

NEWS CLIPS

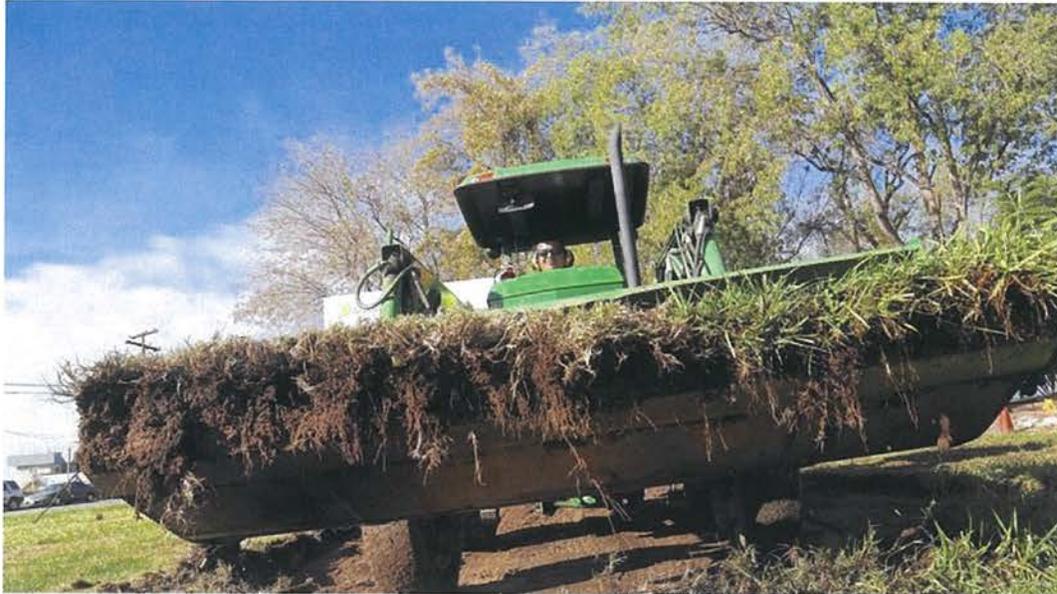
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Resource Conservation and Public Outreach

Organized by date

Southland water district ends popular lawn-removal rebate program



Ruben Hernandez removes turf to make room for a 12-foot decomposed granite pathway at the Miller Coors brewery in Irwindale. (Gary Friedman / Los Angeles Times)

LA TIMES July 10, 2015

When Gov. Jerry Brown called on drought-weary Californians to reconsider their love of thirsty, nonnative landscaping, some businesses and homeowners responded by tearing out their once-cherished lawns.

Additional motivation for swapping out grass for drought-resistant plants came in the form of cash rebates offered by local governments and water agencies.

Yet barely a month after officials at the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California approved an additional \$350 million in rebate funds, they ended the program Thursday. All of the money, they said, was spoken for.

"We didn't predict just how popular turf rebates would become," said MWD General Manager Jeffrey Kightlinger.

The news sent some local water agencies and governments scrambling for ways to keep rebates alive, if at a less generous level. Some said the development was an indication that Californians are indeed altering their behavior, as well as their landscaping preferences, in the face of severe drought.

"The timing was right for turf removal programs," said Brent Haddad, director of the Center for Integrated Water Research at UC Santa Cruz. "We're developing a new aesthetic for open space in California and moving away from the ideal of the green grasses of Kentucky."

The MWD had set aside a total of \$450 million in rebates. Of those funds, roughly \$340 million was earmarked for lawn removal and \$110 million was for rebates on drought-friendly appliances such as water-saving toilets.

MWD officials said they knew the money would eventually run out, but they never dreamed it would so quickly.

Officials say the program will help to fund the removal of up to 170 million square feet of turf, three times the statewide goal Brown set in a historic executive order that also sought to cut urban water use by 25%.

MWD directors will get an update on the program next week, "but we have no indication that they will add more money," said MWD spokeswoman Sherita Coffelt.

The earliest the board might consider boosting funding would be sometime in 2016 when officials begin planning for the 2016-17 fiscal year, she said.



Richard Delgado replaces turf in his San Fernando Valley front yard with three different colors of bark in June, although he was denied a rebate because he hadn't taken photos of his grass before it died. (Anne Cusack / Los Angeles Times)

Still, between 20% and 30% of people who apply for turf rebates don't follow through. So interested residents can get on a waiting list and still have a chance, Coffelt said.

