

Plans for \$200 million in drought relief released

By FENIT NIRAPPIL, Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — State water officials on Tuesday released plans for spending almost a third of the \$687 million emergency drought relief package approved by lawmakers earlier this year.

More than \$200 million in expedited bond funding would benefit 110 projects throughout the state, ranging from the city of Mt. Shasta to San Diego, under the draft recommendations by the state [Department of Water Resources](#). The agency plans to make final decisions by Oct. 31.

Gov. [Jerry Brown](#) declared a drought emergency in January, as vanishing snowpack and rainfall has led to farmers fallowing fields and mandatory water restrictions. The next month, the Legislature approved fast-tracked legislation, SB103 and SB104, to address the immediate effects of the three-year drought on communities while accelerating bond funding for public works projects that will better prepare agencies for future droughts.

"There's many ways we can better use the water we have," Brown said when announcing the legislation. "You can't manufacture water."

One of the projects recommended Tuesday would replace 18 miles of an [Amador Water Agency](#) canal, 50 miles southeast of Sacramento, with a pipeline to save water that is now evaporating or seeping into the ground. Another would fund three new wells serving rural communities facing water shortages in Ukiah.

All the projects will need another \$400 million from local and federal sources to be completed. The water department has another \$250 million available from the drought relief package to distribute more awards to projects next spring.

Already this year, various state agencies have spent or committed an additional \$100 million to address more immediate drought problems under the emergency legislation.

For example, more than 100,000 households received boxes from food banks while 2,000 farm workers received help to pay the rent, according to the Department of [Social Services](#) and the [Department of Housing and Community Development](#).

The package also has funded work for young people through the California Conservation Corps. The agency says it has used money to pay for programs to clear brush and other wildfire hazards across the state, including at Silverwood Lake in the San Bernardino Mountains of Southern California and Mount Tamalpais in Marin County.

Other pots of money made available for the drought have yet to be tapped. The [California Department of Food and Agriculture](#) received \$10 million to fund water efficiency programs in farms but has yet to announce recipients.

State officials also plan to buy a turbine for a hydroelectric dam near Oroville that will generate more power using less water. That involves \$10 million redirected from the state fund collecting fees from polluters to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Brown signed an executive order last week to buy drinking water for residents whose wells have gone dry, though no dollar amount has been attached. He and legislative leaders have also placed a bond measure on the November ballot to authorize \$7.5 billion in borrowing for long-term water supply and conservation projects.

