

More water in California reservoirs, but drought persists

Dale Kasler, Sacramento Bee, 10-8-16

California's major reservoirs are holding 69 percent more water than a year ago, the U.S. government announced Friday, but regulators warned that drought conditions continue to plague the state.

In its annual inventory of water in storage, the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation said the six key reservoirs owned by the federal government's Central Valley Project held a combined 4.9 million acre-feet of water as of Oct. 1, the beginning of the "water year" that runs through next September.

That figure compared with 2.9 million acre-feet a year earlier.

However, the reservoirs were still at just 41 percent of capacity. And the 4.9 million acre-feet represented about 80 percent of the average for the past 15 years, the bureau said. An acre-foot is 326,000 gallons, or roughly a year's worth of water for a typical California household.

The bureau's figures don't include major state-owned reservoirs such as Oroville Lake.

A fairly normal winter revived Northern California reservoirs, particularly Lake Shasta. But areas south of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta experienced another dry winter. The federal government's share of San Luis Reservoir, a critical storage facility for the San Joaquin Valley, was at just 7 percent of capacity Oct. 1, slightly worse than last year.

Meanwhile, the pressure to keep water flowing to Southern California and the San Joaquin Valley, as well as furnish water for environmental needs, has drawn down some Northern California reservoirs in recent months. Folsom Lake was just 31 percent full Oct. 1 – considerably higher than last year but less than the 15-year average.

Despite improvement since last year, "we continue to face difficult circumstances as we deal with the ongoing effects of the drought," said David Murillo, the bureau's regional director, in a prepared statement. "We hope that water supply conditions improve ... but know we could be facing a sixth consecutive year of drought."