All told, officials believe Southern California will save about 26 billion gallons of water a year, enough to serve 160,000 households annually.

Bill McDonnell, an MWD water efficiency manager, said the massive spending on the program was justified.

"It started the huge snowball down the hill," he said. "If we had done \$5 million in turf removal, you wouldn't be writing an article and it wouldn't be on NPR or the TV. Our service area is so big, that amount of impact wouldn't have been seen. We needed to do something big and something impactful to start the discussion and start the change."

The news had local water districts scrambling Thursday to maintain their rebate programs.

For the last several months, the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power has supplemented MWD's \$2-per-square-foot rebate money with up to \$1.75 of its own.

The DWP "is working quickly on a plan to continue the portion of the rebate that was funded through its own water conservation budget ... while at the same time not jeopardizing other critical water programs," a department spokeswoman said in a statement.

Long Beach, which has already converted 2 million square feet of grass to drought-tolerant landscapes, pledged to continue providing residential rebates of \$2.50 per square foot — down from the \$3.50 that had been offered with the help of MWD's funding.

In south Orange County, the board of the Santa Margarita Water District "recognized that the bank was getting emptied" and set aside \$500,000 for turf removal rebates in May, said spokesman Jonathan Volzke.

The rebate program has been "such a great awareness campaign for us," he said. "It really is a great tool for keeping the drought in front of people.... It reinforces the idea that we need to live different in California now."

Still, he added, "We probably shouldn't have printed so many brochures."

But some water suppliers that had relied solely on MWD's rebate money had to shut down their programs altogether.

The Las Virgenes Municipal Water District, which serves the affluent cities of Agoura Hills, Calabasas, Hidden Hills and Westlake Village, had to say goodbye to its popular "Mow No Mow" turf program. Officials said more than 1,000 residential customers — many with large lots — removed more than 40 acres of lawn with the help of about \$3.4 million in rebates.

"What I'm kind of sad about — we gained so much momentum, then we hit the wall, and it stopped," said Carlos Reyes, director of resource conservation and public outreach for the district. "We're hoping people will do this without the incentive."

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Got sand? Drought prompts California state beaches to shut off outdoor showers



Outdoor showers like this one at Dockweiler State Beach -- being used by Ryanh Morales, left, and his brother Dereck as their sister Sophia stands by -- will be turned off at state beaches starting July 15. (Genaro Molina / Los Angeles Times)

By **SARAH PARVINI AND LOUIS SAHAGUN**

LA TIMES JULY 10, 2015

Thousands of beachgoers will soon feel the drought's impact in the dry shower heads of dozens of state beaches.

State park officials ordered the outdoor showers at 38 state beaches, many of them in Southern California, shut off as of July 15 to conserve water during the drought.

The move is designed to save up to 18 million gallons annually. It will also remove an amenity central to one of summertime's pleasures — washing away the salt and sand under an outdoor shower, the Pacific Ocean just a few yards away. Todd Lewis, acting superintendent for California State Parks' Orange Coast district, urged beachgoers to investigate what he described as "several very clever alternatives to our outdoor rinse stations."

"They can bring along a gallon jug filled with warm tap water from home, for instance" he said.

"A fine-bristled broom is also a terrific way to remove sand from your body."

That kind of talk rankled Sara Israelsson, 22, who said she won't swim in the ocean if she doesn't have the option to shower afterward.

Wrapping her wet long brown hair in a towel after washing the salt water out of it at an outdoor shower at Santa Monica State Beach, she said with a skeptical laugh, "Bring a bottle of water? How big? A tank? That is not a good idea."

The change may not be popular, but every drop counts, said Brian Ketterer, a spokesman for the state parks.

The new restrictions will apply only to outdoor showers, not to indoor campground showers, he said.

On Thursday, beachgoers expressed mixed feelings about news that they would soon lose access to outdoor showers.

At Dockweiler State Beach, just west of Los Angeles International Airport, Justin Velasco, 18, of Santa Clarita grumbled, "Most people live far from the beach, and if they were to sit in a car covered in sand and beach grime for an hour, I think they would get upset."

“Take your shirt off and dust your feet off. We are in a drought.”

