

# Editorial: California's water challenges require action by one and all

BY THE EDITORIAL  
BOARD

Californians should not take water for granted ever again.

Not after four years of drought forcing residents from the mountains of Northern California to the beaches of San Diego to change their lifestyles and cut their water consumption.

Lavender is an evergreen shrub with masses of scented blooms that can tolerate drought-stricken areas. California's drought has forced residents to rethink their landscaping. Dean Fosdick The Associated Press File



Yes, this drought has been painful and costly for many.

It also has been an eye-opener – to the realities confronting our state and the ways we can more effectively use water.

Previous droughts in modern California affected fewer people and industries. Drought always impacts farmers, of course. But when rain scarcely fell from 1987 to 1992, there was no mandatory statewide water cut.

California, however, is a much different place today. We have 39 million residents now – up 11 million from 1987. This increase is further straining a water storage and conveyance system designed to accommodate half that many people.

Moreover, our economy has continued to expand and diversify. California is home to high tech, Hollywood and millions of acres of farmland. Long story short: We have assembled the eighth-largest economy on the planet, according to the World Bank, and done so in a semiarid region.

It's a remarkable success story.

Future success will require us to stretch every drop of water as far as it will go. Especially if, as some scientists believe, California is in the beginning of what could be a 200-year megadrought similar to what the Southwestern United States experienced many centuries ago.

Regardless of whether this year's El Niño is a gusher or a bust, we need to soberly assess our lifestyles, businesses and public policies to ensure that:

- Everyone has access to safe, clean drinking water.
- Industry has the water it needs so that people have jobs.
- California's spectacular environment and bounty of fish and wildlife aren't further compromised.

The key here is keeping an open mind and embracing the fact that change is not only necessary but inevitable. By acting sooner rather than later, we increase the likelihood that California can enjoy economic prosperity without drying up more rivers and lakes, seeing more species endangered and having residents in rural communities such as

East Porterville have to make do with bottled water.

Here is our action plan.

Local and state leaders must work collaboratively to ensure that the Sustainable Groundwater Act of 2014 succeeds in recharging aquifers throughout the state. This will require decisions based on the best available science and data – not self-interest, rhetoric and emotion.

The state, along with the federal government, must expand California's water storage and conveyance system to meet not just today's population but growth through 2050, too. This will require a vast array of tools, including storage above and below the ground and desalination. In our view, the \$7.5 billion water bond passed by voters in 2014 is a down payment on what is really needed.

A more efficient way must be found to move water through the San Joaquin-Sacramento River Delta. The Delta's water quality must be enhanced and its ecosystem restored.

The state, along with industry, must dramatically increase funding for water-technology research in the University of California and California State University systems.

Water recycling efforts ("purple pipes projects") must be ramped up. Recycled water is perfectly fine for landscaping. Let's save potable water for drinking.

Finally, Californians must fully realize that the days of cheap water and landscaping requiring vast amounts of water are over.

We salute those of you who have already made changes to cut your water use. We urge those who haven't to get cracking.

As Gov. Brown said this spring in announcing California's first mandatory statewide water reduction: "It's a different world. We have to act differently."