

Agricultural water districts fail conservation mandate

By Bradley J. Fikes | 7:14 p.m. July 30, 2015



Nursery crops, like these flowers in a Fallbrook nursery, account for the majority of agriculture value in the county — *Charlie Neuman*

In a generally upbeat report on water conservation results for June, the state gave bad news for some San Diego County water agencies.

Statewide, the picture is bright, according to the report issued Thursday by the State Water Resources Control Board. California's urban water agencies reduced potable water consumption by 27.3 percent, compared to the same month two years ago. That beats the state's 25 percent mandate, that runs from June to February.

However, six local water agencies missed their goals, some by wide margins. Heavily agricultural districts in Fallbrook and Rainbow fell furthest short in the county. Fallbrook Public Utility District's performance was the second-worst in the state.

The report indicates that while the great majority of water districts and agencies are meeting their mandates, some agricultural districts are struggling, even with an exemption the board gave to commercial growers.

ADVERTISING

Fallbrook Public Utility District disagrees with how the state board on how to account for water savings by farmers, said spokeswoman Noëlle Denke. The district was under the impression that water saved by commercial growers could be counted toward the conservation total.

The district will discuss the matter with the water board next Wednesday, Denke said.

Gov. Jerry Brown issued the 25 percent conservation mandate on April 1. The state water board then drew up plans to

put it into practice, beginning June 1. Each agency was assigned its own mandate, from 8 percent to 36 percent.

June 2015 water conservation

District	Conservation mandate	Percent conserved in June	Gap
Fallbrook Public Utility District	36%	8.6%	-27.4%
Rainbow Municipal Water District	36%	20.7%	-15.3%
San Dieguito Water District	28%	18.1%	-9.9%
Carlsbad Municipal Water District	28%	24.6%	-3.4%
Rincon Del Diablo Municipal Water District	32%	29.8%	-2.2%
Valley Center Municipal Water District	36%	34.2%	-1.8%
Ramona Municipal Water District	28%	28.0%	0.0%
Olivenhain Municipal Water District	32%	32.5%	0.5%
Santa Fe Irrigation District	36%	37.3%	1.3%
Poway City of	32%	36.0%	4.0%
Helix Water District	20%	25.0%	5.0%
Oceanside City of	20%	25.3%	5.3%
Otay Water District	20%	25.9%	5.9%
Vista Irrigation District	20%	26.8%	6.8%
Padre Dam Municipal Water District	20%	28.3%	8.3%
San Diego City of	16%	24.3%	8.3%
Vallecitos Water District	24%	33.8%	9.8%
Lakeside Water District	20%	31.8%	11.8%
Escondido City of	20%	31.9%	11.9%
Sweetwater Authority	12%	25.6%	13.6%
California-American Water Company San Diego District	8%	27.0%	19.0%

San Diego water conservation results for June 2015, from worst to best. Data provided by State Water Resources Control Board.

That June's total exceeded the mandate is significant, said Felicia Marcus, chairwoman of the water board. This is the first month of required savings. Moreover, the conservation came during the hottest June on record, which would normally lead to an uptick in water use. Previous savings have occurred during unusually wet months.

“The June numbers tell a story of conscious conservation, and that’s what we need and are applauding today,” Marcus said. “We need to save as much as possible. That is water essentially in the bank for a future dry year or more.”

The report confirmed figures previously released by California’s largest cities, including Los Angeles, San Diego, San Jose and San Francisco, showing strong water conservation. San Diego saved 24.3 percent, well over its 16 percent mandate.

California-American Water Co.’s San Diego division racked up the best record. It was supposed to reduce water consumption by 8 percent, and actually cut back by 27 percent. The company serves Coronado, Imperial Beach and parts of San Diego.

But elsewhere in San Diego County, Fallbrook Public Utility District missed its mandate by 27.4 percentage points. The district saved about 9 percent, but was supposed to save 36 percent.

Only the city of Livingston performed worse, falling 28.9 percentage points short. The city saved about 3 percent, while mandated to save 32 percent.

California drought

- [Latest headlines](#)
- [How you can save water](#)

When Gov. Brown issued his order, he exempted farmers in agricultural regions such as the Central Valley. However, growers in what are technically urban water districts in North County weren’t included. The districts appealed to the board, and allowed proven commercial growers to be exempted from the mandate.

Where the issue becomes murky is whether water conserved by the farmers can still be counted in figuring out the percentage conserved. Farmers who take water under a discounted agricultural rate are required to conserve 15 percent, not by the state board, but by Metropolitan Water District of Southern California, the region’s biggest water wholesaler.

Another agriculturally oriented North County agency, Rainbow Municipal Water District, 15th worst on the state’s list, saved about 21 percent when it was supposed to save 36 percent, falling short by 15.3 percentage points.

San Dieguito Water District in Western Encinitas missed by 9.9 percentage points; it was supposed to save 28 percent and actually saved about 18 percent.

Three other local agencies that missed by smaller amounts are Carlsbad Municipal Water District, off by 3.4 percentage points; Rincon Del Diablo Municipal Water District, short by 2.2 percentage points; and Valley Center Municipal Water District, down by 1.8 percentage points.

Valley Center’s general manager, Gary Arant, had said Wednesday that the district would exceed its target.

PREVIOUS: [Water customers exceed drought mandates](#)

Associated Press reporter Fenit Nirappil contributed to this story.