- Brithany Mcginty, Arizona resident visiting Southern California

A few miles to the north, Julianne Sheer shrugged off the state plan as "slightly inconvenient." "I know it's for the greater good; I'll take a towel and dust off my feet," she said. "It's easy to adjust, and I want to have a lot of water in life."

Brithany Mcginty, who was visiting from Arizona, agreed. "Take your shirt off and dust your feet off," she said. "We are in a drought."

So far, the department's 278 total parks have managed to meet the state's 25% water reduction mandate.

A few individual parks in Northern California, however, face additional reductions required by local water authorities.

State officials a year ago locked up the 30 public flush toilets at one of California's most popular tourist attractions after its drought-stricken well went dry: Hearst San Simeon State Park, which

features the famous castle that has come to symbolize the wealth and power of the Hearst family dynasty.

Portable chemical toilets were parked near the restrooms, which remain open on weekends "to ensure that the plumbing doesn't get all clogged up by not having flowing water running through it," said James Grennan, public safety superintendent for the department's San Luis Obispo Coast district.

Visitors weren't happy with the closure, he said, "but they understood that we're in severe drought conditions calling for drastic measures."

Separately, the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation delivered grim news to its 121,000 inmates on Thursday: To save water, the state has turned off open-air showers in prison yards.

"Yes, all showers outside of those in the housing units have been shut down as part of the statewide mandate to reduce water use by 25% due to the drought," said Dana Simas, a spokeswoman for the corrections department.

Prisoners still have access to showers on their cellblocks and can take sponge baths by the sinks in their cells, she said. Even so, lawyers for inmates have included the new restrictions in a class-action lawsuit recently filed in federal court in Oakland.

Back on Santa Monica State Beach, Billy Burk, 23, dried himself off after spending several refreshing minutes under an outdoor shower.

"The drought is a tough situation," he said.

Tom Selleck, water district reach tentative settlement in dispute



Someone has been taking huge amounts of water from a public hydrant and delivering it to actor Tom Selleck's 60-acre ranch in Westlake Village. The Times' Christy Khoshaba has the details.

By **MATT HAMILTON**

LA TIMES JULY 10, 2015

It had all the makings of a latter-day water war, pitting a Ventura County water district against actor Tom Selleck.

The Calleguas Municipal Water District accused Selleck of illegally moving water over district boundaries from Thousand Oaks to his 60-acre Hidden Valley estate, and it spent about \$22,000 on a private investigator to track the deliveries, according to a complaint filed in Ventura County Superior Court.

As California's drought ravaged water supplies and the district sent cease-and-desist letters to Selleck's addresses, the unlawful deliveries continued, the complaint said.

But the skirmish came to a halt Thursday when the water district announced that it had reached a tentative settlement with Selleck. Details are confidential pending approval by the water district's board, said Eric Bergh, Calleguas' resources manager.

The board is scheduled to consider the settlement at its meeting Wednesday.

“We're happy about it,” Bergh said. “It's good news.”

The tentative resolution caps an episode that, fueled by celebrity and the novelty of the purported misconduct, prompted fascination and still more questions: Was Selleck himself, the mustachioed “Magnum, P.I.” and “Blue Bloods” star, pulling up to a fire hydrant and plundering the city's water system? Did it not constitute a crime, such as grand theft?

According to the complaint, a water tender truck was spotted multiple times filling up at the same Thousand Oaks fire hydrant on Irving Drive, then delivering the water to Selleck's property in Hidden Valley. A delivery was first observed about Sept. 30, 2013, according to court papers. Residents say the same man -- not Selleck -- usually pulled the truck up to the hydrant about 6 a.m.

Jay Spurgin, director of public works for Thousand Oaks, said water sourced from the hydrant described in the complaint was legally purchased during the last two years.

With a \$710 check, the Thousand Oaks-based construction company Burns Pacific Construction Inc. secured a city-approved water meter on the fire hydrant in early August 2013, according to city records.

Construction companies and contractors typically obtain special meters that allow them to draw water from hydrants for large-scale projects such as controlling dust or mixing concrete, Spurgin said.

After the meter was installed, the construction company could use as much water as it needed -- even sell it to a third party -- so long as the monthly bill was paid, he said. That monthly bill included a flat \$564 fee plus \$5.32 for about each 750 gallons, a rate higher than for residential customers, he said.

“Whatever water was taken from this construction meter was paid for,” Spurgin said.

