

California's federal reservoirs even lower than last year

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In the latest indicator of the severity of the drought, the federal government's main reservoirs serving California have begun the new "water year" at just a quarter full and in worse shape than last year.

The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation said Tuesday that the six key reservoirs of the Central Valley Project were a combined 200,000 acre-feet below the same time last year, a difference of about 6 percent. An acre-foot is 326,000 gallons, or a year's supply for a typical California household.

All told, the reservoirs, including Shasta and Folsom, are just 24 percent full. They've begun the water year with a carry-over that's an estimated 47 percent below the 15-year average. The 2016 water year, as designated by regulators and policymakers, began Oct. 1 and runs through next September.

The 2015 water year "was very difficult, and we are beginning (water year) 2016 with even less water in our reservoirs," said David Murillo, the Bureau of Reclamation's regional director, in a prepared statement.

Speaking at a hearing of the state Board of Food and Agriculture, an advisory commission, water expert Ellen Hanak of the Public Policy Institute of California said, "We entered this drought with our reservoirs pretty full. By now we're kind of at a point where ... there's not a whole lot of margin left."

Forecasters say a strong El Niño winter is a near certainty in California, but there's a good chance most of the precipitation will fall in the [southern half of the state](#). Most of the state's main reservoirs are located north of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, making it unlikely the storms will end the drought.

Shasta is the state's largest reservoir, with a capacity of 4.55 million acre-feet. It is 35 percent full.

The Bureau of Reclamation's figures don't cover State Water Project reservoirs, including Lake Oroville, the largest of the state-run reservoirs.

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Water storage

The six main reservoirs of the federal Central Valley Project began the water year 24 percent full.

Reservoir	Capacity (acre-feet)	Percent full
Shasta	4.55 million	35%
New Melones	2.42 million	11%
Trinity	2.45 million	22%
Folsom	0.98 million	18%
San Luis*	0.97 million	8%
Millerton	0.52 million	37%

*Figures cover federal share of joint federal-state reservoir.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Reclamation