

LA CAÑADA IRRIGATION DISTRICT

1443 Foothill Boulevard
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Lake Oroville: from Association of California Water Agencies

2008 Water Year Ends Critically Dry

The 2008 water year officially ended Sept. 30. Following a dry 2007, the 2008 water year was designated critically dry. Statewide runoff totaled just 57% of normal for the year. The state's major reservoirs are at about one-third of capacity at a time when they would typically be at about two-thirds.¹

Current Conditions²:

- In Northern California, Lakes Shasta, Oroville and Folsom are at or below 30% of capacity. Lakes San Luis and Pine Flat are at 12% of capacity. (Editor's note: It's not about saving fish, there just isn't any water.)
- The Colorado River is only at 56% and has seen the lowest 10 year flow average on record, but it is recovering.
- The seven-month period March-September 2008 was the driest on record in the Northern Sierra. Only 3.5" of rainfall was received: merely 23% of average.
- Statewide precipitation for the six-month period March-August 2008 was 31% of average; the driest of 114 years on record.
- Southern California experienced its driest year on record last year.

With all signs pointing to a third dry year for Southern California, water agencies are gearing up for more challenges and the possibility of widespread water shortages.³

1 Association of California Water Agencies, "Dealing with Drought", October 2008.

2 CA Department of Water Resources, "Water Conditions-2008 factsheet.pdf", October 2008

3 Association of California Water Agencies, "Dealing with Drought", October 2008.

Looking Ahead: A Dry 2009 Could Put California in Dire Straits

A third year of drought would have severe impacts on the state's agricultural economy. Ongoing drought would also set the stage for a potentially explosive fire season next year as the forests and landscapes become even more dry and fire-friendly. Dry conditions in 2009 and continued court-ordered restrictions on water deliveries would likely put more pressure on the state's groundwater resources, which provide about 40% of the state's water in average years.⁴

On October 30, the Department of Water Resources announced the second lowest initial allocation in the history of the State Water Project (SWP) – 15 percent for water delivery to the SWP. The lowest initial allocation figure was 10 percent back in 1993. Last year, the initial figure was 25 percent, but was increased to 35 percent as the year progressed.⁵

Rates Encourage Conservation

As drought continues its grip on California, many water agencies are moving to institute new water rate structures designed to encourage customers to use less and charge a premium for those who use more. Tiered-rate structures (La Canada Irrigation District's rates are tiered) are expected to become more and more widespread in the coming years. Even without a change in how rates are structured, monthly water bills are likely to increase over the next few years for customers from one end of the state to the other. Among the factors driving the increase are soaring energy costs, high costs associated with upgrading water delivery and treatment infrastructure, and drought-related expenses such as public education and purchasing additional water supplies.⁶

Drought Impacts on California Water Agencies

(Based on a survey prepared by the Association of California Water Agencies)

With California officially in a drought, local water agencies are dealing with challenges ranging from low runoff to court-ordered reductions in water deliveries to soaring energy costs. An informal survey conducted by ACWA shows drought conditions are having an array of impacts on local water agencies. Of about 80 water agencies that have responded to the survey so far:

- 40% have declared a water supply or drought alert.
- 70% are calling for voluntary conservation, and 13% have mandatory rationing in place.
- 25% have imposed restrictions on outdoor watering.
- 50% of agricultural agencies say they are rationing irrigation water, and 22% say farmland is being fallowed.
- 16% say crops are being abandoned.
- 39% are drawing down their water reserves / reservoir storage to meet needs this year.
- 29% say there are pumping more groundwater to offset the loss of surface water
- 44% say they have less water available for groundwater recharge this year.
- 34% say they are planning to increase water rates due to water supply shortages.
- 17% say they have drought rates / surcharges in place
- Of those not taking action now, 83% anticipate taking action in the future.

In the comments section, respondents have reported seeing farmers turn to their own wells to pump water to crops; implementing a tiered-rate structure to discourage high use; modifying will-serve letters to developers; limiting new connections to 10 per year; and implementing drought surcharges for water use exceeding 75%. Many anticipate taking more stringent action in 2009 if weather patterns continue.

2009 Winter Outlook

Prepare for the worst and hope for the best.

Officially, NOAA is predicting neutral conditions for California (neither a wetter nor drier winter). They're also not predicting a "normal" year. However, at the 2009 Winter Outlook sponsored by the California Department of Water Resources, scientists broke from NOAA's position. Most are noticing weak La Niña conditions which would bring a drier than normal winter for Southern California and normal to wetter weather for Northern California and the Colorado River Basin. Even with La Niña conditions, one scientist suggested there is possibility we may get relief from atmospheric rivers, the "Pineapple Express".

Though there is not the great news of a prediction for El Niño conditions the news is not all bad for our water supply. There is a glimmer of hope.

For Further Information

If you would like additional information on these and other water topics, please visit the following websites:

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| • Association of California Water Agencies | http://www.acwa.com |
| • CA Department of Water Resources | http://water.ca.gov |
| • California State Climatologist | http://www.water.ca.gov/floodmgmt/hafoo/csc |
| • California Urban Water Conservation Council | http://www.cuwcc.org |
| • U.S. Bureau of Reclamation Water Operations | http://www.usbr.gov/main/water |
| • U.S. Climate Prediction Center | http://www.cpc.ncep.noaa.gov |
| • U.S. Climate Change Science Program | http://climatescience.gov |
| • U.S. EPA Climate Change Page | http://epa.gov/climatechange/index.html |
| • U.S.G.S Water Watch | http://water.usgs.gov/waterwatch |
| • Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change | http://www.ipcc.ch |

4 Association of California Water Agencies, "Dealing with Drought", October 2008.

5 CA Department of Water Resources, "Water Conditions-2008 factsheet.pdf", October 2008

6 Association of California Water Agencies, "Dealing with Drought", October 2008.