

Gov. Brown's \$1 billion plan 'a start,' but more needed for drought-related expenses

By Marc Benjamin



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- *Supervisors back water restrictions for five communities.*
- *Drought emergency has to be reaffirmed every 30 days by supervisors.*
- *About 400 customers are affected by county-imposed water restrictions.*

Fresno County Board of Supervisors declared a drought emergency Tuesday so it can obtain state and federal government reimbursement for local drought emergency costs.

Supervisors approved the declaration 4-0. Supervisor Buddy Mendes was absent. The board also supported water restrictions in five unincorporated areas with about 400 customers.

Gov. Jerry Brown has declared a statewide drought emergency and proposed using \$1 billion to pay for drought-related issues.

"It's not as much as what's needed, but it's a start," said Supervisor Brian Pacheco, who introduced the drought declaration along with Supervisor Henry R. Perea.

Supervisor Andreas Borgeas said the drought declaration sends “a strong message to Sacramento.”

Perea said the message is similarly strong to residents.

“We know we are in dire straits,” he said. “We are in the fourth year of a drought and we know more are coming. The message is self help, a message to all the residents of Fresno County to accelerate all of our efforts in conserving water.”

Supervisor Debbie Poochigian said she agreed with much of the governor’s proposal.

Supervisors must renew the proclamation every 30 days.

The board of supervisors also approved water restrictions for Cantua Creek, O’Neills Farming Community, El Porvenir in western Fresno County and Shaver Springs. All of the communities will go to stage four restrictions and all have water contamination issues. Shaver Springs was supposed to go to stage three, but a neighboring property owner who had been selling water to the community said last week he was going to stop selling water, which means the water works district is closer to losing its supplies.

County officials say the four communities already are taking action as if they are in stage four. Cantua Creek, O’Neills Farming Community and El Porvenir are operating under restrictions set out by Westlands Water District, which sells surface water to Fresno County, which then sells it to the community districts.

In stage four, residents could be fined if they use water for prohibited purposes, such as watering lawns or washing vehicles.

Larry Paquette, an advisory committee member for Shaver Springs’ 70-customer waterworks district, said the county has money to repair a damaged well that could help supplement the community’s supply. Paquette said the well won’t produce a lot of water, but it will help.

“They are projecting that we could be out of water by June,” Paquette said. “Everyone here is pretty cognizant of what’s going on.”

County documents show that the well will produce between 1 gallon and 1.5 gallons per minute, said John Thompson, the county’s resource director.

He said going to stage four will also allow the district to become eligible for state financial assistance to fix the damaged well and truck water to the community. In all, 400 customers are affected among the five districts and county service area.

The Beran Way area southwest of Fresno gets water from the city, which has stage two water restrictions in place, limiting outdoor watering to twice a week. Weaver said the county will follow the city’s rules since the city provides the water.

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