

The Fourth Consecutive Dry Year in the Sacramento Valley Questions and Answers

May 6, 2015

How will the drought impact the Sacramento Valley in 2015?

The economy and ecosystem will be negatively impacted.

- The fourth consecutive year of drought has led to significant surface water cutbacks throughout the Sacramento Valley, with some areas receiving no surface water.
- Reduced water supplies result in fallow fields. Fewer crops will directly impact rural communities, our economy and the related wildlife habitat. Family farmers in the Sacramento Valley (Valley) grow a wide variety of crops on two million acres, generating \$10 billion in economic activity each year.
- Reduced water supplies mean less water for wildlife refuges and ricelands, which affect birds and the Pacific Flyway. Area rice fields supply nearly 60 percent of the food for the millions of ducks and geese that migrate through the Sacramento Valley each winter. Rice fields in the valley are recognized as providing some of the best shorebird habitat in North America. Additionally, over half of the region's wetlands (about 40,000 acres) rely on drainage water flowing through rice fields, which will now get reduced deliveries. In addition, the water for farms also benefits millions of birds along the Pacific Flyway--nearly 230 wildlife species in total.
- In areas with access to groundwater resources, more groundwater will be pumped to make up for the lack of surface water.

How will Sacramento Valley water be used this year?

In all areas of the Valley where water is available for use this year, every drop of water is stretched for multiple beneficial uses. For example, water released from the various reservoirs will serve **triple duty**:

- as cold water for salmon rearing in the upper reaches;
- to grow crops in the valley; and
- to provide significant wildlife habitat for millions of birds along the Pacific Flyway.

Additionally, a significant portion of water released for salmon would also flow south to the Delta and be available for salinity control, fisheries and other water uses under State Water Board rules.

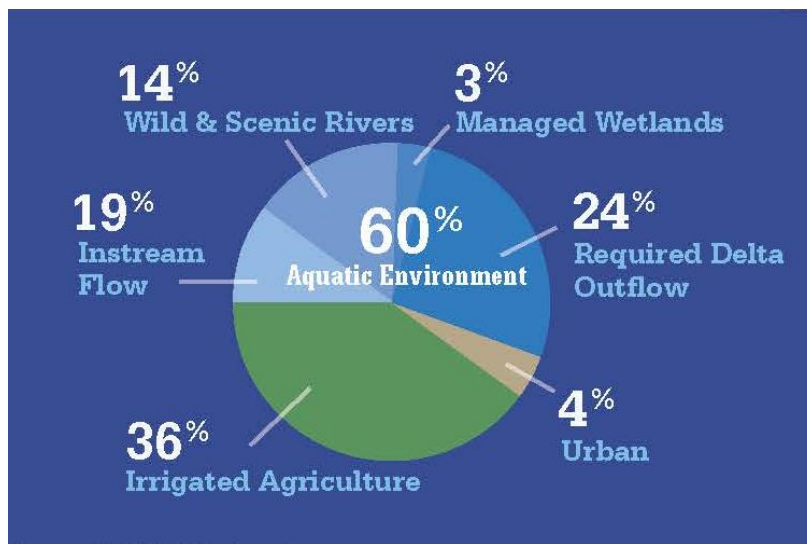
Water in the Sacramento Valley is highly valued and effectively used.

Urban water users are having their supplies reduced by 25 percent. Are other water supplies in the Sacramento Valley being reduced?

All water uses in the Sacramento Valley are reduced this year. Most water supplies for farms and ranches are reduced much more than 25 percent, with some supplies reduced by 100 percent. The National Wildlife Refuges are reduced by 25 percent and the water levels for salmon and fish are low as a result of the dry year.

How is water used in the Sacramento Valley?

The Sacramento Valley is a highly managed water system. According to the State Department of Water Resources, farmers use 36 percent of the applied water in the Sacramento River Hydrologic Region. Four percent is used by cities and the remaining 60 percent is used for aquatic environmental purposes.



Are we planning for next year if it is dry?

