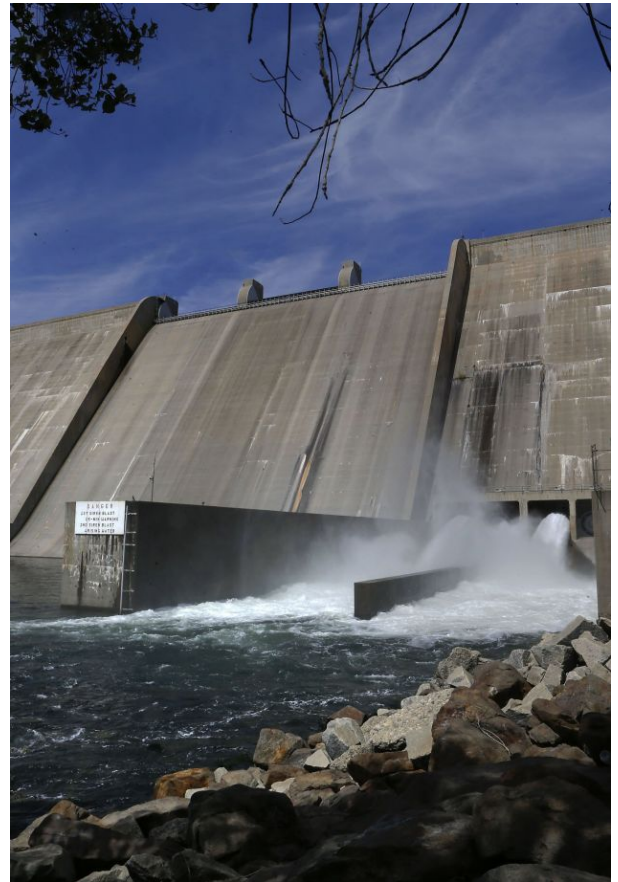


State Water Project expects scant deliveries next year

By Kurtis Alexander

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Photo: Michael Macor, The Chronicle

Image 1 of 3

Friant Dam releases water into the San Joaquin River as seen on Friday July 25, 2014, near Firebaugh, Calif. The San Joaquin River Exchange Contractors receive a huge percentage of the water exported from the Bay-Delta by the State Water Project and the federal Central Valley Project based on a sweetheart deal made by the Bureau of Reclamation in exchange for building the Friant Dam in 1940.

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Image 2 of 3

Larry Freeman the water master for the San Joaquin River Exchange Contractors Water Authority walks across a dam at the Mendota Poll a meeting of the San Joaquin River and North Fork Kings River water that will flow into the fields near Firebaugh, Calif., as seen on Friday July 25, 2014. The San Joaquin River Exchange Contractors receive a huge percentage of the water exported from the Bay-Delta by the State Water Project and the federal Central Valley Project based on a sweetheart deal made by the Bureau of Reclamation in exchange for building the Friant Dam in 1940.

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The State Water Project, which carries runoff from the mountains of Northern California to much of the state, expects to limit annual water deliveries to 10 percent of what is requested in the coming year due to the prolonged drought.

The cutback announced Monday, while not unexpected, is another reminder of California's precarious water situation and is a blow to both urban water departments and rural irrigation districts that received 5 percent of what they wanted last year — the lowest amount ever doled out by the state.

Though next year's projected allocation is slightly larger, it will force the 29 contracting agencies, serving nearly two-thirds of California residents and 750,000 acres of farmland, to look elsewhere for water and to push conservation.

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The Zone 7 Water Agency in the Tri-Valley area of the East Bay, which gets 80 percent of its supply from the State Water Project, has recently pumped more groundwater while cutting deliveries to Livermore, Pleasanton, Dublin and San Ramon. Those communities have been forced into rationing water.

"Our customers are amazing. They've proven that they could reduce their water use by 25 percent," said [Sue Stephenson](#), a spokeswoman for the [Dublin San Ramon Services District](#).

However, another year of relying on groundwater, Stephenson said, may not be healthy for the area's aquifer — the equivalent of dipping deep into a savings account.

"It's not a good situation to be in," she said.

Next year will be the fourth straight in which water agencies see significantly less water than they contracted for with the state. Before this year's 5 percent allocation, agencies received 35 percent in 2013 and 65 percent in 2012. The allocation announced this week is preliminary, and state officials hope snow and rain this winter will allow them to bump up deliveries.

The state water comes from 34 lakes, reservoirs and storage facilities and is piped via aqueduct across the state, from the Bay Area to Southern California. About 70 percent goes to urban users and 30 percent to agriculture.

The project's largest water source is Lake Oroville, which is currently at 26 percent capacity — just 43 percent of average for this time of year.

California's other big water project, run by the federal government, has not yet projected how much water it will deliver next year. The Central Valley Project similarly slashed allocations this year, forcing customers to use alternative sources like groundwater.

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