

## Valley cities in the bull's eye for water cutback rule

By  
MarkGrossi



The rocky banks of Pine Flat Lake remain high above the water line. The drought has hit hard in Central California reservoirs.

CRAIG KOHLRUSS — THE FRESNO BEE [Buy Photo](#)

Look closely at [the first-ever order](#) for mandatory water cutbacks in California. Just beyond the nine paragraphs that start with “where as,” you find something San Joaquin Valley residents should notice about the 25% reduction in water use.

It says the state is going to be toughest on those who use more water.

That means if you're in a coastal city where usage is dozens of gallons per person each day, your orders are not likely to be as onerous as they will be for others. However, if you're in a place where the usage is hundreds of gallons per person each day, the state is going to demand more.

That seems pointed at the Valley and other places like it. So, exactly what will this cutback look like in places such Fresno, Clovis, Modesto, Visalia and Bakersfield this summer?

State authorities are going to work on that answer this month. Don't expect official marching orders until May. Even then, the rules will be pointed at cities, not individuals. The cities will be letting us know how it will play out.

If you hadn't guessed already, this reaction to the drought crisis is complex and fast-moving. There is much room for misunderstanding.

Gov. Jerry Brown last week set it in motion by issuing the historic mandate. He used the April 1 snow measurement as a platform to announce it. The snowpack is the smallest on record in the Sierra Nevada. Actually, it's virtually gone. So the drought alarm is spreading faster this year than last.

I already have been receiving calls and emails from people venting about water-wasting neighbors, farmers planting new orchards or oil companies injecting large amounts of water into the ground for fracking. One reader asked me how much water is used in setting up recreational "mud runs," in which runners must work their way through mud as part of a race.

In the coming months, I probably will mention some of these comments, along with tips people are passing along to me about saving water.

As always, I will try to share tidbits that either don't get reported or need repeating.

For instance, on a phone call with state authorities last week, I heard other nuances about the mandatory restrictions. Felicia Marcus, chairwoman of the State Water Resources Control Board, the arbiter of water rights in California, was speaking at the time.

"We want to encourage people to save trees, but not unduly water lawns," she said, "because trees are important from a climate change perspective.

"Similarly, there is a provision to prohibit new home and building irrigation with potable water not delivered by drip or microspray."

More locally, I had a conversation last week with Fresno Public Utilities Director Thomas Esqueda, who said thousands of residents would get an interesting postcard in the mail soon. It's a gentle nudge, telling them they are illegally watering on Mondays, Thursdays and Fridays — all of which are "no-watering" days in Fresno. For Thursdays alone, there will be 26,000 postcards.

"We're trying to make people aware," he said. "Check your timer clock. Make sure you don't water on those days."

Eventually, if folks don't shut off the water on those days, they would see a \$45 fine on their monthly bill.

Later this summer, if the state pushes hard enough on Fresno, the next stage of water reductions could involve only one watering day per week, instead of two. Stay tuned.

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