Yes, it is estimated that at the end of the water year (September 30, 2015) there will be 1,100,000 acre-feet of water in Lake Shasta; 1,000,000 acre-feet in Lake Oroville; and 300,000 acre-feet in Folsom Lake. As a result, the California Department of Water Resources and the federal Bureau of Reclamation have determined that these supplies are adequate for health and safety supplies--both this year and through 2016. The water resource managers in the region will continue to aggressively operate for these dry conditions until this dry spell is over and the state declares the drought is over.

What is the process that guides water supplies in the Sacramento Valley?

California's water rights system operates to provide the most efficient and effective use of this precious resource. According to the State Water Board, "The water rights system is designed to provide for the orderly allocation of water supplies in the event that there is not enough water to satisfy everyone's needs. When there is insufficient water for all, water diversions are allocated in order of water right priority."

As part of this system and the development of the state and federal water projects in the valley, there are various water right and supply contracts between the state and federal government and water suppliers in the valley that provide essential water supplies for farms, cities and wildlife refuges. Water rights and contracts are the foundation for water operations in California and provide the stability needed for the state and federal administrations to solve this crisis.

Is the Sacramento Valley dependent upon the operations of the Central Valley and State Water Projects?

Yes, areas along the Sacramento and Feather Rivers have settlement contracts with the project operators that assure water for these areas where water was served before the completion of the projects. Other areas in the valley depend upon water stored in these reservoirs. As a result, water suppliers in the valley are working closely with the project operators on their current operations plans to make sure that contracts are fully honored and the water projects are operated for multiple benefits in the valley, as described above.

Would the Sacramento Valley benefit in dry years from additional surface storage?

As an example of how additional surface storage would help during a dry year, the Department of Water Resources has analyzed that if Sites offstream reservoir was in place in 2015, it would have stored an additional 410,000 acre-feet of water this very dry water year. The water that would have filled Sites reservoir is largely from the December 2014 and the February 2015 storms. Importantly, if Sites reservoir was in operation today, total north of Delta storage this year would have increased by 900,000 acre-feet, including an additional 280,000 acre-feet in Shasta reservoir. This additional water could be used for multiple purposes: fish, farms, birds, cities, recreation and to help maintain salinity levels in the Delta.

For more information from the Department of Water Resources on the benefits Sites reservoir would provide this year, visit: [FAQS: The Drought and Sites Reservoir](#).

Are the water supplies in the valley in balance? If not, what can be done to help with the Sacramento Valley's water supplies?

This year has shown that there simply is not enough water for all beneficial purposes in the valley. Additional water storage is a necessity to avoid similar impacts during future dry years. This includes exploring increased storage at existing reservoirs during dry periods and new off-stream storage through the Sites Reservoir. (See: www.sitesjpa.net/index.php).

What are the flooded fields I see in the Sacramento Valley?

Those fields are growing rice. Ninety-seven percent of the California rice crop is grown in the Sacramento Valley. From above the fields may look like lakes, but in reality the water depth is only five inches.

There has been steady progress in getting the most out of every drop of water used to farm rice. For example, improved varieties grown in heavy clay soils combined with precision leveling of fields has made rice a much more water-efficient crop.

Will any cities or rural communities in the Sacramento Valley be without drinking water this year?

At this time it does not appear that any communities in the valley will be without drinking water. Local officials will continue to monitor groundwater throughout the region and will be prepared in the event groundwater supplies are not available.

Are water resources managers planning for future years if this year is dry?

Yes, the valley is focused on making water available this year for all the beneficial purposes described above, while making sure that there is water storage for next year if the dry spell continues.

How do water officials in the Sacramento Valley work with the rest of the state?

Water officials in the valley have partnered with state and federal agencies, conservation organizations and water suppliers in other parts of the state to creatively provide water for cities and rural communities, farms, fish, birds and recreation in the valley, while also helping provide water to other regions that are suffering serious shortages.

Where do we go for more information?

You can go to www.norcalwater.org or www.CalRice.org, or call us at (916) 442-8333 or (916) 387-2264.