

Water conservation falls short of goals; officials worry storms could cause backsliding

Bee staff and news services

State regulators said Tuesday that they are confident residents of drought-stricken California will meet long-term water-conservation goals but worried that the onslaught of storms dousing the state might lead to backsliding.

“You’re seeing it rain and you’re hearing about a snowpack above normal,” State Water Resources Control Board Chairwoman Felicia Marcus said in Sacramento. “We need to keep saving.”

Despite the uptick in El Niño-driven precipitation, reservoirs remain critically low in the state and the landscape is parched after four years of drought.

Residents fell short of the governor’s 25 percent conservation mandate in November for a second straight month, using 20 percent less water, officials reported.

However, residents have saved a combined 26 percent since the cutbacks began in June.

In the central San Joaquin Valley, more water suppliers met their conservation goals in November than in October, but most still missed their goals, the state Water Resources Control Board reported Tuesday. Among cities that met monthly goals after missing them in October were Fresno, Clovis and Visalia.

The numbers are measured monthly against the same month in 2013.

Officials had expected less water saving during winter, when residents reduce landscape irrigation anyway, Marcus said.

Still, the latest numbers reflect considerable savings compared to past years, Marcus said, adding that residents understand it’s too early to declare an end to the long drought.

Most strikingly, average monthly water use declined from 87 gallons for each person per day in October to 75 gallons in November, hitting the lowest level since the curtailments began, officials reported.

“Californians are clearly thinking twice before turning on the tap,” Marcus said in a statement.

Gov. Jerry Brown ordered the 25 percent cutbacks starting in June compared to the same period in 2013, the year before he declared a drought emergency.

The regulations are set to expire in February, and regulators are drafting new conservation measures under the governor’s authority that could be extended through October.

Conservation efforts hit a setback in October when Californians missed the mandated target by posting 22 percent in savings.

Regulators renewed their appeal for conservation, even as a recent Sierra Nevada snowpack survey showed water content was well above normal for this time of year.

“We’re in such a deep hole,” Marcus said. “We need to have a lot of water in storage and snow in the mountains to let us relax at all.”

November water conservation

Supplier	Conservation target	Overall savings (since June)	Monthly savings (vs. 2013)	Daily per-capita use (est. in gals.)	Monthly target	Overall target
Bakman Water Co.	36%	30.0%	8.5%	115.1	Missed	Missed
Clovis	36%	31.2%	36.1%	91.5	Met	Missed
Corcoran	36%	31.6%	33.8%	112.6	Missed	Missed
Dinuba	32%	36.0%	44.5%	82.1	Met	Met
Exeter	36%	30.3%	22.5%	98.0	Missed	Missed
Fresno	28%	27.2%	30.2%	71.9	Met	Missed
Hanford	28%	14.2%	25.3%	70.4	Missed	Missed
Kerman	32%	26.1%	31.3%	79.7	Missed	Missed
Kingsburg	36%	39.9%	46.3%	105.6	Met	Met
Lemoore	32%	24.3%	14.0%	84.9	Missed	Missed
Los Banos	28%	25.5%	28.0%	96.5	Missed	Missed
Madera	28%	28.5%	26.4%	82.3	Missed	Met
Madera Co.	36%	33.4%	32.8%	113.5	Missed	Missed
Pinedale Co. Water Dist.	36%	27.4%	30.4%	77.7	Missed	Missed
Porterville	32%	32.5%	8.4%	88.9	Missed	Met
Reedley	24%	21.9%	15.3%	57.3	Missed	Missed
Selma	32%	40.2%	41.4%	66.5	Met	Met
Tulare	32%	24.4%	25.2%	99.1	Missed	Missed
Visalia	32%	25.9%	33.6%	77.1	Met	Missed

Source: State Water Resources Control Board