his State of the State address in January, Brown referred to that approach as “serious groundwater management.”

As the state’s most severe drought continues — albeit with welcome, but insufficient, relief forecast to arrive in the next several days — the striking visual images are satellite photos of a spotty Sierra Nevada snowpack and photographs of parched ground covering acres of once-abundant reservoirs that have shrunk to relative puddles.

But as important as the resources that can be seen are the water supplies that can’t be photographed, the resources that lie beneath the surface — ideally as underground storage that is judiciously tapped in ordinary times so that it can be pumped more aggressively in times of drought.

It is an essential resource that must be measured, monitored and managed.

That might start with the installation of smart meters on wells that would allow local water agencies to do what electrical utilities do — drive around neighborhoods and take electronic readings of how much is being used.

Pavley believes that in 2014, unlike five years ago, there may now be an appetite for taking meaningful steps to measure groundwater — to find out how much is the bank before making decisions on how much can be spent and how much needs to be saved.

“There has been a real sea change in people’s views on monitoring groundwater basins,” she said. “Local governments have to manage their groundwater supply. They have to protect it.”

Timm Herdt writes from Sacramento for The Star. His political blog “95 percent accurate\*” is at [http://www. TimmHerdt.com](http://www.TimmHerdt.com).

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✉ LETTERS

Janna Orkney, *Oak Park*

## Delta water

Re: your Feb. 20 editorial, "It's crucial that Delta water plan moves forward":

Kudos for your editorial

supporting the state plan to fix the Sacramento Delta to ensure that we have a reliable source of water in the Conejo Valley. As the editorial stated, 100 percent of drinking water for all the valley's retail water agencies comes through the Delta, supplied by the State Water Project.

That means our water supply is just one Sacramento-area earthquake away from a catastrophe! With a large quake, saltwater from San Francisco Bay would roll into the Delta and contaminate our drinking supply, with no immediate means available to purify it.

So, we need to vote "yes" on the Bay Delta Conservation Plan and also support the two tunnels to bring us water that bypasses the Delta. To cut back water use, let's remove at least some of our lawns. It is estimated that about 70 percent of home water use goes to irrigation.

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The writer is a board member for the Triunfo Sanitation District, which owns and operates Oak Park Water Service. The opinions expressed in the letter are the writer's and not necessarily those of other board members. — Editor

## Poll finds little favor Delta tunnel project aimed at bolstering water imports to Southern California



This file photo shows houses located in the Pocket Area of Sacramento, Calif. along the Sacramento River. A recent poll show that just 10 percent of Californians support the current plan to restore and protect the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta ecosystem and guarantee a stable water supply for millions of Californians. The Bay Delta Conservation Plan, known as the BDCP for short, is a federal and state initiative financed by California's water contractors, which includes recommendations for a twin tunnel project in the delta to carry water to vast farmlands and thirsty cities. (AP Photo/Rich Pedroncelli, File)

Ventura County Star 2/25/2014

**SACRAMENTO** — As top state water officials briefed lawmakers Tuesday on the status of the \$37 billion Bay Delta Conservation Plan that includes construction of two large tunnels, a leading environmental organization released a public opinion survey that shows only 10 percent of Californians approve of it.

Testifying before a joint hearing of the Assembly and Senate water committees, Doug Obegi of the Natural Resources Defense Council said the poll of 1,000 California voters found strong support for projects that invest in increasing local and regional water supplies, but little support for spending money to bolster water supplies imported from elsewhere in the state.

Asked specifically about approaches to address issues with the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, Obegi said: 40 percent of voters prefer building no new major projects to move water from the Delta; 45 percent support the idea of a smaller, less expensive tunnel that would complement local water conservation and recycling projects; and 10 percent support the two-tunnel project that is the preferred approach of [Gov. Jerry Brown](#)'s administration. The latter proposal is designed to improve water exports to Southern California.

The poll was conducted Feb. 1-9 by Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates, one of the state's leading public opinion research firms. It was commissioned by the NRDC,

a leading advocate for what it calls a “portfolio approach” that would include a single Delta tunnel that would supplement regional water recycling, reclamation and conservation programs.

The poll’s findings underscore the challenge facing state water officials as they move forward with a plan to address the twin goals of restoring badly degraded Delta ecosystems while increasing the reliability of water exports that serve 25 million Californians and 750,000 acres of irrigated farmland.

It showed Californians consider the drought the single most critical issue facing the state and that three-quarters of voters say they are willing to pay higher water bills to finance projects to increase water supply.

The Bay Delta Plan, however, is a long-term project designed to ensure reliable water exports for decades to come. It would do nothing to immediately address the effects of the current drought.

Even if the tunnels were in place today, they would not provide immediate help.

“We would not be considering delivering more water this year with that infrastructure in place,” testified Mark Cowin, director of the Department of Water Resources, the agency that is now estimating it will be unable to deliver water from the Delta this year. “We’re not going to drought-proof California.”

Cowin noted, however, that had the tunnels been in place during torrential late-December storms in 2012, the State Water Project could have released more water last year that could have been stored to help address drought impacts this year.

“The BDCP is the best and possibly only opportunity we have in a generation to invest in the Delta to help future Californians,” he said.

Natural Resources Secretary John Laird said that while local projects are essential to California’s water supply, imported water from the Delta is a baseline need for many communities.

“You can’t conserve, you can’t reuse unless you have the underlying reliability of supply,” he said. “The drought adds urgency to us in making sure we get the long-term plan right.”

The Bay Delta Conservation Plan and its draft environmental impact report were released late last year. The public comment period on the EIR has been extended until June.

Lawmakers pressed Cowin, Laird and Department of Fish and Wildlife Director Chuck Bonham on a variety of issues, including financing, operational decision-making and impacts on communities in the Delta region.

Sen. Lois Wolk, D-Davis, a leading critic of the tunnel plan, noted that the cost of the tunnels, estimated at \$25 billion, will be borne exclusively by State Water Project contractors, principally the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California and the Westlands Water District, which serves farms on the west side of the Central Valley.

She cited a recent analysis from the bond-rating firm Standard & Poor's that pointed out those agencies would have to commit themselves to long-term debt that they would be responsible to repay regardless of the amount of water delivered.

Steve Arakawa of Metropolitan, the district that supplies state water to Ventura County, said his agency is analyzing both the costs of building the tunnels and the alternative. "What is the cost of doing nothing?" he asked. "We try to value that.

"The Delta system today is not capable of capturing reliable supplies."

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# Herds Thinning

*Drought forces cattle ranchers to lease land or sell*

By Carol Lawrence  
Ventura County Star 2/25/2014



Gonzalo Manturano De La Cruz drops hay bales to feed about 250 cattle at Rancho Cañada Larga.

No rain equals no grass, no food for grazing cattle and threatened livelihoods for Ventura County cattle ranchers.

The formula is simple, but the reality is increasingly grim for Ventura County cattle ranchers as the lack of rain is forcing them to make tough decisions and act quickly to sustain their livelihood.

Costs to keep cows and calves healthy are adding up so high and so fast that many ranchers are selling off more and more animals, moving them out of state to green rangeland and upgrading water systems to ensure that the water does not make their cattle sick.

'It's epic,' said Tom Crocker, president of the Ventura County Cattlemen's Association, and 'unprecedented' in its effect on the county's 110 cattle ranchers. 'There's no one in V.C. that hasn't had to go through their herd.' Cattle herds are down at least 40 percent countywide, Crocker said. At least two ranchers have sold all their cattle, and several, including him, have sold 40 percent to 50 percent, he added.

Ranchers now also must address cows with compromised health and increased susceptibility to disease because of the new conditions and food source along with higher labor and transportation costs.



At \$1.9 million, livestock production accounts for a sliver of Ventura County's \$2 billion agriculture industry. But ranchers describe a livelihood at risk.



Ron Singleton (left) talks with Mike Williams at Rancho Cañada Larga after feeding livestock some hay.  
PHOTOS BY JUAN CARLO/THE STAR

"They're digging into their equity in their herd just to keep them going and keep them healthy," Crocker said.

Drought aid is available, and while the cattlemen appreciate and use it, they also say it is not dependable and comes late. They say crop insurance reimbursements were promised in October, for example, but did not arrive until January and February.

## **DROUGHT**

Since the beginning of January, Mike Williams has spent about \$750 a day in hay to feed the roughly 220 cattle he keeps on Rancho Cañada Larga on the hilly outskirts of Ventura.

Costs are mounting to pick up the hay and pay his staff for the time needed to drive the hay to the animals and feed them, which takes the workers from other tasks.

"I can't do this very much longer," Williams said. "That's why these cows got to go."

A new lease for rangeland in Utah will give him a place for most of his top cattle, but he already pays to lease other land for the animals. He usually waits until June to move the

cattle, but these new costs are forcing him to move them earlier, probably by March.

According to the U.S. Drought Monitor, the northern half of Ventura County is now considered to be in an “exceptional drought” condition — the highest drought condition. The county’s lower half is in an “extreme drought.”

An analysis from the authors of the drought monitor, which is put together by the Agriculture Department and climate-focused agencies, says the period from February 2012 to January 2014 was the driest 24 months on record.

Williams used to keep 500 to 700 cattle at the ranch when grass grew 6 to 10 inches tall, but several years have passed since it last grew that high.

He and others who have spent their lives raising cattle in Ventura County say the drought has lasted 14 years.

“I don’t think they’re stretching it too far — from a long-term rangeland or a management issue,” said Mark Svoboda, climatologist with The National Drought Mitigation Center in Lincoln, Neb.

The center uses satellite-based observations to calculate VegDRI maps that provide information about drought effects on rangeland and crops on a regional to subcounty scale.

