

WATER

THEMES

- Assembly Republicans are fighting for water storage, infrastructure and operations that bring reliable, affordable water to families and businesses.
- Droughts are a recurring feature of California’s climate, but that does not mean water shortages and curtailments have to be.
- Water curtailments and shortages are a combined result of failing to improve upon the water infrastructure in the state and regulations that govern the flow, and pumping, of water.
- Assembly Republicans support funding repairs needed to maintain the state’s existing water infrastructure and projects that improve the amount of water the system can support.
- Infrastructure and operational changes also align with the predictions of climate scientists, who generally predict that California will not necessarily receive less rain, but will experience more precipitous (wetter) patterns with longer dry spells in between. ¹

SUMMARY.

- **California is prone to droughts.** California has the nation’s most variable climate, and droughts are a recurring feature. Very wet and very dry years are both common, while “normal” years—widely used to describe average precipitation—are rare. Yet one dry year does not constitute a drought. Water stored in the state’s reservoirs and groundwater basins protect against individual dry years. Droughts occur when two or more successive years are very dry, and reservoirs and groundwater reserves are depleted. Significant recent droughts occurred in 1976–77, 1987–92, 2007–09, and 2012–16.²
- **Recent Drought Conditions.** The year 2021 was California’s 16th driest year to date over the past 127 years. The month of November (2021) was the 21st driest November over the same period. There are currently 58 counties with USDA disaster designations regarding drought. Currently, 100 percent of California is designated as abnormally dry, with 28.3 percent being placed in the exceptional drought categories. California is prone to both wet seasons and seasons of drought. Since 2000, the longest duration of a drought lasted from December 2011 to March 2019, with severe drought from 2014 to 2017 (Drought.gov 2021).
- **California has not built any major water-storage projects since the 1970s** yet the population of the state has roughly doubled. Furthermore, significant repairs are necessary to address the existing impacts of subsidence to California’s water supply infrastructure that moves water throughout the state. Repairing and improving upon water conveyance allows for increased reliability and improves Californian’s resiliency to drought.
- **Groundwater is a critical source of water for both farms and cities**, supplying 40 percent of water in a typical year and as much as 60 percent in drought years. A 2014 law, the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act, requires local or regional agencies to develop and implement sustainable groundwater management plans. Newly created governing bodies, Groundwater Sustainable Agencies, will have the authority to measure and limit water extractions and impose fees for water management. This new law will have a major impact on communities and businesses, especially agriculture, that rely on groundwater pumping. For example, the Public Policy Institute of California put forth a study that indicated at least 500,000 acres of farmland in the San Joaquin Valley will be fallowed as a result.

¹ <https://www.ioes.ucla.edu/project/future-extreme-precipitation-california/>

² <https://www.ppic.org/publication/droughts-in-california/>

ISSUES

- **STATE IS FAILING TO IMPROVE STORAGE CAPACITY.** California has not built any major water-storage projects since the 1970s yet the population of the state has roughly doubled. Cost-effective projects that add additional water to the system should be embraced to meet the needs of Californians, but face significant permitting challenges that cause delays and sometimes require mitigation that are even at odds with each other. In 2014, voters approved proposition 1 which dedicated \$2.7 billion for investments in water storage. The state failed to quickly award projects and did not determine the funding for projects that applied for the funds until 2018 (four years later).
- **STATE IS FAILING TO MAINTAIN EXISTING INFRASTRUCTURE.** Subsidence has caused damage to both the State Water Project and Central Valley Project infrastructure. For example, parts of the Friant-Kern Canal, Delta-Mendota Canal, San Luis Canal and California Aqueduct are experiencing a 15-60% reduction of design flow capacity and at least \$15-30 million dollars per year in higher operational and power costs. This has significantly reduced California's resilience to drought and threatened the water supply for hundreds of California communities, including millions living in disadvantaged communities throughout the state
- **OPERATIONAL RULES ARE ANTIQUATED AND LIMITING.** The rules that govern water flow, pumping or dam releases often handicap the supply of water for businesses and people. The majority of people, farms and businesses in California depend on water transported through the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta. However, water is no longer exported reliably or consistently out of the Delta because of court-ordered pumping restrictions to minimize effects on Delta smelt and other species. Another example are rules or guidance that utilizes historical averages to release water to make room for storm water to prevent flooding when real-time data suggests more efficient strategies by keeping more water in the reservoir.

SOLUTIONS

Assembly Republicans understand that droughts are reoccurring part of California's climate but are fighting for improvements to ensure affordable water for communities, farms and the environment.

- **Take advantage of one time funding opportunities.** The state expects an approximate \$3.5 billion over five years to improve water infrastructure across the state and ensure clean, safe drinking water for California communities from the recently passed (federal) Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. Additionally, last year's budget included funds for water conveyance and there may be opportunities for more water related funding if next year has anticipated surplus becomes reality. Funding can be directed towards storage and water conveyance such as fixing damaged canals due to subsidence.
- **Streamline regulations that hinder, handicap or delay water projects.** An example is supporting efforts to provide the same judicial environmental review process (CEQA) for lawsuits that sports stadium have received.
- **Modernize and reform the rules that govern the flow of water** (while not interfering with water rights) that improves water availability. This includes utilizing programs such a Forecast Informed Reservoir operations that utilize real-time data and predictions to improve water operations.
- **Support local and regional agencies implementing SGMA.** Farms and communities that rely on pumping groundwater need help from the state. Assembly Republicans support improvements and assistance to mitigate the harmful impacts of SGMA on California's regional economies.

REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

- Public Policy Institute of California's [Water and the Future of the San Joaquin Valley](#) (2019).
 - Public Policy Institute of California's [Droughts in California Fact Sheet](#)
 - [California Water Commissions](#) website on Prop 1 (2014) includes data and updates on the progress, or lack thereof, of water projects funded by the proposition.
 - National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration [Drought Monitor](#)
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