

California raises water allocations to 20% after measuring snowpack

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Even with the Sierra snowpack's water content above average, the California Department of Water Resources on Thursday raised its allocation to customers of the State Water Project to only 20 percent -- for now.

In 2009, the State Water Project delivered 40 percent of customer requests. The 10-year average allocation to the 29 public agencies with long-term contracts has been 68 percent.

Those contractors deliver water to more than 25 million Californians and 750,000 acres of irrigated farmland.

"As the water picture for this year becomes clearer, we can increase our deliveries to farms and communities throughout the state," DWR director Mark Cowin said in a written statement. "But the aftermath of three years of drought and regulatory restrictions on Delta pumping to protect fish species will keep this year's allocation far below normal. This underscores, once again, the need to implement long-term solutions to improve water supply reliability."

Manual and electronic snow survey readings on Thursday indicate that statewide, snowpack water content is 106 percent of normal for the date. This time last year, the reading was 81 percent of normal for the date.

Electronic sensors show northern Sierra snow water equivalents at 126 percent of normal for the date, central Sierra at 92 percent, and southern Sierra at 105 percent.

DWR said it "may be able to increase" its allocations "as hydrologists refine runoff projections from today's snowpack readings conditions continue to develop.

DWR will make its final manual survey on May 1, while electronic readings report conditions daily.