It uses vegetation conditions, climate data and other biophysical information such as soil characteristics.

The VegDRI map for Ventura County shows the short and tall grasses and shrub lands as dark red or possibly brown, indicating very dry conditions with very low photosynthesis, the process through which plants grow.

Svoboda said the rangeland probably never fully recovered from the drought that hit the Western United States in 1999 and peaked from 2002 to 2005.

“One wet year interspersed with several dry years doesn’t cut it,” Svoboda said.

## **WATER QUALITY**

In the creeks and natural springs running through an expansive Santa Paula ranch, the mineral content has built up because of the lack of rain.

Sulphur, calcium and other naturally occurring compounds are now in larger amounts on the ranch where Rob Frost runs his cattle, as reduced water flows are not diluting the compounds to safe levels .

Those high concentrations likely contributed to the death of 10 percent of his herd two months ago, Frost and his veterinarian think.

“The drought is concentrating constituents normally in the water that don’t normally cause us a problem,” said bovine veterinarian A.E. Bud Sloan, also a cow and calf producer on a nearby ranch.

At Frost’s requests, Sloan took samples, had the waters tested and found mineral contents to be 2½ times what is healthy for mammals, he said.

Sloan also helped perform liver biopsies on some of Frost’s cattle and found the copper amounts to be 20 percent of what they need, he said, adding that the high sulfur content limits the animals’ copper intake.

As a result, the cattle’s immune systems are compromised, they have trouble digesting hay, and they get chronic diarrhea, Sloan said. Additionally, reproduction rates have dropped 30 percent to 40 percent.

Frost said he has had to upgrade to more expensive hay and has spent about \$14,000 to improve parts of his watering system.

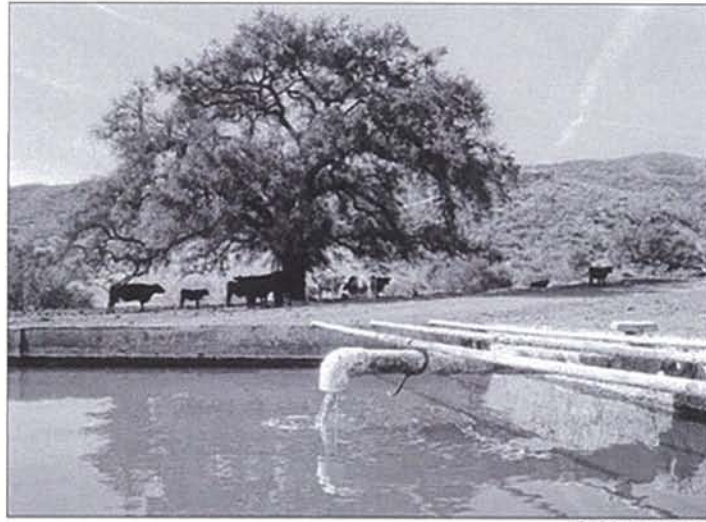
The upgrades appear to be working, Sloan and Frost agree.

A 400-gallon trough near where a group of cows settled on a recent morning to drink provided transparent water.

Williams, the Ventura rancher, estimates that he will lose \$40,000 to \$60,000 this year

because of the drought.

“I’ve loved this since I was 5 years old,” he said. “I will figure out a way to stay in business”



Water from a natural spring, which feeds into a man-made sediment pond, trickles into a large water trough on a ranch in Adams Canyon near Santa Paula on Thursday. Rancher Rob Frost set up the pond filter so the excess minerals in the water would settle, leaving cleaner drinking water for his cows. Ten percent of Frost’s herd died two months ago. ANTHONY PLASCENCIA/THE STAR

#### **HELP AVAILABLE**

The Agriculture Department and the Obama administration’s additional assistance to drought-affected farmers, ranchers and residents:

- Announced mid-February
- Will use the 2014 Farm Bill livestock disaster assistance programs
- Sign-up should be by April 15. Additional help includes \$100 million in livestock disaster assistance for California producers.
- Losses eligible include those from 2012 and 2013.
- Sign-up roughly in mid-April
- Funding also is available through the Agriculture Department’s Environmental Quality Incentives Program and Emergency Watershed Protection Program.
- Ventura County is one of 54 California counties declared primary natural disaster areas.

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OXNARD COUNCIL

## City will discuss water

*Agenda lists asking residents to trim use 20%*

From staff reports

The Oxnard City Council on Tuesday night will consider asking residents to voluntarily cut water use 20 percent.

Although heavy rain is expected in parts of California this week, water woes remain urgent as the state enters into a third straight year of low rainfall.

Oxnard water officials recommend matching the 20 percent reduction requested by Gov. Jerry Brown when he declared a statewide drought emergency last month. They will also highlight rebates for residents — \$75 for high-efficiency toilets, for example — and businesses.

The city typically gets 60 percent of its supply from pumped groundwater, with the rest from imported Northern California State Water Project supplies. Groundwater basins on the Oxnard Plain are over-tapped, and local regulators may restrict pumping when they meet Wednesday.

In other business the panel is scheduled to hire a recruiter to search for candidates for city attorney and launch a youth commission by appointing 15 teens and four young adults.

The council will meet at 6 p.m. at 305 W. Third St. after a 5 p.m. closed session on possible legal action.

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Across the nation

LOUISIANA

## Mississippi River reopens after spill

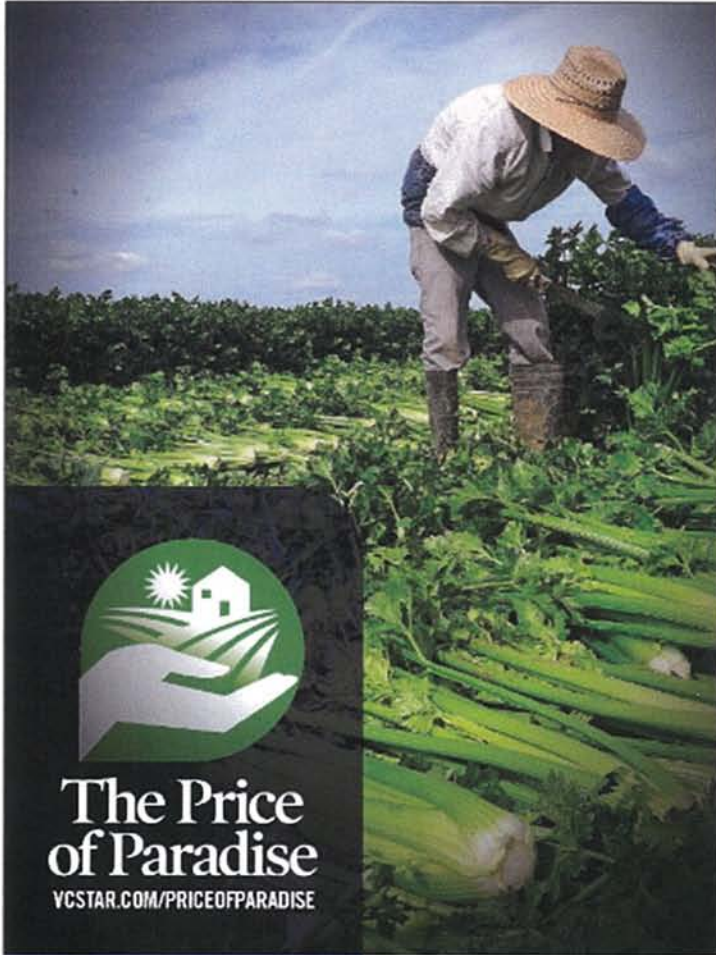
NEW ORLEANS — The Coast Guard reopened a normally bustling stretch of the lower Mississippi River to ships and boaters Monday, two days after an oil spill closed the major inland waterway between Baton Rouge and New Orleans.

About 31,500 gallons of light crude oil spilled into the river after a tank barge pushed by the towboat Hannah C. Settoon collided with another towboat Saturday afternoon, officials said.

At least 30 vessels had been waiting for the river to reopen, Coast Guard Petty Officer Matthew Schofield said of the spill near Vacherie, about 50 miles west of New Orleans by land.

No one was hurt, all vessels were subsequently secured and there were no reports of any wildlife harmed by spilled oil, the Coast Guard said.

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## OUR WATER CRISIS. THE EFFECT IN VENTURA COUNTY. SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 23

The groundwater system that supplies much of Ventura County is already in a state of crisis. Combined with the drought and serious overpumping, our water supply has become critically stressed. In this premiere "Price of Paradise" story, The Star looks at the farmers and cities on the Oxnard Plain and the consequences they are facing.



[VCSTAR.COM/PRICEOFFPARADISE](http://VCSTAR.COM/PRICEOFFPARADISE)

**8A** » Tuesday, February 25, 2014 » THE STAR

## Meeting will address water prospects tied to pipeline for 2014

From staff reports

Users of the United Water Conservation District's Pumping Trough Pipeline may attend a meeting Thursday to hear about water use and supply for the rest of 2014.

Staff members from United Water will report on pumping trough operations last fall and discuss the future from 8:30a.m. to 10:30 a.m. in the community meeting room at the Camarillo Public Library, 4101 Las Posas Road.

The Farm Bureau of Ventura County, the California Strawberry Commission and United Water are hosting the event.

For more on how water is used in Ventura County, see [http://www.vcstar.com/news/2014/feb/21/agrou ndwater- crisis- h a sresurfaced- i n-ventura \\_ D/](http://www.vcstar.com/news/2014/feb/21/agrou ndwater- crisis- h a sresurfaced- i n-ventura _ D/).

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# Finally, some rain for California

Ventura County Star 2/25/2014

Rain is on the way to drought-stricken California.