In June, the water meter was removed.

It's unclear whether Selleck, his employees or a contractor purchased the water directly from the construction company or from another source. Representatives for Selleck have not responded to several requests for comment.

A receptionist at the construction company said the company had no comment about the use of the hydrant.

The Ventura County Sheriff's Department reviewed the allegations and was unable to establish that a crime had occurred, according to a department spokesman.

The issue for Calleguas -- which provides water to smaller purveyors in Simi Valley, Moorpark and other parts of southeast Ventura County -- was the movement of water outside its territory, which is prohibited by law, Bergh said.

Selleck's ranch, which he has owned for nearly three decades, is within the boundaries of the Hidden Valley Municipal Water District, an agency that exists largely on paper and does not actually provide drinking water. The approximately 37 ranches in Hidden Valley, including Selleck's, rely on wells.

During droughts, residents sometimes look elsewhere. It's common for residents to own or rent tankers to shuttle water to their horse stables and estates. Another Hidden Valley resident also received a cease-and-desist letter and apologized to Calleguas, Bergh said.

In 2009, when the state was mired in its final year of a drought, Selleck and about five others gained permission to fill up trucks from a water hydrant in nearby Lake Sherwood, said Reddy Pakala, then the director of water and sanitation for the Ventura County Public Works Agency. That agreement lasted a few months. Pakala said it was canceled after he learned about a law that bans transferring potable water outside a district's boundaries.

But Hidden Valley faces a steep admission fee if it wants to join a water district such as Calleguas and secure a supply of state water: about \$9,000 for each acre of land, plus the cost to install a public water infrastructure, officials said. Some ranches in Hidden Valley are hundreds of acres.

To stabilize the upscale area's water supply, Calleguas rolled out a special spigot this year for Hidden Valley customers to buy recycled water, which can be used for irrigation or other outdoor needs.

The valve provides reclaimed water and does not run afoul of the law that Selleck is accused of violating, officials said. On a recent morning, a line of white tender trucks were waiting to fill up.

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The Acorn

Pool ponderance JULY 9, 2015

I received our household water budget questionnaire from the Las Virgenes Municipal Water District. I notice that it does not include any information regarding swimming pools.

No water allowances are made for those of us who have pools on our property. This means our pool top-up water must be taken from our irrigation and personal water consumption allowance.

We use a solar cover on our pool to keep evaporation down but nothing can stop evaporation completely in the heat.

While I understand water is at a premium, allowances should be made. If we don't top up our pools, it will damage the pool pump system and leave our pools open to mosquitoes, which is a huge hazard since we have West Nile virus in our area.

Pools should be included in the water allowances if horses are.

Is the LMVWD going to start an incentive rebate program aimed at pool owners emptying their swimming pools, similar to the mow no more rebate program?

Traci Craig

Agoura

The Acorn

Turf is tough July 9, 2015

In answer to all of those who question artificial turf, we had it installed in our front and back yards for over five years. It looks great, is lush and green, and there's no maintenance except for occasional cleanup of leaves.

