

Headline: Anatomy of a drought; 2007 is a record-setting dry year

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PASADENA - Despite the weekend's rain, the city experienced its driest year since Pasadena started keeping records in 1878, officials said Monday.

"It's amazing," Pasadena Water & Power engineering manager Brad Boman said, shaking his head while looking at the bone-dry Arroyo Seco percolation ponds, which provide the city with 700 million to 800 million gallons of groundwater a year.

"After that big of a rainstorm, you'd think we would have more water," he said.

Unfortunately, what seemed like a downpour to water-starved Southern Californians on Saturday provided only 1 inch of precipitation at most in some areas, according to National Weather Service rainfall totals.

But the dry spell forms only one-third of a "triple whammy" Pasadena is facing when it comes to water shortages, Boman said. Along with the lack of rainfall, the Colorado River is in the midst of an eight- to nine-year drought, he noted.

And by late next month, a federal court judge in Fresno could finalize a ruling that would reduce pumping from the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta in order to save the threatened Delta smelt, a small endangered fish that only live in that river.

That could reduce the Metropolitan Water District's water supply by up to 30 percent, Boman said.

"This is the first time in history that I know of that all of our water resources are compromised," he added.

This year, the 15 percolation ponds in the Arroyo Seco Canyon near the Jet Propulsion Laboratory produced only 10 percent of the normal amount of groundwater. Forty percent of the city's water supply is pumped from the ground, Boman said.

For a city that uses roughly 12 billion gallons a year, its groundwater supplies are just a drop in the bucket, Boman said, adding that Pasadena might eventually have to take the sort of steps adopted by Long Beach.

Earlier this month, Long Beach imposed the region's most severe water restrictions in years, including forcing residents to cut back on watering their lawns and requiring restaurants to only serve water when customers request it.

"Come January, all the cities in Southern California may be doing what Long Beach is doing," Boman said.

In July, Pasadena Mayor Bill Bogaard called on residents to voluntarily reduce personal daily water use by 20 gallons per household. Suggestions included cutting showers by two minutes, running only full loads in the washer and dishwasher and turning off the faucet while brushing your teeth or shaving.

"We'd like to see people continue to use water wisely and voluntarily conserve water," said Bob Muir, spokesman for the Metropolitan Water District, which provides Pasadena with 60 percent of its water.

In May, the district started a \$6.3 million public awareness campaign, telling folks it is "time to get serious about water conservation," Muir said.

"And it certainly is," he added. "If we face water supply challenges in 2008, what we do today could be beneficial."

In Sierra Madre, the city imposed mandatory water restrictions last year when it faced contamination problems with its wells, said Bruce Inman, the city's director of public works.

While the problem has long been remedied, the restrictions - which include no watering of lawns between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. - remain in place due to the drought.

Most violators receive warnings, but repeat offenders face doubling and tripling of their water bills, Inman said.

"We're trying to be serious about this, but we're not trying to be the water police, either," Inman said.