The large, high-pressure system off the coast of California that's been blocking any rain from moving through is finally breaking down. It started last week with some rain showers in Washington, Oregon and northern California.

Last week's rain in the Pacific Northwest not only eased drought conditions, but it's paving the way for two more waves of low pressure, which will bring much needed rain to the entire West Coast.

The first round of rain will move through central and southern California Wednesday into Wednesday night. This first round is smaller with some areas getting 1-2" of rain, and it won't be enough to put a dent in the longstanding drought.

The second system moving through on Friday and into Saturday is bigger and brings much more rainfall. Initial model runs are showing 1-2" for coastal and valley areas with double that in the foothills in the mountains.

## Is that enough?

California has been experiencing extreme drought conditions for the last six months, and with each passing week, California gets drier and drier, worsening drought conditions. As of the most recent report issued by the US Drought Monitor, nearly 91 percent of California is experiencing a severe to exceptional drought.

That means it's going to take a lot of rain to end this particular dry streak. The National Climactic Data Center estimates that it would take between 18" and 36" of rain to put an end to the most drought-stricken areas. While this week's rain will help, it's only going to be a drop in the bucket.

Follow Scripps Digital Meteorologist Jason Meyers via the Storm Shield app on twitter, [@StormShieldApp](#) and [Facebook](#). Download the Storm Shield Weather Radio App for your [iPhone](#) or [Android](#) device and get severe weather alerts wherever you are.

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## Letters: California's doomsday droughts



A boat launch at Folsom Lake near Sacramento sits along the banks of the drought-ridden reservoir. (Los Angeles Times)

LA Times February 25, 2014

Re "Drought in a state of denial," Feb. 23

Sure, California has had severe droughts in the past, but we haven't been here before. We have not been at 400 parts per million of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere the entire history of human existence. The damage has not fully "matured."

Yet our sweet sirens of the carbon age will croon: "We've had droughts before." But if a 100-year drought occurs now every few decades, could we recognize it and respond accordingly? Or would we allow ourselves the false comfort of saying, "Well, gosh, we've had these droughts before"?

A 2011 study by scientists at the [Massachusetts Institute of Technology](#) estimated that within a few decades, California will average about two more months of drought per year than before. This is in many of our lifetimes.

Only by respecting scientific messengers and electing responsible public servants can we avert the catastrophes that await our continued indifference.

*Jan Freed Los Angeles*

Here we go again, another article about the drought that mentions everything but continued development. We are supposed to tear out our lawns, stop watering and lug buckets of gray water around, while all around us development continues apace.

Just a few miles from my house, hundreds of new housing units are planned. Just this past Friday I got stuck in traffic as vehicles were moving to work on townhouses in Claremont.

I don't know anyone who resents farmers getting water; after all, we eat food too. But people are getting very resentful of being asked to conserve while developers get rich.

*Janet Campagna Alta Loma*

Your article was very sobering. However, something that could alleviate water shortages caused by drought was not mentioned. That something is desalination.

Israel has become the technological leader in this field; that country's IDE Technologies is helping to build in Carlsbad what will be the largest seawater desalination plant in the Western Hemisphere. Three smaller desalination plants are already operating in California, and at least a dozen more have been proposed.

It doesn't serve readers to report on a problem as serious as water availability without mentioning a solution that can alleviate the problem. Sure, desalination is expensive and there may be environmental concerns to be studied, but these programs should be looked at and discussed as part of the larger water problem, and as possible solutions.

*Norman Redlich Woodland Hills*

We hear a lot of suggestions for conserving water, but one possibility that rarely gets mentioned is the elimination of grass in sidewalk parkways.

Having lived in Arizona for 25 years, I learned that an attractive frontyard can be created without a lawn. Xeriscaping demonstration projects in Los Angeles might persuade homeowners to consider this option.

Another option would be to follow the advice provided to me in a hotel room bathroom on a Caribbean island many years ago: "In these islands in the sun, we don't flush for No. 1."

*Lotte Schaefer Van Nuys*

# Urgency flowing on drought at state Capitol

*Leg isolators focus on bills to save water*

By Fenit Nirappil Associated Press  
Ventura County Star 2/24/2014

SACRAMENTO -Drought and water issues will play a prominent role in this year's legislative session as most of California is dealing with the consequences of one of the driest periods on record.

Since the Legislature reconvened in January, 1,929 bills were introduced in advance of Friday's deadline.

The legislation reflects a sense of urgency among lawmakers after three dry winters have forced farmers to fallow fields and some communities to declare mandatory water reductions. At least 17 communities have dangerously low drinking water supplies.

The most ambitious drought bill is being pushed by Gov. Jerry Brown and the Democratic leaders of the Assembly and Senate. It proposes \$687 million to provide immediate help to launch local water recycling and conservation projects while providing housing and food assistance for the driest communities.

Other bills are more narrowly focused, with some trying to spare homeowners from fees or punishment for unwatered lawns.

AB2104 by Lorena Gonzalez, D-San Diego, and SB992 by Jim Nielsen, R-Gerber, prevent homeowner associations from penalizing homeowners for having brown lawns. AB1636 by Cheryl Brown, D-San Bernardino, prevents cities and counties from doing the same.

To address California's long-term water needs with major infrastructure projects, lawmakers from both parties also agree they need to revamp an \$11.1 billion water bond measure that already is on the November ballot.

That is likely to be the water-related issue that generates the most debate this year in the Legislature, given the amount of money at stake.

There appears to be general agreement among lawmakers of both parties that the size of the bond needs to be reduced and the special interest projects it included so it would win passage in the Legislature in 2009 should be stripped. Republicans and Democrats in both houses have proposed five different options, ranging from \$5.8 billion to \$9.2 billion.

Republicans emphasize eliminating the earmarks and prioritizing money for reservoirs and dams.

'If we don't store it, we don't have any,' said Assembly Minority Leader Connie Conway, R-Tulare, after a news conference announcing a bill that would authorize the sale of nearly \$8 billion in bonds. 'I don't fear the competition from other water bonds as long as eventually we focus on one, the one that makes the most sense, the one that has language that everyone can live with.' Democrats focus on partnering with outside groups to restore watersheds and ecosystems, as well as making more use of the water already available.

'The era of the very, very large dams is fading quickly,' said Sen. Lois Wolk, D-Davis, architect of a \$6.9 billion bond proposal.

She says her focus is on a more realistic proposal that is 'effective and affordable, that people are willing to pay for because ultimately these bonds are not free.' Legislative leaders expect a negotiated bill to come together by early summer.

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# Drought takes heavy toll on almonds

## *Orchards in Central Valley being uprooted*

By Scott Smith Associated Press  
Ventura County Star 2/24/2014

**FIREBAUGH** -With California's agricultural heartland entrenched in drought, almond farmers are letting orchards dry up and in some cases making the tough call to have their trees torn out of the ground, leaving behind empty fields.

In the Central Valley, Barry Baker is one of many who hired a crew that brought in large rumbling equipment to perform the grim task in a cloud of dust.

A tractor operator drove heavy steel shanks into the ground to loosen the roots and knock the trees over. Another operator, driving a brush loader equipped with a forklife implement on the front, scooped up the trees and root balls and pushed them into a pile, where an excavator driver grabbed them up in clusters with a clawing grapple. The trees were fed into a grinder that spit wood chips into piles to be hauled away by the truckload and burned as fuel in a power plant.

Baker, 54, of Baker Farming Co., has decided to remove 20 percent of his trees before they have passed their prime. There's simply not enough water to satisfy all 5,000 acres of almonds, he said. 'Hopefully, I don't have to pull out another 20 percent,' Baker said, adding that sooner or later neighboring farmers will come to the same conclusion. 'They're hoping for the best. I don't think it's going to come.' There are no figures yet available to show an exact number of orchards being removed, but the economic stakes and risks facing growers are clear. Almonds and other nuts are among the most high-value crops in the Central Valley - the biggest producer of such crops in the country. In 2012, California's almond crop had an annual value of \$5 billion. This year farmers say the dry conditions are forcing them to make difficult decisions.

Gov. Jerry Brown last month declared a drought emergency after the state's driest year in recorded history.

The thirst for water has sparked political battles in Washington, D.C., over use of the state's rivers and reservoirs. This month President Barack Obama visited the Central Valley, announcing millions of dollars in relief aid that in part will help the state's ranchers and farmers better conserve and manage water.

Baker, who favors farming over politics, explained the math leading to his decision. Between now and the summer almond harvest, he would need to irrigate his orchards with scarce, expensive water and pay to have the trees pruned and sprayed. Bringing in beehives to pollinate the blossoms costs nearly \$500 an acre.

That all would amount to a \$2.5 million gamble, without knowing if the next couple of months will bring significant rain to the valley floor and snow to the mountains. 'You'd

have wrapped a lot of money up in those trees to see what happens,' he said.

Removing old trees is common practice. Almond trees remain productive for about 25 years, growers said. The state's almond farmers removed more than 10,000 acres of trees in 2012, according to a report by the California Department of Food and Agriculture.

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# Much-needed rain, snow is forecast

By The Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO -Meteorologists forecast a pair of storms could dump several inches of rain on parched cities and croplands throughout California in the coming week, bringing welcome news to a state that has just endured its driest year in recorded history.

While the rain won't be enough to end the drought, the National Weather Service projected Sunday that the much-needed precipitation could nearly double the amount of rainfall in parts of Los Angeles and the San Francisco Bay Area this year.

By next Saturday the twin Pacific storms are expected to bring as much as 2 inches of rain to the coast and several feet of snow to the Sierra Nevada.

The first storm Wednesday won't offer much relief, just light overnight rains heading into Thursday. By Friday, radar images show that the second storm should drench the entire state for 24 hours.