We are more than happy and it looks better than real grass. News Bayou

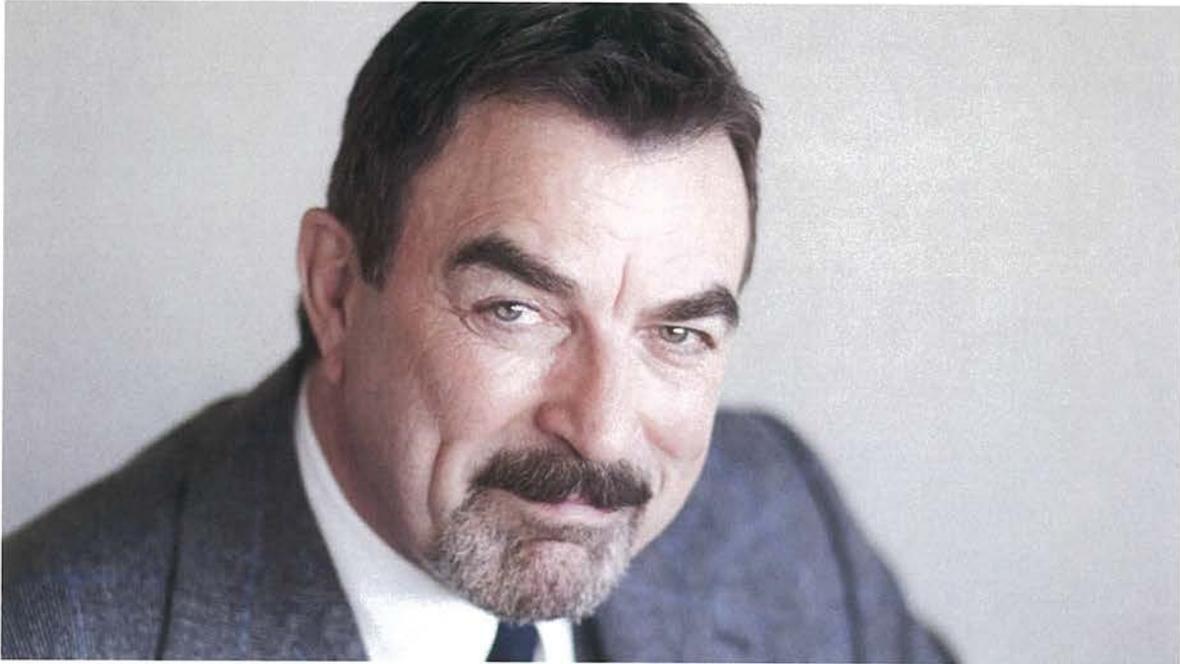
With shading from the trees, it does not generate that much heat and is even safe for our grandchildren and pets to play on.

Most installers now use sand as an infill and not rubber pellets. It never needs fertilizers and poison weed killers that cause more harm downstream.

I highly recommend artificial turf as an alternative to brown grass, plus it keeps the resale value of the neighborhood up.

Dan Murphy
Westlake Village

Did 'Magnum P.I.' star Tom Selleck steal truckloads of hydrant water? A real P.I. was on case



Actor Tom Selleck had truckloads of water delivered to his Hidden Valley home from a nearby water district, according to a complaint filed Monday in Ventura County Superior Court. (Liz O. Baylen / Los Angeles Times)

By **AMANDA COVARRUBIAS, MATT HAMILTON AND SARAH PARVINI**

LA TIMES JULY 8, 2015

The vehicle that officials say was used to pilfer water from a Ventura County water district's fire hydrant was a white water tender truck, not a red Ferrari driven by a mustachioed man in a Detroit Tigers baseball cap and a Hawaiian shirt.

But in a complaint filed by the Calleguas Municipal Water District, the utility points the finger at "Magnum, P.I." star Tom Selleck — and they say they hired a real P.I. to prove it.

As California's historic drought worsened, water from a public hydrant was delivered to Selleck's sprawling Hidden Valley ranch, according to court documents filed against the veteran actor.

On multiple occasions between 2013 and 2015, a white truck filled up at a Thousand Oaks hydrant and hauled water to Selleck's 60-acre property, according to the complaint. To document its case, the water district spent nearly \$22,000 to hire the real private investigator.

Calleguas says the "Blue Bloods" star and his wife, Jillie, who is also named in the complaint, are barred from using water from the hydrant because their property is located in a different water district, Hidden Valley Municipal Water District.

"Our 630,000 customers are ripping out their lawns, drastically cutting back on the water they use," said Eric Bergh, resources manager for the Calleguas Municipal Water District. "The water that we have secured for them, that they have paid for, should remain in district boundaries."

Representatives for Selleck have not responded to several requests for comment. The Ventura County Sheriff's Department reviewed the allegations and was unable to establish that a crime had occurred, according to a department spokesman.

Before filing the complaint, the water district tried to get Selleck to stop taking water from the hydrant. In November 2013, Calleguas sent cease-and-desist letters to both Selleck's home and an Avenue of the Stars address linked to the property, according to court papers.

As recently as March, the water truck was spotted on four days filling up at the same hydrant and delivering water to Selleck's estate, according to the complaint.

The incident highlights the fragile water supply at the enclave of Hidden Valley, whose 37 ranches are owned by celebrities and business elite. Selleck, son of the late San Fernando Valley real estate magnate Robert D. Selleck, has lived there for nearly three decades.

Hidden Valley properties are not connected to the public water supply, and the Hidden Valley Municipal Water District does not actually provide drinking water. Instead, residents rely on about 100 wells to supply their needs, according to county records.

