

# Schwarzenegger signs water conservation bill in San Jose

**Paul Rodgers, Bay Area News Group, 11-11-09**

With willow trees, migrating geese and local politicians as his backdrop, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger on Tuesday visited San Jose to sign a new water conservation law that aims to reduce urban use 20 percent statewide by 2020.

Schwarzenegger signed the bill, SBX7-7, at a ceremony at the Santa Clara Valley Water District headquarters in Almaden Valley.

The bill, authored by Sen. Darrell Steinberg, D-Sacramento, is the fourth of five water measures Schwarzenegger has signed around California since the Legislature passed the package last week.

"This is something historic, not only because of its size, but because a lot of people who have always fought came together," Schwarzenegger said.

He and local leaders, including San Jose Mayor Chuck Reed and water district chief executive Beau Goldie, hailed the new law as a landmark achievement when combined with the other bills, which include an \$11 billion bond measure to build new dams and other projects that will be placed on the November 2010 ballot.

California now is the first state to set statewide targets for water conservation. The law also is expected to push cities such as Fresno and Sacramento — which still don't have water meters on all homes — to do more.

But critics note the law does not impose any fines on cities that fail to meet the 20 percent reduction.

Further, it imposes no numerical target on farmers, who use 80 percent of the water in California devoted to human use. Instead, it requires farm water districts by 2012 to measure the amount of water they deliver and set pricing based on the amount that farmers use.

Cities and farm water districts that don't follow the rules will be ineligible for state water grants and loans.

The new law also allows urban districts to measure the 20 percent by taking a 10-year average starting as far back as 1994 and comparing per-capita use then and in 2020. Because of population growth, agencies could meet the target while using more water in 2020 than today.

A version of the bill last year was tougher, but farm groups and water districts in San Bernardino and Riverside opposed it as too strict.

"We're big fans of conservation," said Jim Metropulos of the California Sierra Club. "But I don't think this will get even 10 percent savings. There are so many loopholes."

Asked why farmers were not required to meet any conservation target, Schwarzenegger said the state will for the first time start monitoring groundwater use under another law he signed, and because of that "everyone has to participate."