

2014 Water Year – A Review of the Third Year of the Drought

Summary: Experts from academia and local and state agencies will provide a summary of water year 2014. Specifically, panel members will discuss the impacts to the operation of the State Water Project; the impacts to fish, wildlife and the ecosystem; impacts to the agricultural economy; the success of water conservation and efficiency efforts, including, the State Water Resources Control Board's curtailment of water rights; how the unavailability of surface water impacted groundwater use; the success of water transfers in 2014 and what the Sacramento Region did specifically to stretch their water supplies.

Background

Over the past two years, the Council has assembled various panels to provide briefings on the current drought. During the July 2013 meeting, with California in its second dry year, the Council heard how the Department of Water Resources (DWR) and Bay Area water suppliers were preparing for a continuing drought, including plans at the state and local level to begin water conservation efforts ([July Drought Staff Report](#)).

In January of this year, as the drought intensified and water year 2014 looked to be the driest ever recorded, Governor Brown declared a drought emergency. With the state and federal reservoirs in precariously dire conditions leading into spring and summer 2014, the Council was briefed by DWR's newly appointed drought manager, other state and local water managers, and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife ([January Drought Staff Report](#), [February Drought Staff Report](#)). The message from the water managers segued from how they were planning for the drought to how they were mitigating the effects of the drought. The Council learned how one of California's (and the Sacramento region in particular) main water supply reservoirs, Folsom Lake, was approaching "dead pool", the water elevation that would be below all water supply intake or reservoir release facilities. The water managers described what kind of tools, including regulatory, were available to them to maximize existing water supplies, and how those tools would be wielded.

The Council also convened two meetings in 2013 and 2014 that focused on potential water storage solutions. At the November 2013 meeting, the Council released an issue paper on water storage recommending conducting a statewide survey of local public water agencies to determine potential locations for new or enlarged water storage projects, in addition to the prompt completion of the storage project studies began during the CALFED Bay-Delta program ([November Storage Staff Report](#)). At the April 2014 Council meeting, the Council was updated on the status of activities to implement Delta Plan recommendations regarding increased water storage ([April Storage Staff](#)

[Report](#)). The Council was briefed on two of the “big” surface water storage projects, the North-of-Delta Offstream Storage Investigation (Sites Reservoir) and the Upper San Joaquin River Basin Storage Investigation (Temperance Flat) and what would be needed to bring these projects to fruition. In addition, the Council was briefed on the results of a statewide water survey of local public water agencies to determine potential locations for new or enlarged surface and groundwater storage that built upon the Council’s storage issue paper. This survey was a coordinated effort by the California Water Commission, Association of California Water Agencies, DWR and the Council.

In February of this year, the Council heard from a panel of groundwater technical experts, groundwater policy experts and regional groundwater authorities ([February Groundwater Staff Report](#)). The panel discussed the range of current challenges, opportunities, and policy initiatives related to California’s groundwater management, particularly in California’s Central Valley.

Today’s Briefing

Today’s meeting will serve two purposes: 1) it will be a technical post-mortem of the past year’s drought management actions – the Council will learn what happened, what worked and what didn’t work; and 2) the Council will be updated on the status of some of the previous panel topics, such as groundbreaking new groundwater legislation and the success of using water transfers to increase California’s water supply reliability.

The panel members include:

- Karla Nemeth, deputy secretary for water policy at the California Natural Resources Agency will provide opening remarks, as well as participate on a panel to discuss available options if the drought continues into a fourth year.
- Charles Rabamad, Assistant Director for Recovery, Cal Office of Emergency Services will provide opening remarks addressing impacts of the drought that have required response by Cal OES and will participate on a panel to provide insight on how the continued impacts will be addressed if the drought continues into a fourth year.
- John Leahigh, a Principal Engineer with DWR’s State Water Project (SWP) - Operations Office will summarize the SWP’s operations for the year.
- Mike Chotkowski, the Field Supervisor for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s Bay-Delta Fish and Wildlife Office will summarize the impacts the drought has caused to California’s fish and wildlife.
- Dr. Dick Howitt, professor emeritus of agricultural and resource economics at U.C. Davis’ Center for Watershed Sciences will brief the Council on the drought’s impact to California’s agricultural economy.

- Eric Oppenheimer, a Director with State Water Resources Control Board's (SWRCB) Office of Research, Planning and Performance, will summarize California's successful efforts to conserve water and increase water efficiency, and the regulatory actions to protect water rights.
- Mary Scruggs, a Supervising Engineering Geologist with DWR will brief the Council on the drought's impact on groundwater use, and an overview of 2014's package of groundwater management legislation.
- Bill Croyle, DWR's drought manager has been invited to provide a summary of 2014's water transfer season, including how much water was transferred through the Delta, how the water transfer process was streamlined because of the drought, and if anything has been learned to help streamline the process further.
- Tom Gohring, the Executive Director of the Sacramento Water Forum, who last appeared before the Council to discuss the drought's potential impacts to Sacramento's water supplies, will provide an update.

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