Some wells dry up during a drought, forcing residents to look elsewhere, Bergh said. Another Hidden Valley resident also received a cease-and-desist letter and apologized to Calleguas, Bergh said.

In 2009, when the state was mired in its final year of a previous drought, Selleck and about five others gained permission to fill up trucks from a water hydrant in nearby Lake Sherwood, said Reddy Pakala, then the director of water and sanitation for the Ventura County Public Works Agency.

That special agreement lasted a few months. Pakala said it was canceled after he learned about a law that bans transferring potable water outside a district's boundaries.

To those living near the Thousand Oaks fire hydrant named in the complaint against Selleck, the sight of a truck filling up with water was common.

"It's always the same guy and truck," said Rick Kaiser, who lives down the street from the hydrant.

Anna Guzman, who has a clear view of the hydrant from her front yard, said a truck typically arrived about 6 a.m. Her daughter, Alejandra Yela, who lives with her mother, wondered why officials didn't step in sooner if water was being drawn surreptitiously.

"We're in a drought," Yela said, "and everyone's trying to save water."

Innovation or insanity? Californians' ideas for busting the drought



The idea of towing icebergs to California has been a perennial favorite among members of the public who submit drought-busting suggestions to state officials. (Barcroft Media via Getty Images)

By **CHRIS MEGERIAN**
LA TIMES

Last month, after Gov. Jerry Brown ordered Californians to cut back their water use, a retired engineering professor in Carmel revived a decades-old proposal for easing the drought: icebergs

He wrote to officials urging them to consider towing giant hunks of ice across the ocean to California, a fantastical concept that has never quite gained steam.

The suggestion was dutifully filed away in a database of drought-relief ideas sent from around the state and nation, compiled since the beginning of last year.

With the drought threatening every aspect of Californians' lives — how long they stay in the shower and what food they eat — it's not surprising that so

many have opinions on how to handle the problem. Officials have cataloged more than 170 messages containing suggestions and received untold more in emails, phone calls and public meetings.

In a sense, people are responding to a rallying cry from Brown, who has repeatedly cited the state's history on the cutting edge of new technology and saying the dry spell "will stimulate incredible innovation."

The pitches run the gamut. Would the state like to invest in biodegradable towels that don't need to be washed with water? What about covering reservoirs to prevent evaporation? Why aren't more desalination plants being built?

One person suggested a water pipeline from Alaska, an idea also offered by William Shatner. The "Star Trek" actor's proposal was more modest, reaching only to Seattle.

The suggestions are recorded and categorized, such as "water supply — solar water purifier" or "conservation idea(s) — leak detection technology." Some are forwarded to the state water board for review.

"There could be good ideas here," said Nancy Vogel, a spokeswoman for the California Natural Resources Agency. "We don't want to miss out."

What about iceberg towing?

"Well, it's entertaining," she said.

Almost none of the pitches have been successful, officials said. The state isn't in the business of investing in towels, and experts say a Shatner-esque pipeline isn't feasible. One of the more popular suggestions, desalination of ocean water, is already being pursued in San Diego, although it has not been embraced as a silver bullet because of concerns about cost and environmental effects.

The "cheapest, smartest, fastest" way to address the drought is for Californians to use less water, Felicia Marcus, chairwoman of the state water board, has said.

Still, Dave Todd, who works on drought issues at the Department of Water Resources, said the state is keeping an open-door policy for new ideas. For example, when someone reached out to discuss irrigation technology, Todd put him in touch with a laboratory at Cal State Fresno.

"They're being good citizens in trying times," Todd said. "We don't want to discourage people from thinking outside the box."

Some go way outside the box.

Todd said one man sketched out a plan for changing the weather by aiming abandoned airplane engines at the sky.

It wasn't clear exactly how that would work, Todd said. "His physics were obviously way beyond mine."

Some ideas are more grandiose.

"Is there someone with whom I can speak about a project that will be approximately the scope of the Central Water Project, and perhaps save civilization?" David Newell, a 79-year-old retired engineer who lives in Sacramento County, wrote in November. He also conceded, "I sound nuts."

