



Long-term Drought: Overview of State Drought Actions

Introduction

Water Resilience Portfolio Action 26.3 tasks the State with developing strategies to protect communities and fish and wildlife in the event of drought lasting at least six years. The California Water Commission will host a panel of experts to explore the current State response to drought as part of its exploration of Action 26.3. The Commission will first hear a presentation that was rescheduled from the July 2022 panel on California droughts of the past, present, and future.

Jeanine Jones, Interstate Resources Manager and Drought Manager at Department of Water Resources (DWR), will discuss how climate change is exacerbating impacts observed in recent droughts, as compared to California's historical droughts. Past California droughts provide critical lessons learned for managing for and responding to droughts. Some of these lessons can be applied to the current drought, but the reality of climate change is forcing a larger reckoning as California prepares for the future: there is a need to reframe the conversation about drought from emergency management to transitioning water management to a more arid climate.

Laurence Sanati, Drought Coordinator at DWR, will provide an overview of key DWR activities that address both near-term drought impacts, as well as longer-term drought resiliency for California. As hotter, drier weather intensifies drought conditions across California and the West, DWR has engaged in numerous activities aimed at mitigating drought impacts to communities and the environment.

Brycen Swart, Statewide Drought Coordinator at the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) will discuss CDFW's drought response, which has been focused on: (1) terrestrial and aquatic species rescues and monitoring; (2) hatchery modernization, increasing fish production, and trucking; (3) habitat restoration, flow enhancements, and fish passage for salmon; (4) coordinated water operations and permitting; (5) improving drought resiliency on state-owned and partnership lands; (6) responding to increased human wildlife conflict and injured wildlife care; and (7) increased law enforcement.

Jessica Bean, Program Manager for Drought, Policy and Planning at the State Water Board Division of Water Rights, will describe the Water Board's drought efforts, including the Safe and Affordable Funding for Equity and Resilience (SAFER) program's emergency drinking water activities, emergency curtailments, water conservation, and work related to Governor Newsom's [Water Supply Strategy](#).

Keali'i Bright, Assistant Director at the Department of Conservation, will discuss land repurposing as a means of preparing for drought, and the connection between the Sustainable Groundwater Management ACT (SGMA), drought, and land repurposing. He will share information about the Department of Conservation's Multibenefit Land Repurposing Program and some of the projects it has funded, describing how these present a way of thinking about preparing for and responding to drought.

Panelists have been asked to address the following questions in their presentations:

- What is your Department/Agency doing to protect communities and fish and wildlife from the impacts of drought?
- What more needs to be done, particularly if the drought continues?
- How is your Department/Agency working with the others on this panel?
- How is your Department/Agency leveraging the capacity of partner organizations representing fish and wildlife and communities?

Background

On July 28, 2020, the California Natural Resources Agency, California Environmental Protection Agency, and the California Department of Food and Agriculture issued the final [Water Resilience Portfolio](#) (portfolio) in response to Governor Newsom's Executive Order N-10-19, which calls for a "set of actions to meet California water needs through the 21st century." The portfolio outlines a broad suite of actions designed to move the state toward water resilience. The portfolio includes Action 26.3: Develop strategies to protect communities and fish and wildlife in the event of drought lasting at least six years. Action 26.3 is assigned to the California Natural Resources Agency and the California Environmental Protection Agency; the State Water Resources Control Board, Department of Water Resources, Department of Fish and Wildlife, and Department of Food and Agriculture represent these agencies. Action 26.3 is embedded in a section of the portfolio that is focused on preparation for a changing climate, which includes actions designed to help regions prepare for inevitable drought.

In a letter dated December 14, 2021, the Secretaries for Natural Resources, Environmental Protection, and Food and Agriculture requested that the Commission assist with this action by educating itself about potential long-term strategies for managing sustained drought and delivering a proposed set of investments and policies that would better position the state to manage severely constrained water supplies for at least six consecutive years. The Commission proposes to accomplish this work by leading a thorough and inclusive public dialog, similar to the Commission's recent efforts to assess a state role in financing climate-resilient conveyance and in supporting locally driven, in-basin groundwater trading programs that protect natural resources, small- and medium-sized farms, and disadvantaged communities. The Commission has coordinated with other agencies and developed a [framework](#) to advance its work without disrupting immediate drought response efforts. At the end of this process, the Commission will produce a paper that describes a set of strategies to protect communities and fish and wildlife in the event of long-term drought that agency policy makers can draw on when considering future policy and financial investment.

The Commission's work on long-term drought will implement Goal One of the Strategic Plan, which calls on the Commission to "serve as a primary public forum for the discussion of improving water management policy to assist regions in achieving climate resiliency ... including those actions of the Water Resilience Portfolio assigned to the Commission."

Meeting Overview

Commissioners will hear from the panelists noted above, take questions from the public, and then engage in a discussion with the panelists. This is an informational item.

Contact

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