

Gov. Brown has a long-term water plan

John Laird, Fresno Bee, 4-10-15

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For the first time in California's history, we are faced with mandatory water use restrictions. After Gov. Jerry Brown made this announcement last week, the Fresno Bee Editorial Board asked on April 3, "Where is your long-term water plan, Gov. Brown?"

In January of 2014, the governor released the California Water Action Plan — a five-year blueprint for California water infrastructure and policy. It is a long-term water plan. Not only will this plan help us manage through this drought, it will prepare us for what's next.

This is not a plan that has been hidden — it was the cornerstone of the water bond efforts last year, the basis of revised water system operations, a motivation for the groundwater management act, and the guidepost for expenditures in the governor's last two budgets.

Gov. Brown highlighted it in his last two State of the State Addresses, saying in 2014, "Right now, it is imperative that we do everything possible to mitigate the effects of the drought. ... As the State Water Action Plan lays out, water recycling, expanded storage and serious groundwater management must all be part of the mix. So too must be investments in safe drinking water, particularly in disadvantaged communities."

The plan was developed by policy experts and scientists to guide California's efforts to enhance water supply reliability, restore damaged and destroyed ecosystems, and improve the resilience of our infrastructure. Water managers, environmental advocates, agricultural interests, and others were solicited for feedback, ensuring all were heard.

Key actions are:

- Make conservation a way of life.
- Expand water storage capacity and improve groundwater management.
- Increase regional self-reliance and integrated water management across all levels of government.
- Achieve the co-equal goals for the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta of water supply reliability and ecosystem restoration.
- Protect and restore important ecosystems.
- Manage and prepare for dry periods.
- Provide safe water for all communities.
- Increase flood protection.
- Increase operational and regulatory efficiency.
- Identify sustainable and integrated financing opportunities.

The water bond's \$7.5 billion investment in California's water future responds to the plan by addressing water recycling and storm-water-capture infrastructure, desalination projects, watershed habitat renewal, and includes \$2.7 billion for new water storage.

Gov. Brown's 2015-16 budget proposes \$1.7 billion for implementation of the plan. This includes funding for safe drinking water, watershed protection and restoration, regional water reliability, water storage, water recycling, flood control and groundwater sustainability.

Last week's snowpack measurement was 6% of normal — the smallest since the measurements began. That is why Gov. Brown is now mandating 25% cutbacks for water use in cities and towns, instituting an aggressive lawn buyback program in partnership with local agencies, fast-tracking water-efficiency standards for appliances and other efforts.

In Fresno, many people are also aware of the ongoing, year-over-year impact to California's farms. This year, water deliveries to most farmers from the Central Valley Water project are 0% and the State Water Project allocation will be 20%. Additional curtailments may be on the way. The impacts are dramatic — hundreds of thousands of acres of farmland are being fallowed and 17,000 farm workers are jobless.

We are taking short-term actions and making long-range plans to ensure California can make it through this drought and manage even better through the next one.

The actions of all Californians will determine whether we meet the challenge of this drought and the California Water Action Plan will guide those efforts.