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## Truce called in longtime feud between L.A. County water districts

*The Central Basin Water District had refused to sell to its rival, the Water Replenishment District. New circumstances bring detente.*



Former Assemblyman Thomas Calderon, second from right — a onetime consultant for the Central Basin Water District — has been charged as part of a major federal corruption case, along with his brother, state Sen. Ron Calderon (D-Montebello), left. (Genaro Molina, Los Angeles Times / January 14, 2012)

By Hector Becerra  
LA Times February 24, 2014

For nearly three years, two Los Angeles County water districts had been locked in an ugly feud.

The Central Basin Water District, a water wholesaler, refused to sell to its rival, the Water Replenishment District, which manages an underground storage basin in southeast Los Angeles County that serves 4 million residents. For its part, the WRD was just as happy not to buy the water, lest the purchase benefit Central Basin.

The standoff cut groundwater storage even as the state faced a looming drought.

But as Central Basin faces an [FBI](#) corruption investigation, the bad blood between the two agencies has suddenly eased.

Central Basin this month agreed to sell 60,000 acre-feet of water to the Water Replenishment District. Water experts say the sale represents a major boost to the local underground basin. It comes as the drought is forcing local agencies to rely more on the basin for water.

"I think it's a new day where we're finally practicing good water management in our basin," said Kevin Wattier, general manager of the Long Beach Water Department, who has sat on the sidelines as the water war raged. "We put zero drops of water in this basin. And that, to me, is the travesty. And it was because of this war."

Typically, the Water Replenishment District replenishes the basin with about 100,000 acre-feet of "artificially captured water" a year, most of it from rain runoff. About 20% usually comes from imported water purchased from Central Basin. But there has been very little rainfall in the last three years, which combined with the lack of imported water has concerned Wattier and others.

The detente comes amid a year of change at Central Basin, which has faced several scandals and has seen some of its top leaders depart. On Friday, former Assemblyman Thomas Calderon — a onetime consultant for the agency — was charged as part of a major federal corruption case, along with his brother, state Sen. [Ron Calderon](#) (D-Montebello).

The charges Friday alleged the brothers took tens of thousands of dollars in bribes, though not related to Central Basin.

However, the FBI obtained boxes of records from Central Basin's offices last year and is continuing to investigate.

Thomas Calderon was widely seen as a field marshal in Central Basin's protracted battles with the WRD.

Both sides now agree the conflict did far more harm than good.

Central Basin and the WRD each spent about \$2.4 million in the water war. Central Basin sent state legislators and lobbyists after its rivals, in one case paying a consultant to create promotional online stories under the names, bios and photos of reporters that did not exist. The WRD bought up domain names such as "centralbasin.net" and used it to post stories critical of its rival.

Central Basin was so concerned about being sued that it secretly managed a \$2.7-million fund for its own groundwater storage project without public hearings or notifications. In a deposition as part of a lawsuit filed last year against a former vendor, Central Basin's former general manager, Art Aguilar, testified that the board wanted to pursue the storage plan but "didn't want anybody to know what we're doing."

Legislation ended up precluding Central Basin from pursuing groundwater storage, but the fund is now part of the FBI investigation.

The scandals and investigation have left Central Basin humbled — and with leaders vowing reform.

Tony Perez, who became Central Basin's general manager last spring, said the agency is doing things differently. The district has launched its own internal investigation into the \$2.7-million fund, he said, and is working on reforms after an audit found "significant deficiencies" in its financial controls.

The audit cited a case in which Central Basin paid \$22,000 upfront for the college tuition of Gil Cedillo Jr., the son of Los Angeles City Councilman Gil Cedillo, who had been paid \$112,000 a year by the agency until he was let go last year. The audit also found that Central Basin had been lax in the contract bidding process, among other problems.

Central Basin recently dropped the last of its litigation against the WRD and also recently made about \$800,000 in budget cuts to close a deficit.

Perez said the battles with the WRD were a wasteful example of turf building.

"I think it's a cautionary tale to all members of the water community that we need to work together," he said. "I think that both parties are reasonably going to enter into this environment of trust a little bit slowly, but both sides are going to have to take a step out of the darkness."

He said the water sale to the WRD will help Central Basin by bringing in \$4.2 million.

Rob Katherman, the WRD's board president, said the change of leadership at Central Basin has made a major difference. Two incumbents on the Central Basin board were ousted after a series of stories in The Times about the water war and how the agency was spending money.

In an interview, Aguilar described the battle with the Water Replenishment District as a part of a "costly and nonproductive" conflict that no one party could be blamed for. He said he is glad it's been resolved.

"The basin has gone without adequate replenishment," he said.

Overall, southeast L.A.'s basin is a better reserve than some parts of the state hardest hit by the drought. Officials said the 60,000 acre-feet of additional water from Central Basin comes at a key time, when some cities in the area will be required to pump more water from the underground storage.

Albert Robles, a WRD board member and Carson councilman, said southeast L.A.'s water situation would have been significantly more secure if not for the feud.

"Had it not been for the war," he said, "we would literally be laughing at today's drought."

## Over troubled waters

*Aquifers may be worse despite effort*

By Timm Herdt and Gretchen Wenner  
Ventura County Star 2/23/2014



John Broome (left), a fourth-generation rancher, and Thomas Vujovich Jr. walk through a field on the Oxnard Plain, where they believe groundwater supplies are being managed adequately. Both men have 33-year-old sons who plan to continue their family farming operations for decades. PHOTOS BY JUAN CARLO/THE STAR

On April 30, 1979, state water officials came to Oxnard and dropped a word that sent terror through the hearts of every farmer on the Oxnard Plain: 'Adjudication.' For decades, seawater had been slowly intruding into the freshwater aquifers beneath the Oxnard Plain. In the view of state authorities, the local folks had done too little to stop it.

For the first time in California, state officials formally threatened to seek a court order restricting the pumping of groundwater.

When the regulators came that day, scores of ranchers, business leaders and local elected officials showed up at the community center to deliver a unified message: 'Go home. We've got this.' The Ventura County Board of Supervisors pledged to take control of the situation. Local legislators pushed through a law creating a new county-based agency with the power to regulate pumping. Funding was secured to finance a \$31 million diversion dam to replenish the aquifers and push back the sea.



Broome walks through a raspberry orchard on his land south of CSU Channel Islands. He worries the drought could trigger knee-jerk pumping restrictions that would be devastating to growers.

The new Fox Canyon Groundwater Management Agency convened its first meeting in 1983. In 1990, the agency implemented a phased 25 percent reduction in well pumping. A year later, the Vern Freeman Diversion Dam opened in Saticoy, with the capacity to reroute 58,000 acre-feet of Santa Clara River water each year to recharge groundwater basins.

The problem was pronounced solved.

It wasn't.

A crisis has re-emerged.

Three decades later, the situation is arguably worse. The area of saltwater intrusion has expanded, and about 25,000 more acre-feet of groundwater are being pumped from aquifers each year than is sustainable.

An acre-foot, or about 326,000 gallons, can supply two households for a year — which means the amount of water overdrafted annually is more than what's needed to supply every housing unit in the city of Ventura.

## **LOW-WATER MARK**

New science has shown the safe yield of the basins beneath the Oxnard Plain is considerably less than previously believed. New environmental rules have limited the amount of surface water that can be diverted to replenish the aquifers. County farmers are growing more water intensive crops. Loopholes in the groundwater agency's restrictions have nullified some of the hoped for pumping reductions.

And, now, a severe drought is placing even more stress on chronically overstressed groundwater basins. Scores of wells are pumping water from 100 or more feet below

sea level, a low-water mark not seen since the drought of the early '90s. And the area's underground water bank, the Oxnard Forebay Basin, no longer has enough water to recharge neighboring aquifers.

Various problems plague each of the eight interconnected sub-basins that stair step their way from Piru to the beach areas of Oxnard.

In addition, the drought has taken its toll on groundwater supplies elsewhere in the county. In the Ojai Valley, some wells have gone dry, placing greater demand on dwindling storage at Lake Casitas.

The availability of reliable, affordable groundwater is of existential importance to Ventura County farmers. Without it, the county's agriculture industry could become unsustainable. In the Fox Canyon system, agriculture is by far the biggest water user, accounting for about two-thirds of all pumping.

The aquifers also are of critical importance to hundreds of thousands of residents and businesses in Oxnard, Ventura, Camarillo, Santa Paula and Fillmore that rely in large part on groundwater to cook food, wash clothes and water lawns.

There is a growing consensus among water experts that the condition of Ventura County's groundwater resources is either approaching a crisis, or already is in one.

Today, even some local officials are invoking the same word that stirred such fury three decades ago.

"There's no doubt the area has to be adjudicated," said Michael Solomon, general manager of the United Water Conservation District, the agency charged with managing groundwater in an area that covers the Oxnard Plain and the Santa Clara River Valley, from Point Mugu to Piru.

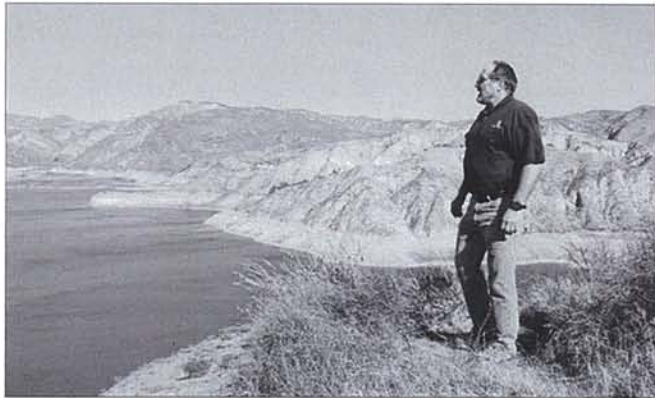
"We're over drafting and killing the basin," he said.



