

How Low Can They Go? What California's Reservoirs Look Like Right Now [Interactive Visualization]

Victor
Powell

Source: [California Department of Water Resources](#)

The rising mercury in your thermometer today might suggest otherwise, but summer is officially coming to a close (September 23 marks the autumnal equinox), leaving California's vast collection of reservoirs at less than half their total capacity.

But there is some relief on the horizon, with a wet El Niño season forecast for the winter. It's unlikely, though, that the heavy rains — which have raised concern over major flooding — will provide enough water to end California's historic drought.

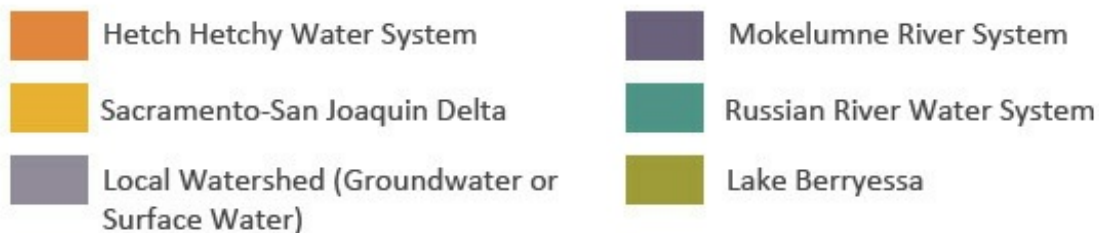
But hey, beggars can't be choosers, right?

California's massive system of dams and reservoirs provide water — and in many cases power — to cities and farms throughout the state.

Most of the state's reservoirs typically fill up during the wet winter months and are slowly depleted over the course of the summer and fall (although reservoirs used mainly for agriculture and power generation follow scattered release schedules). But since the drought started, the reliability of seasonal replenishment has all but dried up.

The map above, created for The Lowdown by Bay Area web developer [Victor Powell](#), and recently updated by designer [David Kroodsma](#), shows fluctuations since 2010 in California's 30-largest reservoirs. The map refreshes daily with updated data from the CA Department of Water Resources. Grey borders mark each reservoir's maximum capacity, while the blue shows fluctuating storage levels over time. All reservoirs are scaled relative to maximum storage capacity (with the largest — Shasta Lake — at 30 pixels). Click on each reservoir to see the change in capacity over the designated time period. View the changing percentages over time by hovering over the reservoir pop-out to the left of the graph. And use the slider at top to select specific time periods. Source code and data available [here](#).

Color indicates the largest source of water for that district



For more on where California's water comes from:

- [NRDC's water district finder interactive](#)
- [Water Education Foundation's regional water tracker](#)

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