

State increases projected water delivery

Matt Weiser, Sacramento Bee, 4-1-10

State officials have increased their projected water delivery forecast for the year from 15 to 20 percent of normal, the result of a statewide snowpack that has grown towards the end of winter.

Mark Cowin, director of the California Department of Water Resources, said the allocation could grow to 40 percent next month as runoff measurements firm up. But even that would merely equal last year's allocation.

This means the drought effectively enters a fourth year for customers of the State Water Project, which includes cities and farms that depend on water pumped out of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta.

"Clearly we're going to continue to have shortages this year, and we need to continue to conserve," Cowin said.

The statewide snowpack stands at 106 percent of average for the date, but actual snowmelt runoff is expected to be below average because the parched ground will absorb more than usual.

This effect will be especially pronounced in the Feather River watershed which feeds Lake Oroville, the state's second largest reservoir and the primary storage point for the State Water Project. Runoff there is currently projected at 47 percent of normal, compared to 89 percent in the Shasta Reservoir watershed, which serves the federal Central Valley Project water system.

"The ethic of using water wisely has got to be a normal course of business and not dependent on the weather forecast," Cowin said.