This bone-dry agricultural reservoir is at the Pleasant Valley County Water District in Camarillo. The reservoir was drained in July for a fix-it project but has remained that way because of the drought — the first time in nearly 30 years it has been empty.  
TROY HARVEY/THE STAR



Most of the Fox Canyon aquifer is deep underground, but you can see what it looks like on a stretch of Highway 23 outside Fillmore, where it bends up and is exposed along the roadway. Bryan Bondy, groundwater manager for the Calleguas Municipal Water District, says the permeable gravel and sand layer is ideal for groundwater.

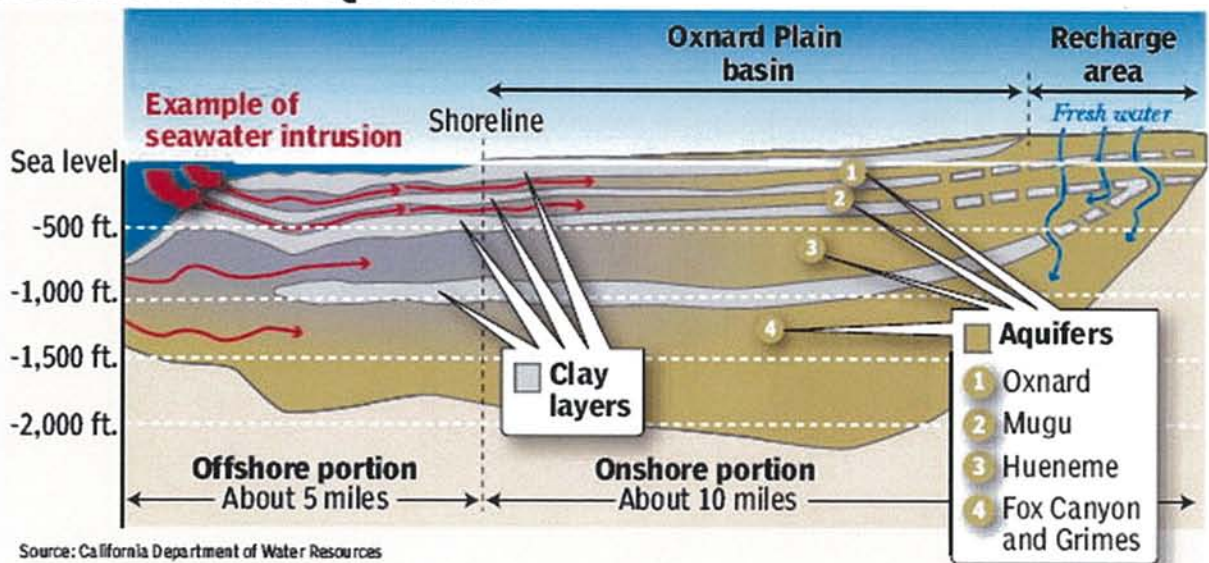


Michael Solomon, general manager of the United Water Conservation District, looks across Lake Piru. The reservoir was created with construction of the Santa Felicia Dam in the 1950s to manage groundwater pumped by farmers and cities along the Santa Clara River and Oxnard Plain. Solomon's district owns the dam, lake and key downstream facilities.

There's no doubt the area has to be adjudicated. We're over drafting and killing the basin. Somebody's got to take control of this and say, 'Stop the insanity.'

*Michael Solomon, general manager of the United Water Conservation District*

## OXNARD PLAIN AQUIFERS



SCRIPPS NEWSPAPERS



 The Price  
of Paradise

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## Demand has pitted farmers against fish

By Timm Herdt and Gretchen Wenner  
Ventura County Star 2/23/2014



Thomas Vujovich Jr. (left) and John Broome are multigenerational farmers whose holdings include acreage on the Oxnard Plain, where groundwater supplies are stressed by pumping, seawater intrusion and increasing environmental restrictions. Both men, who believe local supplies are being managed adequately, have 33-year-old sons who plan to continue farming. JUAN CARLO/THE STAR

When rain finally comes again to Ventura County, it will have to fill more buckets than ever before.

For decades, farmers and cities on the Oxnard Plain have relied on rain that flows through the Santa Clara River to replenish underground aquifers from which water is pumped. That's been going on since 1928, when an earthen dam was built near Saticoy to divert river water.

A series of licenses issued by the State Water Resources Control Board beginning in the late 1950s gave the United Water Conservation District the right to divert the water, a practice that was enhanced in 1991 with the construction of the concrete Vern

## Freeman Diversion Dam.

But new legal demands were placed on water flowing through the Santa Clara after the Southern California steelhead trout was listed as an endangered species in 1997, which led to the creation of a recovery plan. Enough water had to be left in the river to facilitate steelhead migration, which has fallen from about 40,000 fish per year in the 1940s to near zero today.

Water management on the Oxnard Plain could become more complicated still, depending on the result of a complaint filed late last year by the Wishtoyo Foundation, Ventura Coast keeper and Center for Biological Diversity. They have asked the water control board to further restrict diversions to protect native plants and endangered birds that populate the riverbed, as well as the steelhead.

To receive a permit from the Fisheries Service to continue its diversions, the United District was required in 2008 to develop a habitat conservation plan, which will require modifications to its Santa Felica Dam at Lake Piru and the Freeman dam.

The plan, which will cover 11 species including the steelhead, is still under development. It will require that millions be spent for construction of a fish passage, physical habitat improvements and extensive monitoring. The district has spent \$6million to date on license compliance, plan preparation and design studies.

United Board President Lynn Maulhardt estimates the district will ultimately spend about \$80 million to comply with federal requirements. "It doesn't produce one additional drop of water anywhere in Southern California," he said.

In an average year, United diverts about 78,000 acre-feet of water from the Santa Clara for groundwater replenishment. Maulhardt estimates that taking steps to obtain the federal permit will reduce that total by about 15,000 or 30,000 acre-feet.

The Wishtoyo complaint could lead to even greater cutbacks in diversions.

It suggests that more consistent river flows would provide recreational and economic opportunities that could potentially offset any harm to the agricultural industry, including low paid farmworkers.

The action has so alarmed the agricultural industry that the county and state Farm Bureaus have stepped forward to join the United in responding to the complaint.

"In essence, the Wishtoyo complaint suggests that farmworkers would be better off if we eliminated their jobs, because then they'd be free to land higher-paying jobs in the river-based recreational industry that will magically appear once we take away farmers' water and drive them out of business," said John Krist, executive director of the Farm Bureau of Ventura County.

Jason Weiner, staff attorney for Ventura Coast keeper, said his organization does not mean to understate the importance of agriculture. He notes the complaint proposes alternative sources of water for aquifer replenishment and the construction of additional infrastructure that would allow United to divert more water during heavy flood events.

County farmers, however, are frustrated that federal law gives standing to a nearly nonexistent fish that may never again be able to navigate its way to spawning areas in Sespe, Santa Paula and Piru creeks, but is indifferent to the groundwater basins that sustain a \$2 billion-a-year industry.

Grower Thomas Vujovich Jr., president of the Pleasant Valley County Water District board, believes changes to the Endangered Species Act are needed to help preserve Ventura County farming. "I don't think the fish people will be satisfied until the diversion and the dam are gone," he said.

## ONLINE

Find out where your water comes from and learn more about Oxnard Plain basins in interactive maps with this story at [vcstar.com](#).

[vcstar.com/priceofparadise](#).

The Star is exploring the true cost of living in Ventura County in a new project called Price of Paradise. That cost can be measured in actual dollars spent on housing, either as a renter or owner. It can be measured in terms of the opportunities we give up to preserve the open space and natural beauty that make Ventura County unique. It might mean making difficult decisions to conserve a limited water supply.

Our team of 10 journalists will explore this balancing act as we cover the county's cities and unincorporated areas, but we need your help. We want to know what you consider the cost of living in Ventura County. Tell us about issues that impact your quality of life, whether they be new housing developments, vanishing farmland or congested highways.

We'd love to hear from you. Visit [vcstar.com/priceofparadise](#) to meet the team and learn more about the project. Connect with us @VCS\_POP on Twitter.

## AQUIFER

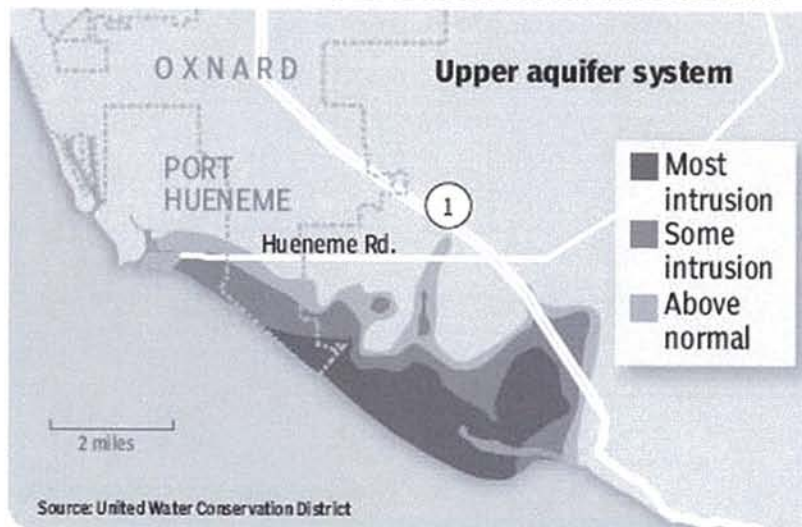
It's an underground layer where water seeps into, such as sand and gravel. Aquifers can serve as water banks, with withdrawals – pumping – and deposits that recharge groundwater supplies. Locally, the system of aquifers under the Oxnard Plain bends toward the surface around El Rio and Saticoy. There, water from Lake Piru released to the Santa Clara River replenishes the system.

