

# California Braces for Unending Drought

Ian Lovett, *New York Times*, 5-9-16

LOS ANGELES — With California entering its fifth year of a statewide drought, Gov. Jerry Brown moved on Monday to impose permanent water conservation measures and called on water suppliers to prepare for a future made drier by climate change.

Under the governor's executive order, emergency drought regulations, like bans on hosing down driveways or watering lawns within 48 hours of a rainstorm, will remain indefinitely. Urban water suppliers will be required to report their water use to the state each month and develop plans to get through long-term periods of drought.

Despite winter rains that replenished reservoirs and eased dry conditions in parts of Northern California, Mr. Brown suggested that the drought may never entirely end, and that the state needed to adapt to life with less water.

"Californians stepped up during this drought and saved more water than ever before," Mr. Brown said in a statement. "But now we know that drought is becoming a regular occurrence and water conservation must be a part of our everyday life."

Californians have reduced their water use by 23.9 percent, compared with 2013 levels, since the governor ordered a 25 percent statewide cutback last year. With rain brought on by El Niño in recent months, some water agencies have clamored for an end to rationing. One affluent San Francisco Bay Area water agency announced that it would stop publishing the names of its most egregious water wasters, while another district has warned residents that they will soon face fines again for letting lawns go brown.

Ninety percent of the state remains in drought, down from 97 percent two months ago, according to the United States Drought Monitor.

In the short term, some water suppliers may indeed get a reprieve from the state's mandate. The State Water Resources Control Board, which put emergency regulations in place during the drought, has proposed allowing each water district to develop its own conservation plans, based on what its water supplies would be if the drought continued for three more years. For example, an agency that projected a 10 percent shortfall three years out would be required to cut back water use by 10 percent. The state will review each district's plan.

Other statewide conservation measures would also be eliminated from last year's emergency rules, like restrictions on hotels and restaurants offering water to guests. A vote on the plan is scheduled for later this month.

"Conditions have changed this year. While we're certainly in a statewide drought, drought conditions have eased," said Mark Cowin, director of the California Department of Water Resources. "Some local communities have seen a great easing of their drought effects this year, and will see life return more to normal."

But, he added, "we're just one dry winter away from returning to where we were."

Felicia Marcus, chairwoman of the state's Water Resources Control Board, said the proposed regulations were part of a shift toward focusing on long-term water conservation, even during wet years, with the assumption that the state would continue to grow drier over the next century. A state law, enacted in 2009, already requires a 20 percent reduction in per capita water use, but officials are now pushing for even further conservation.

“Our emphasis is on conservation as a way of life in California,” Ms. Marcus said. “We’ve had the luxury of taking our precious water for granted in the past, but we do not anymore.”