

# Final state water action plan outlines short, long term priorities

**Cara Hallam, Turlock Journal, 1-28-14**

With California experiencing one of the driest periods on record, the final California Water Action Plan has been released, highlighting the goals and vision for the next five years.

Spearheaded by the California Natural Resources Agency, the California Environmental Protection Agency and the California Department of Food and Agriculture, the action plan will guide state efforts to enhance water supply reliability, restore damaged and destroyed ecosystems, and improve the resilience of state infrastructure.

The recent State of Emergency Drought Declaration issued by Gov. Jerry Brown has led to collaborative efforts from state agencies throughout California as they pinpoint various ways to conserve water for the state's immediate and long-term needs.

“It is a tall order. But it is what we must do to get through this drought and prepare for the next,” said Gov. Brown during his State of the State address last week.

Within the Governor's proposed 2014-15 budget lays a solid fiscal foundation for the implementation of short-term actions for the plan, including \$618.7 million in funding for water efficiency projects, wetland and watershed restoration, groundwater programs, conservation, flood control, and integrated water management.

“As we work on emergency actions to manage through one of the driest winters on record, we are also taking proactive, long-term steps to prepare California for future droughts and flood,” said Secretary for Natural Resources John Laird. “Each decade brings improvements, but also significantly highlights what we can do better. The California Water Action Plan gives us clear focus and vision for the next five years.”

According to the report, public agencies and water organizations throughout the state agree that the current water management system is unable to satisfactorily meet both ecological and human needs, too exposed to wet and dry climate cycles and natural disasters, and inadequate to handle the additional pressures of future population growth and climate change.

Final revisions to the draft plan include an expanded section on drought response and a new effort focused on better management of Sierra Nevada headwaters that helps water storage and quality, and ecosystems. Throughout the public comment period on the draft plan, it became evident that Californians must better understand the economic and ecological harm of sustained dry weather, says the report.

Providing just under \$480 million in Proposition 84 funds to the Department of Water Resources, the Governor's proposed budget would provide funding for integrated regional water management while leveraging local and federal investment in projects that reduce demand, build supply, and offer additional benefits such as wildlife habitat and flood management. The budget also placed an immediate emphasis on water and energy use efficiency and wetlands and coastal watershed restoration to further support the resiliency of water supply and ecosystems during the ongoing drought.

Additionally, the governor's budget would allow the DWR to better monitor groundwater resources that provide more than one-third of California's supplies in dry years. The development of a state backstop for sustainable groundwater management practices by the State Water Resources Control Board would also be supported through the budget, should local efforts not come to fruition.

"Together, the Governor's proposed budget and this finalized plan provide the State with practical solutions to the state's most critical problems; the proposals on groundwater are a good example," said Cal-EPA Secretary Matt Rodriguez. "Data collection and monitoring are crucial to sustainable management of our unseen but incredible important aquifers."

Both the short and long-term actions within the plan focus on sustaining supplies of water for people, the environment, industry and agriculture. Extreme dry conditions have brought attention to the need for long-term solutions to the state's water management systems, as the ongoing drought threatens hundreds of thousands of acres of farmland, place thousands of individuals out of jobs, and potentially raise the price of food in local supermarkets.

"Our severe dry conditions are alarming for California's agricultural industry," said California Department of Food and Agriculture Secretary Karen Ross. "In the near-term, we must do all that we can to keep our fields productive. In the long term, we have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to make the investments that will allow us to stay productive in the face of a changing climate."

Key actions within the plan include making conservation a way of life in California; increasing regional self-reliance and integrated water management across all levels of government; achieve the co-equal goals for the Delta; protect and restore important ecosystems; manage and prepare for dry periods; expand water shortage capacity and improve groundwater management; provide safe water for all communities; increase flood protection; increase operational and regulatory efficiency; and identify sustainable and integrated financing opportunities.