## GET INVOLVED

■ The Fox Canyon Groundwater Management Agency's monthly board meeting Wednesday will include discussion of emergency pumping reductions. The panel meets at 1:30 p.m. in the supervisors' chambers at 800 S. Victoria Ave. The agenda is available at <http://www.fcgma.org>.

■ The Association of Water Agencies of Ventura County's annual symposium, dubbed "Overtapped Oasis," will be a daylong event April 24 focused on the local groundwater crisis. For information go to <http://www.awavc.org>.

## OXNARD PLAIN SEAWATER INTRUSION



SCRIPPS NEWSPAPERS

## **Editorials**

### Local water: the glass is lower than half-empty

A special report in The Star this weekend provides a sobering reminder that the groundwater supply in Ventura County is an essential public resource that's being overused, as it has been for decades, with severe economic and environmental consequences if the over pumping goes on.

Operating on the principle of local control, officials worked to form an independent locally based agency in 1982 to handle the problem.

More than 30 years have passed since the Legislature created the Fox Canyon Groundwater Management Agency but the groundwater situation has not improved. It has grown worse.

In view of that history and experience, some say it may be only a matter of time until the state passes a law to regulate the amount of pumping or a court appoints a water master to set limits on individual wells.

Agricultural producers that use significant quantities of groundwater and county communities that rely on groundwater as a major source of their potable water have a great deal at stake in this matter.

From The Star's point of view, we would expect all or most of the involved parties to prefer a locally generated solution to this problem rather than dictates imposed through the action of the Legislature or a judge.

So it seems reasonable to us that interested local parties would support, if only grudgingly, stronger action by the Fox Canyon Groundwater Management Agency. Its governing board has five members locally selected to represent county government, cities, water districts and farmers.

These water issues, which involve a major portion of southern Ventura County, underscore the importance of measures to promote conservation and reduce or offset some of the demand for groundwater. Examples include highly advanced wastewater treatment operations like those in area cities and which recently expanded in Oxnard and are set to expand in Ventura.

Those treatment plants, sometimes criticized because of their expense, can be a good

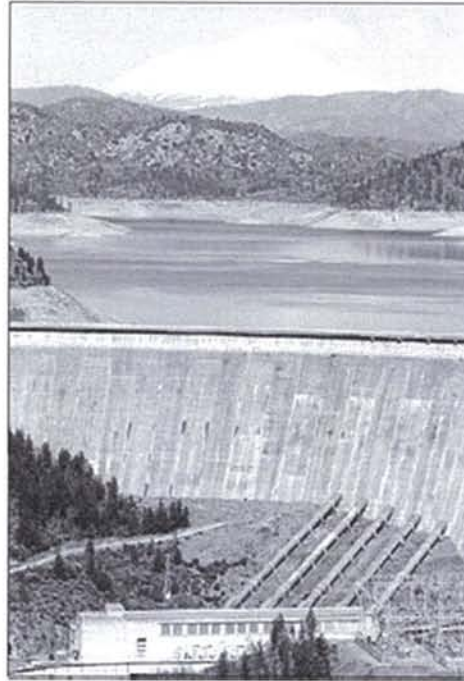
value if they are effectively managed to control costs. They produce clean water that, once the necessary public-works infrastructure is in place, can be used in place of potable water for irrigation and other purposes.

Making the maximum use of a local recycled water supply that's abundant, instead of automatic reliance on groundwater and water imported from distant mountains and rivers, is common sense.

It is one of many adjustments water users will have to accept if local authorities are ever to reach the point of effectively managing the groundwater basins for a sustainable future in our county.

# Saving ag land from drying up takes teamwork

Julia Brownley Guest Columnist  
Ventura County Star 2/23/2014



Shasta Dam and Lake Shasta, which is currently at 37 percent of capacity, are part of the system that delivers water around the state. ASSOCIATED PRESS

This is a story about access to fresh water in California, a story with an ending yet to be written.

It's a story that dates back to the Great Drought of the 1860s that cut Southern California's cattle industry in half and prompted Ventura County's agriculture industry to transition from ranching to farming.

Because of agriculture, Ventura County has a unique beauty, heritage, community and economy — but our community depends on reliable access to fresh water. Without it, our rivers dry up and our crops cannot grow.

It's not just Ventura County that cannot survive without water. It's all of California, which has the eighth-largest economy in the world and grows the lion's share of America's fruits and vegetables.

As John Krist wrote in his book "Living Legacy: The Story of Ventura County Agriculture," "Alone among the coastal counties of Southern California, the landscape of Ventura County remains dominated by farms, a verdant reminder of what the entire

region looked like before the sprawling megalopolis washed over the orchards and vegetable fields of Los Angeles and Orange counties like a concrete tide.”

I couldn't agree more. For the sake of our economy, and to maintain our quality of life in Ventura County, we cannot succumb to that concrete tide by failing to address the water needs of our residents and our farmers.

The drought we are experiencing in California is not just a San Joaquin Valley problem. It is a statewide one. Our reservoirs are at lower levels than they were during the catastrophic droughts of the 1970s; two-thirds of the way through the wet season, the Sierra Nevada snowpack is only 6 percent of normal levels. Here in Ventura County, the earth is so dry that tough old oak trees are dying.

Recently, I held a round-table discussion in Ventura County to hear more about how this current drought is affecting local growers and water users. I appreciate the time our water suppliers, farmers and county leadership took to meet and hear each other's concerns.

Due to prudent planning, the situation in Ventura County is not as dire. Gov. Jerry Brown called on Californians to reduce our water consumption by 20 percent, and the city of Ventura voted to ask residents to cut their water use by 10 percent.

On Wednesday, the governor and Democratic leaders in the state Legislature proposed a \$687 million emergency drought-relief package.

Unfortunately, in a cynical response to this crisis, congressional Republicans recently passed a bill, the so-called Sacramento- San Joaquin Valley Emergency Water Delivery Act, pitting one region of our state against another. It is a bill to nowhere and it will solve nothing.

We need a long-term solution to our water needs, not cynical gimmicks that totally fail to address our present and future water needs.

The stability of our economy and food supply, and the safety of our communities, depend upon us working together on a statewide solution.

In that spirit, Sens. Barbara Boxer and Dianne Feinstein — along with their colleagues from Oregon — introduced the California Emergency Drought Relief Act, which represents a more balanced approach to the severe drought threatening California communities, including Ventura County.

It contains mitigation measures intended to provide additional disaster relief assistance, expedite projects to increase water storage, and provide flexibility to maximize water deliveries without undermining state and federal environmental protections.

This is a big step in the right direction, and I am encouraged that Sens. Boxer and



Feinstein worked closely with our state resource agencies to put together this balanced bill. Ventura County's water districts have done a tremendous job planning for a drought, but we must still do more.

Moreover, we must figure out how we will feed our nation, how we will grow our crops, whether we can overcome partisanship and the ideology that surrounds climate change, and the regionalism that pits Californians against each other. We need to pursue new technologies, conserve water, protect our environment and improve agricultural production .

We must do this to keep Ventura County the beautiful agricultural oasis that it has been for the past 150 years, or we will end up fighting another round of the California water wars that inspired the movie "Chinatown."

It's our choice. We can write our own ending. Let's make sure it's the one we want.

Julia Brownley represents the 46th Congressional District, which includes most of Ventura County.

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# Dry winter calls for efficient and smart water use

Ken Petersen Guest Columnist  
Ventura County Star 2/23/2014

The state is experiencing one of the driest years on record and weather forecasts signal the third-straight dry winter for California.

Given that continued arid conditions are expected in the months ahead, Gov. Jerry Brown recently declared a state of emergency. Brown's declaration has prompted state officials to take all necessary actions in response to drought conditions.

On average, about half of California's statewide precipitation occurs in December, January and February. We've received very little rain during the first two months of this period, which is concerning.

While local water supplies are sufficient today, the dry weather is an important reminder for us all to use water wisely.

Golden State Water Co. currently has an adequate water supply to meet the needs of local customers. However, we always encourage efficient water use.

Prior to recent dry conditions, Golden State had maximized the use of local groundwater supplies and reduced the amount of imported water it purchases from Casitas Municipal Water District to only 8 percent of the overall water supply needed for Ojai residents.

Currently, no water restrictions are currently in place for Ojai. We will continue to keep customers informed about water supply issues and any changes to the current status of the local supply.

Here are some tips to help preserve this finite resource.

**Understand your water usage:** One way to identify your household's conservation potential is to compare water use during winter months (November-February) with the amount you use in the summer (June-September). The difference between the two volumes is a good indication of the amount of water you could conserve.

- Water use in winter months is generally representative of the amount necessary to operate your household. The easiest place to cut down on water use is outdoors.

In the home:

- Use the shortest cycle and wash only full loads of laundry and dishes.

- Fill up a pitcher. Keep a pitcher of water in the refrigerator instead of running the tap for a cold glass of water.

- Check faucets, pipes and toilets for leaks.

In the garden:

- Plant trees, shrubs, herbs and flowers that are native to the climate and require less water.

- Install a smart irrigation controller that will automatically control irrigation based on local weather conditions . Outside the home:

- Use a bucket of water to wash your car instead of running the hose. Also use a broom instead of a hose to clean driveways, sidewalks and patios.

As a community, we can make a big difference to protect the local water supply. Golden State is committed to helping customers manage water consumption.

If you have questions about maintaining your landscape, or would like additional information on water-efficient practices, please visit [www.gswater.com /water-use-efficiency/](http://www.gswater.com/water-use-efficiency/) or call 1-800-999-4033 to speak with customer service representative.