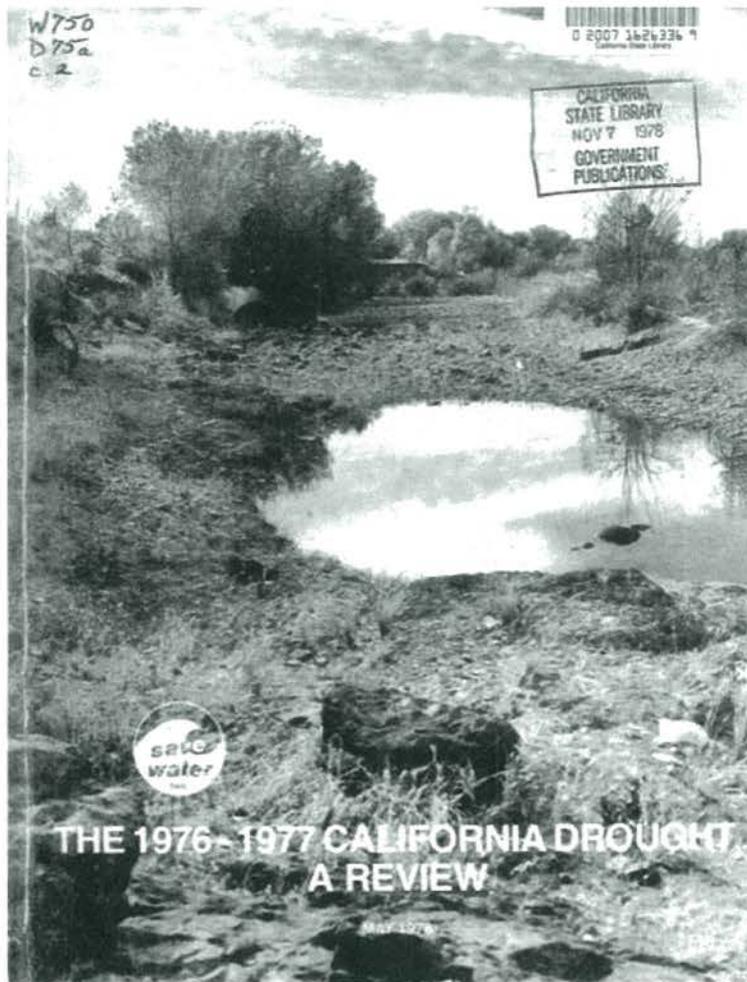
The suggestion involved "the direct air capture of CO₂ utilizing endorheic basin alkaline deposits" (essentially, pulling pollutants out of the sky in areas with high concentrations of certain minerals).

Other ideas are modest.

Ethan Rotman, who runs an education program for the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, suggested bumper stickers, to be placed on unwashed cars, "transforming them from being a visual blight to hero status."

His email last June received a form letter in response, as most of the senders do.

"It seemed like a brilliant idea to me," said Rotman, 55, of Marin County. "Maybe my marketing was wrong. Maybe it wasn't a brilliant idea. I don't know."



Read the state's 1978 report

A flood of drought-busting proposals is nothing new for California, where dry periods are a recurring phenomenon.

During a parched spell in 1976 and 1977, the state opened a Resources Evaluation Office, which responded to 4,400 letters, telegrams and postcards offering ideas. Many people wanted to complain about neighbors wasting water, [according to a 1978 state report](#).

"Writers promised to end the drought for a price, usually to be paid in advance," the report said. "A few writers stated that it rained wherever they

went for their vacations and offered to vacation in California if the state would pay their bills."

The report said hundreds of people suggested importing snow from the East Coast. The state actually calculated what it would take to use snow to make up the deficit in water supply: Every train tank car in the country would have needed to make 500 trips, for a total cost of \$437 billion.

The report concluded, "Obviously, the suggestion, although innovative, was economically infeasible to an advanced degree."

The idea is undying, especially after particularly frosty winter in the Northeast. The state's idea catalog has an entry labeled "water supply — Transport snow from East Coast via train."

As for iceberg towing, the email last month came from Allen Fuhs, who is retired from teaching at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey.

In 1977, he attended a conference on the topic at landlocked Iowa State University sponsored by a Saudi prince who was interested in new water supplies for the Middle East. The prince even footed the bill to fly a chunk of iceberg from Alaska (it cost \$7,500 — close to \$30,000 in today's dollars).

In an interview, Fuhs suggested testing the concept with a demonstration tow that would bring an iceberg from Alaska to the Bay Area.

Asked if he had heard from state officials, Fuhs, 87, said no. But "I'd sure love to have an opportunity to make a presentation."