



September 20, 2021

The California Drought Update is a weekly roundup of conditions, state actions and upcoming developments. It is produced by an interagency team that includes the California Natural Resources Agency, the California Environmental Protection Agency, the Governor's Office of Emergency Services, the California Department of Food and Agriculture, the Department of Water Resources, the Department of Fish and Wildlife, the State Water Resources Control Board and the Department of Public Health. For the latest on drought, please visit www.drought.ca.gov.

Current Conditions

- California and the West are in severe drought, with impacts accelerated by climate change.
- This is a second dry year for most of California, and conditions are on par with the state's 1976-77 drought. The next water year begins October 1, and state agencies are actively preparing for a third consecutive dry year.
- Storage in the state's major reservoirs is low, and some will reach historic lows this fall.
- Fifty of California's 58 counties are under a drought emergency proclamation.
- Californians are being asked to reduce their water use by 15 percent over 2020 levels to protect water reserves and help maintain critical flows for fish and wildlife wherever possible. That 15 percent reduction could save as much as 850,000 acre-feet of water for future use, or enough to supply more than 1.7 million households for a year.
- Several urban areas – including parts of the San Francisco Bay Area, the Sacramento area and much of Southern California – have declared water shortage alerts and are calling residents to reduce water use.
- In the last 30 days, 139 wells were reported dry through the state's [voluntary household dry well reporting system](#). Eight or more dry wells were reported in the last 30 days in Lake, Madera, Mendocino, Merced and Tehama counties.
- The Water Board and DWR are providing hauled or bottled water to eight separate small water providers experiencing supply outages in Monterey, Santa Barbara, Santa Clara, Tulare, Shasta, and El Dorado counties. The providers together serve a population of less than 1,000 people.
- State and federal water projects have slashed their surface water deliveries, with the State Water Project delivering only 5 percent of contracted amounts and the federal Central Valley Project delivering close to zero. Those cutbacks have caused some farmers to fallow acreage, or to pump additional groundwater from already depleted groundwater basins. Anecdotal reports suggest



A drone view of Lake Oroville looking from the South Fork showing extremely low water under the Enterprise Bridge earlier this summer.

cutbacks in the state's annual production of crops such as corn, cantaloupe, rice, tomatoes, and almonds.

- Extreme heat and near-record lack of precipitation are putting unprecedented stress on ecosystems and species, including iconic Chinook salmon.
- Many streams across the state are growing warm, slack, and disconnected. Fish and wildlife managers are monitoring conditions and where possible, relocating native fish and amphibian species and increasing hatchery production to compensate for losses. Some stream sections have been closed to fishing.
- The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation declared a first-ever water shortage on the Colorado River on August 16 based on record-low water levels in Lake Mead. While California will not see immediate reductions in its share of Colorado River deliveries under a 2019 drought contingency plan, Lake Mead storage is just over 9 million acre-feet, or just under 35 percent of capacity. Officials in seven states and federal agencies are fully committed to managing and adapting to the projected hydrology collaboratively.
- Through Governor Newsom's emergency proclamations, executive orders and direction, state agencies have been mobilized to rapidly respond to acute shortage conditions, including expediting assistance to communities experiencing dry wells, communities that have lost their supplies, fish and wildlife rescues and relocation efforts, and more.

Recent State Actions

Webinar on state drought relief funding (Sept. 16) – DWR and the Water Board held an informational session on the financial and technical assistance available to communities suffering hardship due to the drought. The agencies provided details on funding sources, who is eligible to receive assistance, and the types of projects that can be funded. The state budget includes millions of dollars to assist small and rural communities, urban communities and underrepresented communities, including Tribes.

Conservation discussion with water district leaders (Sept. 14) – Leaders of CNRA, CalEPA, the Water Board, and DWR met with the leaders of dozens of public water districts and private water companies to discuss water conservation measures in support of the Governor's call for voluntary reductions of 15 percent and the potential for a third consecutive dry winter.

Scott and Shasta rivers curtailment orders (Sept. 10) – Curtailment orders on groundwater and surface water diversions were sent to surface water diverters in the Scott and Shasta watersheds, and to groundwater users in the Scott River watershed due to the strong surface water-groundwater connection in that system.

Drought and water resource funding (Sept. 10) – The Legislature approved budget legislation, now awaiting the Governor's signature, that includes nearly \$5.2 billion in water-related investments, including \$815 million for drought relief and response activities.

Native frog rescue (Sept. 9) – Using an ice-cooled, aerated bucket, CDFW staff rescued an estimated 1,500 federally endangered Sierra Nevada yellow-legged frog tadpoles from rapidly drying pools on Rattlesnake Creek in Nevada County and moved them to perennial aquatic habitat in the greater Mossy Pond area.

Draft groundwater management principles and strategies released for public comment (Sept. 8) – DWR and the Water Board released for a 30-day public review a [draft](#) set of principles and strategies for groundwater management and drinking water wells. The document was called for by the Governor in his April 21 drought executive order. The document aims to outline solutions that if implemented could support groundwater-dependent communities to mitigate and plan for potential impacts of drought.

Fish and Wildlife drought relief funding (Aug. 26) – The Wildlife Conservation Board approved a \$6 million grant to CDFW to administer a block grant to reduce the negative effects of drought on fish and wildlife passage including, but not limited to, fish impediment removal, voluntary drought agreements and forbearance/land following type projects.

Local governments briefed on state drought funding (Aug. 25 and 31) – DWR and the Water Board organized joint webinars on [state emergency funding](#) for counties, local governments, and community groups that can partner with counties on drought response actions that include assessments, bottled water or hauled water and tanks, and well repairs/replacements or consolidation for state small water systems and domestic wells. More than 200 people attended the first webinar on Aug. 25.