Ken Petersen is district manager for Golden State Water Co.'s Coastal District (Ojai).

Local briefs

VENTURA COUNTY

## Meeting to outline drought relief

Farmers, ranchers and farmworkers can hear during a meeting Tuesday in Camarillo about various drought-relief measures offered by state and federal agencies.

State and federal experts will talk about crop insurance, farm management tools, farmworker assistance programs and programs helping ranchers and farmers with water conservation.

Deadlines approaching for federal programs include Friday for crop insurance and March 3 for water conservation enhancements. Assistance includes help with cover crops, tree pruning and riskmanagement tools.

The meeting will be from 6-8 p.m. Tuesday at the Ventura County Agricultural Commissioner's Office, 555 Airport Way, Suite E, Camarillo.

Visit <http://www.cdfa.ca.gov/drought> for more information on drought resources for farmers, ranchers and farmworkers.

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## Severe drought? California has been here before

*A thousand-year tree-ring study shows that deep droughts come with the territory. Now the issue is how to deal with them.*



By Bettina Boxall  
LA Times February 23, 2014

The skinny rings of ancient giant sequoias and foxtail pines hold a lesson that Californians are learning once again this winter: It can get very dry, sometimes for a single parched year, sometimes for withering decades.

Drought has settled over the state like a dusty blanket, leaving much of the landscape a dreary brown. Receding reservoirs have exposed the ruins of long-forgotten towns. Some cities are rationing supplies and banning outdoor watering. Many growers are expecting no irrigation deliveries from the big government water projects that turned the state's belly into the nation's produce market.

Recent storms in Northern California and forecasts of more to come in the next week or two have lessened fears that this drought will break records as the worst in modern times. But it is unlikely to end soon, highlighting the vulnerability of the state's water supply.

Even when nature behaves, there are too many water demands for them all to be satisfied.

"California is running out of options to deal with the fact that it has basically been relying on more water than it has long-term access to," warned David Hayes, a former U.S. Interior Department official who was the Obama administration's point man on Western water issues during the president's first term.

"It's like reality is closing in on California," Hayes said.

A decade ago the state agreed to stop using more than its share of Colorado River water, cutting an important Southland supply. So much water is diverted from the watersheds of the state's two largest rivers, the Sacramento and San Joaquin, that their common delta is on the brink of ecological collapse, triggering environmental restrictions on delta exports.

Agriculture chronically pumps more water out of Central Valley aquifers than man or nature puts back. During droughts like this, growers suck up even more groundwater, compounding the problem. The state's acreage of almond and other nut and vine crops has ballooned, hardening the demand for irrigation supplies during dry spells.

A warming climate is shrinking the Sierra Nevada snowpack that acts as a natural reservoir. And although it is unclear exactly how climate change will affect precipitation levels in California, rising temperatures mean farm fields and suburban yards will dry out more quickly.

"I think that any prudent — fill in the blank — businessperson, governmental official, citizen, farmer would be thinking about how they can use less water" in the future, Hayes said.

Then there is California's annual rain and snowfall, which go up and down like a yo-yo.

"From a climate perspective, we've been here before," Martin Hoerling, a federal research meteorologist, said last week at a drought forum in Sacramento. "We shouldn't be surprised."

The state dried out like a prune in 1976-77 and before that in 1924, the most parched periods in the modern record. And ancient tree-ring records show that during the last millennium, conditions have at times been even worse.

Take the year 1580, which left the narrowest growth ring — or none at all — in the California trees that University of Arizona scientist David Meko used to reconstruct a 1,000-year history of stream flow in the Sacramento River Basin, the source of much of the state's water supply.

"You see things like 1580 — hey, this can happen," said Meko, who also detected periods of low river flow that lasted decades.

"We've given away more than nature provides," said Peter Gleick, an internationally recognized water expert and president of the Pacific Institute, an Oakland-based think tank.

"I think the current drought opens the door to a real conversation about fundamental changes in California water policy," Gleick said.

He ticked off what he considers the state's spendthrift water ways: California still has too many inefficient dishwashers, toilets and washing machines. Roughly 40% of the state's farmland uses wasteful flood irrigation, in which water flows by gravity down open ditches or across fields.

The state also has too many thirsty lawns, he said. Water for most people is too cheap. Most troubling to Gleick and many other experts: California doesn't regulate the use of groundwater, putting it at odds with most other Western states.

"We've been overdrafting groundwater for years," Gleick said. "If we were smart, we would have been recharging groundwater during wet years. But we haven't been smart."

In Southern California's Coachella Valley, it's not just cities and farms that have sucked down aquifer levels, it's also a string of trophy golf courses that attract celebrities and politicians — including President Obama on his recent California visit.

Of the more than 100 verdant courses in the hot desert valley, only a score irrigate with recycled water. Most pump groundwater or use supplies imported from the Colorado River.

"So much of this is built on a certain style of golf course and a way of life which Mother Nature might be telling us is hard to sustain," said Craig Kessler, director of governmental affairs for the Southern California Golf Assn.

The valley's golfing industry aims to reduce its water consumption by at least 10% and use more recycled water and river supplies to lessen groundwater withdrawals, he wrote recently in a newspaper opinion piece.

Although urban Southern California got serious about water conservation after the 1987-92 drought, flattening demand even as the population rose by several million, other parts of the state have a way to go.

A number of towns and cities, primarily in the Central Valley, are only now installing water meters in residences — and only because they have to do so under state requirements adopted a decade ago. Also, a 2009 law calls for a 20% statewide reduction in urban per capita water use by 2020.

No similar mandates have been imposed on agriculture, which accounts for roughly three-fourths of Californians' water use.

For many farmers, the answer to the state's frequent water shortages is building more reservoirs, the relaxation of endangered species protections in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta and construction of a new delta diversion point and tunnel system that proponents say would allow the capture of more water in wet years.

Proposals for new reservoirs have been floated for years. But they remain controversial and funding is an unresolved obstacle.

Moreover, additional storage wouldn't necessarily guarantee supplies in a parched year like this, said Jeffrey Mount, a [UC Davis](#) professor emeritus of geology and senior fellow at the Public Policy Institute of California. "Who were you not going to give water to two years ago and last year so that you could plan for this year?" Mount wondered.

Laurence Sterling, operations manager of Iron Horse Ranch & Vineyards outside Sebastopol in Sonoma County, isn't waiting for a big new reservoir.

His family got a deal on the vineyard during the 1976-77 drought and printed up bumper stickers that read, "Drink Wine, Not Water."

A dozen years ago, Sterling was offered the chance to store highly treated wastewater from the nearby town of Forestville in his reservoir. He jumped at the idea.

Though some might gag at the prospect of watering Chardonnay grapes with reclaimed sewage, Sterling said the treatment is so advanced the recycled supplies are cleaner than what comes out of a nearby creek — which was bone dry last month.

"To me, it's like drought insurance," he said, gazing at a flock of ducks resting in the wastewater pond.

"The feeling used to be, 'Whatever you do, just don't talk about wastewater,'" he said. "Now, we're in-your-face about it. 'Nyah nyah, we told you so.'"

*Times staff writers Lee Romney and Rick Rojas contributed to this report.*



# Bill aims to weed out fraudulent farmers market vendors

*Assembly measure would crack down on vendors who falsely claim to offer pesticide-free or locally grown produce.*

By Marc Lifsher  
LA Times February 23, 2014

SACRAMENTO — California farmers markets want to get tough with interlopers who don't sell what they grow.

They're backing a bill to crack down on vendors who falsely claim to offer pesticide-free or locally grown fruits, nuts and vegetables.

"Californians are fortunate to have the highest concentration of farmers markets in the nation," said the bill's author, Assemblyman [Roger Dickinson](#) (D-Sacramento).

The bill, AB 1871, he said, would "increase consumer protections and accountability at our certified farmers markets, protect local farmers and help this growing sector of the economy continue to thrive."

The bill would make it a misdemeanor to make false statements about the origin and quality of agricultural products.

State-certified farmers markets have been a growth industry in the Golden State, attracting urban consumers with super-fresh produce that many cooks and diners prefer to supermarket fare. The number of farmers markets statewide has more than doubled in the last decade from about 400 to more than 800, industry officials say.

But the popularity of such markets is threatened by a small but growing incidence of fraud involving the sale of produce from wholesalers and cold-storage facilities.

"It's difficult to control," said Dan Best, general counsel for the California Federation of Certified Farmers' Markets in Sacramento. "This is an attempt to put as much integrity as we can into an enterprise."

The bill, similar to one that stalled last year, calls for a fine of up to \$2,500 and a jail sentence of up to six months for a conviction. The legislation, supporters said, has little or no opposition.

## **Drought plan**

Business leaders praised emergency drought legislation, unveiled last week by Gov. [Jerry Brown](#) and top Democratic lawmakers. But the \$687-million package, they stress, is only part of the solution to the state's water woes.

The governor's plan offers direct relief, including housing and food, to farmworkers hit by the drought. It also would provide money from voter-approved bonds for dozens of projects to capture storm water, use more recycled water, increase conservation and boost underground storage.

"It's a step in the right direction," said Gary Toebben, president of the Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce. "Acting quickly will save jobs and help save our economy."

But Toebben and others insist that much more is needed: bringing more water to farmers and cities in the San Joaquin Valley and Southern California and building reservoirs to store water from wet years.

The new facilities have "got to be a critical component for planning to alleviate future droughts," said Rob Lapsley, president of the California Business Roundtable in Sacramento.

