



# CALIFORNIA'S WATER: A CRISIS WE CAN'T IGNORE

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## RECORD DROUGHT

Throughout California history, water has been the agent of change. The ability to store and move water has made it possible for communities to grow and farms and businesses to thrive in a state that receives little or no rain for months at a time. But, amid the many benefits our water system provides, it's easy to take water for granted and forget that California is subject to prolonged periods of drought.

### **Rain, Snowfall Can be Highly Variable**

Precipitation varies widely from year to year. Multi-year droughts have occurred throughout the state's history, as have devastating floods. In California's feast-or-famine climate, it's possible to have both floods and drought in the same year.

California's water system was developed over decades to address that variability and provide more reliable water supplies year-round. The system has worked well to date, but recent events and the effects of climate change are raising new uncertainties. Experts agree the state's infrastructure no longer has the capacity it once had to respond to extended droughts, extreme floods or other disasters.

### **2007 Driest Year on Record for Some Areas**

The 2006-'07 winter was a dry one for much of California. The Sierra snowpack was the lowest in nearly 20 years, while Southern California logged its driest year on record. The Colorado River Basin, a key source of water for Southern California, has experienced below average runoff for six of the last seven years.

The dry conditions have prompted many local water agencies to call for voluntary water conservation. An Aug. 31 court ruling further complicated the picture by reducing water deliveries by as much as one-third to protect a threatened fish species. The combined effects of the dry year and court-ordered reduction in deliveries have created the equivalent of a multi-year drought for many agencies. More stringent water use restrictions – including rationing – are likely if dry conditions continue.

Despite record rains in early 2006 that left most major reservoirs in good shape, statewide water storage is currently low and would likely not be able to meet demand during a major disruption to the state's water delivery system.

### **Governor Proclaims State of Emergency**

Governor Schwarzenegger proclaimed drought emergencies in both Kings and Riverside Counties in the summer 2007. The Fresno County Board of Supervisors requested a similar drought declaration in early October.

If drought conditions continue into 2008, many communities will be facing statewide rationing.

### **California's Drought History**

Historically, California is prone to long periods of drought. California's last major statewide drought was 1987-'92. Other significant droughts occurred during 1928-'34 and 1976-'77. In the years since precipitation has been tracked, 1977 was the single driest year of California's records. Climate change, however, is raising new uncertainties for the state's weather patterns, with longer periods of drought and other changes expected to significantly alter the state's water supply picture.

For more information, please visit [www.calwatercrisis.org](http://www.calwatercrisis.org).