

dealing with drought



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As snow continues to pile up to record levels here in the Midwest, most of California is under a grueling drought emergency.

In 2013, the state experienced one of the driest years on record, and this year has remained extremely dry with no rain in sight at least through April, according to the U.S. Seasonal Drought Outlook.

Reservoir levels—typically replenished over the winter season—have plunged, ski resorts are struggling to stay open due to lack of snowfall, and *Forbes* recently reported that restaurants in the city of Santa Cruz can no longer serve drinking water unless specifically requested by the diners.

The extreme weather conditions led California Gov. Jerry Brown to declare a drought emergency, asking state agencies to use less water, and residents and businesses to cut their water usage by 20%.

Perhaps most affected by the drought are the state's farmers and agriculture. Of the 43 million acre-ft diverted from surface waters or pumped from groundwater, California's agriculture irrigates 9.6 million acres using approximately 34 million acre-ft of water, according to the California

Department of Water Resources. Recent reports said the state is already cutting deliveries from the California State Water Project to 29 urban and agricultural water suppliers, and urging state-wide conservation. The project consists of a water storage and delivery system of reservoirs, aqueducts, power plants and pumping plants providing supplemental water to approximately 25 million Californians and about 750,000 acres of irrigated farmland.

Water shortages are not new to California and will likely come up again in the near future whether due to population growth or changes in climate patterns. For as long as California continues to rely heavily on imported water and outdated infrastructure solutions like dams and water transfers, the water crisis will persist.

While striving for statewide water conservation is a good immediate step, there is a need for long-term sustainable solutions. For example, better management and enforcement of water transfers, as well as a wider use of water recycling and rainwater capture technologies can help alleviate California's water problems. Advanced water reuse technologies are available today and can serve needs beyond landscape irrigation and recharge of groundwater aquifers; there is no better time than now to sway public perception away from the "yuck factor" associated with recycled and reclaimed water.

Finally, let's not forget the vital role water plays in agriculture. Management strategies that improve water use efficiency and the implementation of environmentally friendly farming practices are key to a long-term sustainable solution. It is not a matter of a quick fix, but making long-range water supply planning a priority.



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