

# Poll: Large majority of Californians support water restrictions amid drought

By David Siders  
dsiders@sacbee.com

Nearly two-thirds of Californians support mandatory water restrictions ordered by Gov. Jerry Brown amid the state's historic drought, though many fear it will be hard to cut back and think farmers can do more to conserve, according to a new Field Poll.

The poll, released Tuesday, offers Field's first measure of public opinion about the drought since Brown ordered a 25 percent reduction in urban water use last month.

Sixty-five percent of adults favor the order, with little variation in opinion between Northern and Southern California.

The finding is significant in a state accustomed to regional tensions over water, which have become more subtle in the current drought.

"What's striking is there's very little regionality to it," said Mark DiCamillo, director of the poll. "People are kind of in this together."

The poll comes as California suffers through a fourth year of drought. Two-thirds of Californians rate the current water shortage as "extremely serious," while nearly nine in 10 residents say conditions are at least somewhat serious.

The level of anxiety is higher than during a severe drought in 1977, when 51 percent of adults described conditions as "extremely serious."

This year, DiCamillo said, residents "definitely see the urgency of the situation ... People are looking at the (snowpack), and there's not much snow. They get it."

Majorities of adults in every area of the state, in every income group and of every political persuasion favor Brown's order, though Democrats favor the measure by a wider margin than Republicans.

"The reason I know the drought's gotten really bad is whenever I go fishing with my uncle, half the spots we go ... it's all dried up," said Nigel Robinson, a poll respondent from Rancho Cordova.

The 18-year-old said he is taking shorter showers and has given up a luxury: "I haven't taken a bath since I heard about the drought."

44 percent of California homeowners say it will be somewhat or very difficult to curb their water use

While Californians endorse urban water restrictions, 57 percent of adults say the state's agriculture industry could reduce the amount of water it uses by changing crops and using water more efficiently.

Just 26 percent of adults say farmers could not change crops and use water more efficiently without creating real hardship, according to the poll.

The view of agriculture's water use is similar to a poll of registered voters last year, suggesting recent criticism of the industry – including a dispute over the value of almonds – has had little effect on public opinion.

Agriculture, which accounts for roughly 80 percent of all water used by people in California, has been hard hit by the drought, with reduced water deliveries forcing farmers to fallow thousands of acres of fields.

Still, DiCamillo said public pressure on farmers is likely to persist “if things don’t improve and ag isn’t seen as doing much.”

In urban areas, the effectiveness of efforts to conserve water in the past year have varied widely, generally falling short of expectations. The poll suggests one reason is that many people find conserving hard.

While 47 percent of homeowners say it will be at least somewhat easy to reduce water consumption, 44 percent say it will be somewhat or very difficult. Wealthier homeowners are more likely than poorer ones to say it will be hard, according to the poll.

Homeowners of all income levels appear sensitive to water pricing, with 70 percent saying it would be a somewhat or very serious problem if their water district raised their water bill by 15 percent or 25 percent, according to the poll.

Bruce Evans, a poll respondent from California City in Kern County, said he has already strained to conserve water and that he cannot afford to do more.

“I flush as seldom as possible, I shower every two or three days,” the 65-year-old said. “I’m at the edge now.”

Evans, who said the state should negotiate with some other, wetter state to bring in water, is among the minority of Californians who disagree with Brown’s water reduction order.

His opinion is partly for reasons related to conservation, he said, and partly because of the politician issuing the order

“I oppose Jerry Brown,” he said, “in every way, shape or form.”

David Siders: [\(916\) 321-1215](tel:(916)321-1215), [@davidsiders](https://twitter.com/davidsiders)