

## Gov. Brown says 'spaceship Earth' approach will see California through drought

Even as the state struggles through an epic water crisis, Gov. Jerry Brown assured residents Tuesday that technology, adaptation and “a more elegant” way of living would ultimately preserve the California dream for generations to come.

In a broad-ranging conversation that touched on the “existential threat” posed by man-made global warming, as well as the arcane laws delineating state water rights, Brown said Californians must learn to live more frugally when it comes to their most precious resource.

If they did so, the state would not only support its current population of 39 million, but probably could accept at least 10 million more residents, he said.

[Gov. Brown says fixing delta water system important for entire state](#)

“We are altering this planet with this incredible power of science, technology and economic advance,” Brown said. “If California is going to have 50 million people, they’re not going to live the same way the native people lived, much less the way people do today.... You have to find a more elegant way of relating to material things. You have to use them with greater sensitivity and sophistication.”

Brown offered his views of the drought during a discussion with Austin Beutner, publisher and chief executive of the Los Angeles Times and the San Diego Union-Tribune.

The talk, held at USC, kicked off The California Conversation, a new event series from the Los Angeles Times that will focus on a range of topics including politics, technology and entertainment.

As the state struggles to meet a mandatory 25% reduction in urban water use, Brown said that technology and engineering would provide long-term solutions, such as containing and capturing stormwater runoff and recycling water numerous times.

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“The metaphor is spaceship Earth,” Brown said. “In a spaceship you reuse everything. Well, we’re in space and we have to find a way to reuse, and with enough science and enough funding we’ll get it done.”

However, there would be an economic cost to this much-needed planning and engineering.

“A lot of heavy lifting will be done by local water districts, and that will show up in your water bill,” Brown said.

Since April 1, when Brown stood in a barren field that normally would have been covered in snow and ordered cities and towns to restrict water use, many have grumbled that agriculture has not been asked to make the same sacrifices. On Tuesday evening, Beutner pressed the governor on that point.

Why, Beutner asked, should alfalfa grown in California with state water be exported to China?

“It’s a bit complicated for any glib answer,” Brown said. “People talk about how much water almonds take, or walnuts, or alfalfa.... Is part of the drought strategy to reduce meat consumption? If you’re growing almonds and putting them on the export market, you’re bringing capital and revenue into California, and that’s a good thing.”

Pressed again, Brown offered a more philosophical view.

“Some people call water a right. Some people call water the essence of life,” Brown said. “Water is more than H<sub>2</sub>O. Water’s a baptism, water’s a poetry, water has an iconic role in human history and human existence, so how we play with water, it’s not like a widget.”

However, Brown returned to a more grounded view of the world when he made an impassioned plea for his \$25-billion Bay Delta Conservation Plan, much as he did when he visited the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California earlier in the day.

The plan involves the construction of two tunnels to convey water to Southern California, as well as the reconstruction of the levees in the delta where the Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers meet.

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The proposal, Brown said, was the result of more than 1 million hours of work, and “the best that human beings, employing the best science possible, can come up with.”

The plan has been heavily criticized by environmental groups, but Brown said that failing to reconstruct aging levees would assure a future water crisis if they were breached.

“What’s there is a very vulnerable system based on hundred-year-old levees made out of dirt that can collapse, or can suffer onslaught of a torrent of salt water from the bay,” Brown told the MWD board of directors.

“If those break through, because of a storm, extreme water events, rising sea level or earthquake, then that delta conveyance will be full of salt water and not fresh water and that is something affects Los Angeles, it affects farmers ... it affects all of Southern California ... and it affects Silicon Valley.”

In both appearances, Brown stressed that while droughts were a natural occurrence in California, global warming has amplified the problem. Droughts are becoming worse, as are other severe weather events.

“The heat-trapping gases that our society generates are creating alterations in the fundamentals of our whole atmosphere,” Brown said. “We may have already passed a tipping point.”

Noting that car-loving Californians collectively drive 332 billion miles each year, Brown said the state was taking bold steps to cut greenhouse gas emissions by planning to cut oil use 50% over the next 15 years.

“That’s a very bold move, but it’s what we need if we’re going to reduce greenhouse gases,” Brown said. “The problem is, Californians can’t do it alone. We’re 1% of the climate pollution in the world.”

Also on Tuesday, the State Water Resources Control Board proposed an emergency regulation that would impose tough new water restrictions on some 13,000 property owners along the Russian River and its tributaries.

The proposed restrictions would affect roughly 113 square miles in and around Sonoma County and are aimed at protecting Central California Coast coho salmon and steelhead. Both types of fish are listed as endangered or threatened by federal or state agencies, and severe drought conditions are causing their numbers to decline even further because of low oxygen levels, high water temperatures and stranded pools, officials said.

By prohibiting watershed residents from watering ornamental turf or washing cars at home, among other measures, officials said more water would be made available to the fish.

“We don’t need a whole lot more water, but we have to have some or we’re going to have a big problem,” water board spokesman Tim Moran said.

Landowners who do not comply with the conservation rules or fail to respond to information orders from the board can

be fined as much as \$500 a day, officials said.

The water board will consider the proposed regulations at its meeting next week. If approved, the regulations could become effective by the end of the month.