

Proposed state budget allocates \$2.2 billion for drought response

By Matt
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As Californians prepare to confront the coming hot, dry summer months, Gov. Jerry Brown proposed more than \$2 billion in additional drought funding Thursday as part of his revised state budget.

8

The surge in funding comes mostly from Proposition 1, a \$7.5-billion bond measure for water projects approved last year by voters. Under Brown's proposal, the money would be spent on water conservation, emergency response and programs aimed at protecting and expanding local water supplies.

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About \$1.7 billion in Proposition 1 money will be available over the next three years to fund programs aimed at cleaning up contaminated groundwater, recycling water, treating waste water and other projects. Department of Water Resources Director Mark Cowin said he could not provide a specific estimate on how much of that funding would be spent in the first 12 months.

9

"We've asked for the three-year appropriation with the motivation to move as much money as quickly as we can," Cowin said in a conference call with reporters. "One of the real challenges in moving money is having local agencies have the time to prepare quality proposals."

The budget also provides \$27 million to replace lawns in the state's under-served communities and several million more for appliance rebates.

Although "there's no silver bullet," Cowin said he "expects a lot of interest" in the turf rebate program, which "will result some real savings in this year." He said officials are likely to use a non-governmental organization to administer the statewide program.

"We hope to make a dent not only in this year's drought, but to change behaviors," Cowin said.

About \$1.4 million has also been allocated to the State Water Resources Control Board to increase enforcement of the state's water-use restrictions. In April, Brown issued an executive order mandating a statewide 25% cut in water usage and the short-staffed water board had to scramble to draw up a plan to meet the mandate.

Water board Executive Director Thomas Howard said the funding would pay for about eight additional staff members -- some whom can work with local agencies on conservation and others who can make sense of the influx of water-use data now being reported to the state.

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