

Earth Log: February is flowering like spring — just don't turn on your sprinklers

By
MarkGrossi



Water conservation representatives for Fresno keep an eye out for landscape watering in violation of city rules.

ERIC PAUL ZAMORA — The Fresno Bee [Buy Photo](#)

There's a reason why mid-February in Fresno feels more like early [April](#) — these temperatures should be happening six weeks from now. I just hope you don't start watering your lawn like it's April.

Indulge me. I want to persuade you to hold off on landscape watering in this dry time even though your lawn is turning green. The groundwater table is likely to take another huge hit this year, and it's better if you don't turn on the sprinklers a lot.

Let me set it up for you. Unless things change a lot in the next six weeks, this winter will be the fourth below-average wet season in a row for California. But it's more than a four-year drought. It's more about the intensity of the driest years.

You may remember the ugly six-year dry time from the late 1980s and early 1990s. Not one of those years was as bad as last year or this winter. The 1976-77 drought was closer to being comparable, but it was only one season.

This is the second year in a row like this. I don't remember [back-to-back dry winters](#) this bad.

But here's the kicker: We're really talking about three consecutive winters, not two.

In 2012-13, Fresno had only 5.67 inches, which is the eighth-driest year on record for the city. Last year was the second-driest on record.

If the winter doesn't pick up soon, this would be the third consecutive winter that lands among [the 10 driest in Fresno](#).

There's a lot more to obsess about when you look east to the Sierra. There are eight ski resorts closed, and not many snow-capped peaks in that [gorgeous web cam view](#) of Half Dome.

If you look at the [snow-water content in the Sierra snowpack](#), you'll see it's about 5 inches. Six weeks from now, it would have to be 29 inches to be considered average.

Runoff from the snowpack helps replenish the underground water for city wells. The runoff this year looks pretty puny so far.

Back to the flat lands. The National Weather Service's [precipitation forecast](#) does not look promising. I'm already thinking of March.

I generally don't depend a lot on forecasts that go out more than two weeks. I'm looking back at the last few years of March in Fresno, knowing they mean nothing for this year but wishing I could get a clue about this March.

The city's March rain total was less than three-quarters of an inch in each of the last two years. But Fresno got 2.43 inches in March 2012 and 3.46 inches in March 2011.

I like to think about the miracle March in 1991 when the city got 7.24 inches of rain. If you're going to wish, wish big.

At the same time, if storms don't arrive in the next few weeks, I hope you go easy on the outdoor watering for now.

Contact Mark Grossi: mgrossi@fresnobee.com, (559) 441-6316 or [@markgrossi](#) on Twitter.