Drought relief funding dispatched to struggling systems (Aug. 11): DWR, in coordination with the Water Board, continues to direct funding to small water systems through the Small Community Drought Relief Program. In the [first round](#) announced on Aug. 11, \$25 million was directed to [10 small water systems](#) in Tulare, Siskiyou, Shasta, Lake and Kern counties. The funds will support a range of projects including emergency water system repairs, infrastructure such as new wells and water storage tanks, and improvements to intakes and distribution systems. Additional funding will be dispatched in coming weeks.

Coho salmon relocated from Russian River hatchery (mid-August): CDFW relocated 4,000 juvenile coho salmon from the Warm Springs Fish Hatchery near Lake Sonoma in Geyserville to a conservation facility at a high school in Petaluma where they will be reared until conditions improve. The National Marine Fisheries Service and Sonoma Water assisted, and Jackson Family Wines funded the effort.



In July and August, about 4,000 juvenile Coho salmon were relocated from Warm Springs Hatchery to the conservation facility at Casa Grande High School in Petaluma where they will be reared until conditions improve.

Bay-Delta water diversion curtailments (Aug. 20) and webinar (Aug. 31): The Water Board issued curtailment orders to approximately 4,500 right holders (covering approximately 10,300 unique rights) to protect drinking water supplies, prevent salinity intrusion, and minimize impacts to fisheries and the environment. Altogether, there are 6,600 right holders in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta. The number of right holders that have been directed to cease all diversions may be adjusted throughout the

fall as water supply in the Delta fluctuates and weather conditions change. The Water Board is offering [reporting assistance to water right holders](#), including a virtual webinar held on Aug. 31.

Adjustments to curtailments (ongoing): As the irrigation season ends, the Water Board is lifting some water right curtailments. In the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, approximately 4,500 curtailments were lifted in September due to decreased demand and rice field drainage making additional water available. It is anticipated these rights will be curtailed again in October once rice field drainage is largely over. Adjustments to curtailments will be made over the coming week in lower Russian River watershed as well.

Current Water Right Curtailments

The following watersheds have water right curtailments in place. Also shown are the current number of curtailed rights or right holders (counts will change as hydrology changes) as of Sept. 16:

- **Russian River (Upper):** Approximately 1,500 rights curtailed.
- **Russian River (Lower):** Approximately 300 rights curtailed. Some curtailments lifted in September due to decreased demand as growing season ends. Curtailments updated monthly.
- **Delta:** Approximately 10,300 rights curtailed in August. Approximately 4,500 curtailments lifted in September in the Sacramento watershed due to decreased demand and rice field drainage making additional water available. It is anticipated these rights will be curtailed again in October once rice field drainage is largely over.
- **Scott and Shasta:** Curtailments issued Sept. 9, with approximately 2,300 curtailments estimated between both watersheds. A compliance assistance webinar is scheduled for Sept. 23.
- **Mill and Deer:** Draft regulations planned for adoption at the Sept. 22 Water Board meeting. Could affect approximately 23 diverters.

Tribal / Local Actions

- **Tribal governments:** Tribal emergency drought proclamations as reported by Cal OES to date: Karuk Tribe, Resighini Rancheria, Tule River Indian Tribe, Yurok Tribe, Wiyot Tribe.
- **Local government:** Local emergency drought proclamations as reported by Cal OES to date: Butte, Colusa, Fresno, Glenn, Humboldt, Lake, Marin, Mendocino, Modoc, Napa, Nevada, San Joaquin, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, Santa Clara, Siskiyou, Sonoma, Tulare, Tuolumne, Yolo.

Upcoming Decisions / Milestones

Launch of updated Save Our Water public education campaign: The statewide water conservation campaign will launch new messaging on social media and radio beginning **Sept. 20** to encourage Californians to reduce water use. The campaign is managed by DWR in partnership with local water agencies. Updated conservation tips and materials will be available at www.saveourwater.com.

Drought and water project operations update: DWR and the Bureau of Reclamation will provide an update on drought conditions, water project operations and planning for next year at the Water Board's **Sept. 21** meeting.

Mill and Deer creeks curtailment: The Water Board on **Sept. 21** may consider adoption of emergency curtailment regulations for Mill and Deer creeks, which harbor spring-run chinook salmon.

Webinar on draft drinking water well principles and strategies: DWR and the Water Board will host a public webinar **Sept. 23** on a draft set of groundwater management principles and strategies. Once finalized later this fall, the document will frame state actions to address impacts to groundwater-dependent communities as droughts become more frequent and intense. Three public listening sessions in June and a public workshop in July informed development of the document's six principles: drinking water resiliency, equity, identifying challenges, best available data, trusted relationships, and lasting solutions.

New Water Year: Water Year 2020-21 ends Sept. 30 and Water Year 2021-22 begins **Oct. 1**. The beginning of a new water year is a natural opportunity to assess conditions and adjust state actions as needed.

Key Data Points and Resources

- Daily Hydrological & Climate Information summary: <http://cdec.water.ca.gov/reportapp/javareports?name=DLYHYDRO>
- Statewide water conditions: http://cdec.water.ca.gov/water_cond.html
- Daily Reservoir Storage Summary: <https://cdec.water.ca.gov/reservoir.html>
- Water Year Forecast and Monthly Distribution: <http://cdec.water.ca.gov/reportapp/javareports?name=B120DIST>
- Monthly water supplier reports on water production and conservation: https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/conservation_portal/conservation_reporting.html
- Information on state drought actions and assistance: <https://www.drought.ca.gov>
- Conservation tips and resources for consumers: <https://saveourwater.com/>