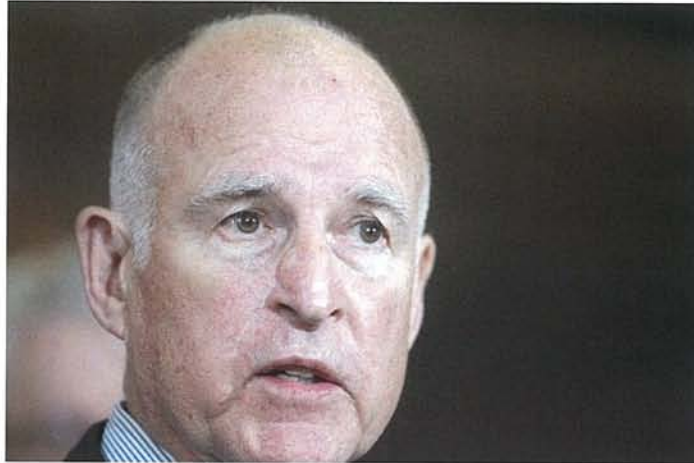
### **Heavy metal**

Want to pick up some machinery, control mechanisms or tools? [Southern California Edison](#) is having an auction at its permanently closed San Onofre nuclear power plant near San Clemente at the end of next month. [Click here for more information.](#)

But don't expect any nuclear surprises. Edison assures that nothing being sold is "associated with radiological operations."

## Brown makes the sale on water program

*Remaking the Water Action Plan as emergency drought legislation attracted the guarded support of Republicans and environmentalists.*



Gov. Jerry Brown combined elements of his water action plan with new relief aid and some water efficiency legislation to create the emergency drought bill. (Gary Friedman, Los Angeles Times / February 13, 2014)

By George Skelton Capitol Journal  
LA Times February 23, 2014

**SACRAMENTO** — If a product doesn't sell, try repackaging and renaming. That's a proven strategy, whatever you're peddling.

Good timing also helps.

Thus, when the governor's California Water Action Plan sits on a shelf unnoticed for a while — and outside it is very dry — reshape and rewrap the contents as Emergency Drought Legislation. Bingo. There's a buying frenzy.

Gov. [Jerry Brown](#) and his administration spent months, behind the scenes, crafting his Water Action Plan. On Jan. 10, he devoted significant space in his annual budget proposal to the \$619-million plan. But few legislators, interests or journalists were attracted.

Even Brown didn't appear to be moved. He didn't mention the plan at his budget news conference. And in his State of the State Address, the governor talked about it in only two sentences.

There was virtually no marketing to the public, just the usual internal gab among bureaucrats.

Then loud cries began emanating from farmers and Republicans demanding that something be done about the drought.

So Brown cleverly combined most elements of his action plan with new relief aid and some water efficiency legislation written by Senate leader [Darrell Steinberg](#) (D-Sacramento) and labeled it an emergency drought bill.

Presto: Front page news around the state. Guarded praise from farmers and environmentalists. And bipartisan political support, although Assembly Republican leader [Connie Conway](#) of Tulare quibbled about it being "just a drop in the bucket."

"You can't manufacture water," Brown said at the unwrapping last week. "You can desalinate it. You can capture it. You can store it. You can move it. Within those constraints, that's exactly what we're doing."

There should be more desalinating and storing, but give the governor credit. It was a smart move and exactly what government should be doing — what it should have been doing more of in the past and will need to do in the future: Making better use of the water we already have in a state where much of the land is arid and artificially made fertile with irrigation.

This makes more sense than mucking up a bucolic estuary by boring two 40-foot-wide, 35-mile-long tunnels under the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, Brown's intensely controversial \$25-billion replumbing project to move fresh water from one agriculture region to a more powerful one.

Some tunneling may be warranted, but a single, smaller burrowing could be sufficient and certainly would be less controversial.

In the long run, what's sorely needed in California is a reprioritizing of water use. Currently, agriculture claims 80% of the state's developed water. And 55% of exported delta water goes to two irrigation districts in the southern San Joaquin Valley.

Brown's emergency legislation is on the right track. It totals a relatively modest — "drop in the bucket" — \$687 million.

It would spend \$549 million in voter-approved but untapped water bonds to provide construction grants for shovel-ready projects. They'd build facilities for capturing storm runoff, recycling used water and recharging aquifers.

An additional \$40 million for water-efficiency projects would be generated from cap-and-trade fees on polluters. There would also be increased fines for people who illegally divert water.

The rest of the money would be drawn from the state general fund and be used for projects such as decontaminating groundwater, strengthening conservation, modernizing irrigation and clearing brush to prevent wildfires.

There would be \$46 million for emergency housing and feeding of people out of work because of the drought. Drinking water would be provided for communities about to run out.

Water recycling alone, it's estimated, could supply an additional 2 million acre-feet of water annually — equivalent to more than two Diamond Valley lakes.

One important piece of Brown's original water action plan that wasn't included in the emergency legislation is comprehensive groundwater management. It was deemed too controversial for quick passage — a lot of folks don't like government messing with their water wells — and postponed for June budget bargaining.

"Groundwater basins are the state's largest reservoir — 10 times the size of all its surface reservoirs combined," the governor's budget document noted. "Eighty percent of Californians rely, at least in part, on groundwater for their drinking water."

But, it continued, "groundwater overdraft is causing subsidence, permanent reductions in underground storage capacity, seawater intrusion, other water quality problems and environmental damage."

Absent that messy subject, the urgency legislation is expected to pass in a couple of weeks.

But when is California state government going to get serious about desalination? It is engaged in just one minor effort: a \$50-million bond program to provide grants for local desalination projects. Only \$8.7 million remain in the kitty.

There are a few projects underway, mostly in Southern California. The biggest, by far, is construction of a \$1-billion private plant in Carlsbad near San Diego. It will be the biggest desalination facility in the Western Hemisphere when it begins filtering sea water in two years.

Problem is, desalting water is expensive, uses lots of energy, spews greenhouse gases and can kill fish. Desalinized water sells for around \$2,000 an acre-foot, perhaps three to four times what dammed fresh water goes for.

But we should be aggressively moving toward cleaning up less-salty brackish water.

Desalination, groundwater cleanup, storm runoff, conservation — a lot of what Brown is proposing (minus monster tunnels) — are the waves of California's future.

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# State farmers won't get federal water

*However, a storm might be on the way*

By Scott Smith Associated Press  
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FRESNO — Without a lot more rain and snow, many California farmers caught in the state's drought can expect to receive no irrigation water this year from a vast system of rivers, canals and reservoirs interlacing the state, federal officials announced Friday.

The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation released its first out-look of the year, saying that the agency will continue to monitor rain and snow fall, but the grim levels so far prove that the state is in the throes of one of its driest periods in recorded history.

Farmers who rely on the federally run Central Valley Project received only 20 percent of their normal water allotment last year and were expecting this year's bad news. Some communities and endangered wildlife that rely on the federal water source will also suffer deep cuts.

The state's snowpack is at 29 percent of average for this time of year, which means that for farmers it's going to be a hard year.

"My gross sales are probably going to be cut in half," said Bill Diedrich, who farms 1,500 acres of almonds, tomatoes and other crops in the parched Central Valley community of Firebaugh. "Some farmers out here are going to lose everything they've got."

Gov. Jerry Brown last month declared California's drought emergency, and both state and federal officials have pledged millions of dollars to help with water conservation and food banks for those put out of work by the drought.

California officials who manage the State Water Project, the state's other major water system, have already said they won't be releasing any water for farmers, marking a first in its 54-year history.

In 2009, the dry weather caused federal authorities to announce many Central Valley farmers would receive no water, but the wet weather that followed moved that up to 10 percent. Ryan Jacobsen of the Fresno County Farm Bureau said no Fresno County farmers were spared of bad news this time, marking a sad historical first. Fresno County leads the nation in agriculture production with \$6.6 billion in annual economic activity.

There's still time for the situation to improve. By late Wednesday, the National Weather Service expects a storm to sweep through the region bringing significant showers. The weather is expected to break Thursday with rain continuing Friday and Saturday. The state needs a succession of storms dumping mountain snow, said Pete Lucero of the Bureau of Reclamation. "Rain is nice, but snow is where the money is," he said.

Gayle Holman of the Fresno-based Westlands Water District, the nation's largest supplier of water for agricultural use, said she fears farmers will be stuck with no increases to the federal water distribution. The district had been preparing farmers for Friday's announcement.

"They're all on pins and needles trying to figure out how they're going to get through this," Holman said, adding that Westland's 700 farmers will choose to leave fields unplanted, draw water from wells or pay top dollar for water that's on the market. "We would need those buckets of rain now."

Farmers are hit hardest, but they're not alone. Contractors that provide cities with water can expect to receive half of their usual amount, the Bureau said, and wildlife refuges that need water flows in rivers to protect endangered fish will receive 40 percent of their contracted supply.

Contractors that provide farmers with water and hold historic agreements giving them senior rights will receive 40 percent of their normal supplies. Some contracts date back over a century and guarantee that farmers will receive at least 75 percent of their water.

One of those is the San Joaquin River Exchange Contractors Water Authority in Los Banos that provides irrigation for 240,000 acres of farmland.

The Water Authority's executive director Steve Chedester said farmers he serves understand that the reality of California's drought means it's going to be tough to find enough water for them.

"If it's not there, it's just not there," he said.



Across the state

## MONTCLAIR

### Gas, water leaks affect hundreds

Utility crews are working to restore service to more than a thousand Montclair residents and businesses affected by concurrent water and gas leaks.

The Inland Valley Daily Bulletin says Monte Vista Water District crews responded Tuesday afternoon to a water main break in a residential neighborhood. Several hours later the crews noticed bubbles in the water and smelled the odor of natural gas. It was determined that a gas line also had ruptured.

Water service is expected to return on Saturday.

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