

California Senate Democrats call out Jerry Brown over water

By FENIT NIRAPPIL

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — California's Democratic senators have called out Gov. Jerry Brown over water spending, saying that in the face of the relentless drought the state should approve funds for recycling and saving water more quickly.

In a joint letter released Thursday, the senators urged the Brown administration to get projects started in months instead of years.

California is in its fourth year of drought, and the Sierra Nevada snowpack that supplies a third of the state's water is nearly depleted.

Climate change means such droughts "are likely to become much more the norm rather than the extreme," the letter stated. "We must respond by aggressively developing and implementing policies that will make California more drought and climate resilient in the future."

The problem isn't a lack of money, it's a matter of using existing funds wisely, the senators wrote.

Voters in November approved a \$7.5 billion bond measure for water infrastructure, habitat restoration and storage projects. Lawmakers also have authorized more than \$1.7 billion in emergency water spending over the last two years.

Brown's administration decides how to spend that money, and the senators are urging his deputies to act more quickly.

The governor acknowledged that projects can be slow to materialize. "Getting things done is different than talking about getting things done," Brown said.

The senators also called for a water czar to coordinate drought relief efforts among multiple agencies.

They also said the agriculture industry should do more to conserve, though Brown has defended shielding farmers from additional cuts. The senators recommend incentives for planting fewer water-guzzling crops and installing more efficient irrigation systems.

The letter comes after Brown this week called for legislation beefing up enforcement of water restrictions, including \$10,000 fines for the worst water wasters.

Senate President Pro Tem Kevin de Leon, D-Los Angeles, has not commented on that legislation, and the letter does not address that proposal.

Associated Press Writer Janie Har in Oakland also contributed to this report.