

# What's next for California's historic water cuts in drought

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Most California farmers, water districts and others affected by the broadest water cutbacks for century-old water rights did not respond to state regulators. It's the latest challenge for the State Water Resources Control Board in reducing water consumption during California's fourth year of drought as rivers and streams run too dry to meet demand.

A look at what this means for California's water saving efforts:

## WHAT'S ALREADY HAPPENED

The water board has already told thousands with more recent claims to water in California's agricultural heartland to stop pumping from rivers and streams. It's received a tepid response from them, too. Only about a third in the San Joaquin, Sacramento and delta watersheds have confirmed that they are obeying the order.

## LEGAL CHALLENGES

Some of these so-called "senior water rights" holders with claims dating before 1914 aren't accepting these largely unprecedented cuts without a fight. Several irrigation districts with prized claims are asking judges this week to put the state's order on hold while the legal questions are sorted out. The first hearing is scheduled in Stockton on Tuesday morning.

## INSPECTIONS

Regulators lack widespread meters or sensors to make sure people aren't illegally taking water, so they send inspectors to check if water from rivers and streams is diverted to farms and other property. Water board officials say those who didn't respond to their order are the first to be inspected. They are starting to make unannounced visits or providing a general warning that they'll be in the area.

## FINES

Regulators have told senior water rights holders to stop taking water before in the 1976-77 drought, but they now have new powers granted by Gov. Jerry Brown and lawmakers. They are able to levy fines of \$1,000 a day for illegally taking water, plus \$2,500 for each acre-foot diverted. One irrigation district says it faces penalties of \$22 million a month if it disobeys, though such high fines are essentially unheard of.