

# Despite California drought, chances for water bond are evaporating

**Paul Rogers and Jessica Calefati, Bay Area News Group, 1-10-14**

SACRAMENTO -- Despite record dry weather, it's looking increasingly unlikely that a multibillion-dollar water bond to pay for dams, conservation and parts of Gov. Jerry Brown's \$25 billion plan to build two huge tunnels through the Delta will be placed on the November ballot.

Water agencies around the state have assumed that some kind of measure would go to voters to provide a new river of cash for water projects. But Sacramento political leaders and insiders say Brown, widely expected to seek re-election this year, hasn't committed and has worries it could hurt him politically, particularly as polls have shown shaky support for it.

Asked Thursday if he wants a water bond this year, Brown said, "The world is changing with these serious drought conditions, but I think I'll withhold judgment on that."

In 2009, lawmakers approved placing an \$11.1 billion water bond on the ballot but then pulled it in 2010 and 2012 after polls showed voters would reject it because of its high cost and criticism that it was full of pork-barrel projects. Two smaller measures, both about \$6.5 billion, are pending in the Legislature but require a two-thirds vote. A September poll by the Public Policy Institute of California found a bare majority, 50 percent, of likely voters supporting a bond that size.

"There's not going to be a water bond this year. No way," said one legislative staff member working on the issue who requested anonymity. "Brown's presenting himself to voters as the guy who just paid down California's debt. Putting more debt on the ballot when he's up for re-election would be a mixed message."

Some environmental groups say they will oppose any bond that includes funds for the Delta tunnels project, which would make it easier to move water south.

"I've heard rumblings that the governor doesn't want to deal with a water bond this year and he's been communicating that to Democratic leaders," said Senate Republican Leader Bob Huff, R-Brea. "However, I think that would be a big mistake."

The head of a top state water group said he hopes dry weather might change poll numbers -- and Brown's mind.

"Let's keep this issue open and figure out where we are in late spring," said Tim Quinn, executive director of the Association of California Water Agencies. "The drought looms large."