

Valley communities get lower state water conservation goals

By Marc Benjamin
mbenjamin@fresnobee.com

Central Valley water suppliers and customers got a break Thursday when new conservation goals for the coming months were announced by the state Water Resources Control Board.

The new standards were developed after water suppliers went to state officials seeking lower conservation percentages because of population growth, climate and development of drought-resistant supplies, such as recharge from water recycling plants or desalination.

Many local suppliers saw their conservation goal drop 2 percent to 4 percent. Fresno's fell from 28 percent to 25 percent, while Clovis' dropped to 33 percent from 36 percent.

The biggest beneficiary statewide was the Pinedale County Water District, which had a conservation standard of 36 percent reduced to 14 percent, state documents show.

ADVERTISING

The reason for the steep cut was due to a paperwork error the district submitted to the state, said Max Gomberg, climate and conservation manager for the Water Resources Control Board.

The district's numbers, he said, indicated that all the water consumed in the 16,000-resident district was for home use and didn't separate commercial and industrial users. Such a scenario would mean that consumption per household was much greater than the actual number.

"The data held them to a higher standard than they needed to be," Gomberg said.

Jason Franklin, general manager of the Pinedale County Water District, suggested that the error may have been compounded by certain apartment complexes and mobile home parks being counted as one family's address rather than where potentially hundreds of people lived.

He said he was relieved by the lower conservation standard.

I would commend our customers overall – they are fairly water-conscious. To have this kind of conservation before we install meters says a lot for our conservation.

Jason Franklin, Pinedale County Water District general manager

Pinedale residents had cut their water consumption by 27 percent, well below the 36 percent standard set last year by the state. Franklin said he's not confident Pinedale residents could have significantly improved on that number.

He said the district is in the process of getting meters for all residential customers.

"I would commend our customers overall – they are fairly water-conscious," he said. "To have this kind of conservation before we install meters says a lot for our conservation."

Fresno has conserved 25.8 percent since June. The new 25 percent standard means the city would have been within the state's conservation standard for the past year. But it's not time to let up, said Thomas Esqueda, the city's director of public utilities.

“We are going to keep going on the conservation messaging and communication,” he said.

Esqueda described the new state standards as more of a “correction, not relaxation.” The standards had to go into effect quickly after Gov. Jerry Brown declared a drought emergency last April.

Even with the correction, Clovis will likely struggle to meet the new standard. Clovis cut residential water consumption by 29.7 percent in the past year.

Luke Serpa, the city’s public utilities director, said he was hopeful that the larger snowpack, 80 percent of normal compared with 5 percent last year, would lead to more relaxed water conservation goals later this year.

The new standards went into effect for March and will be in effect until October, unless state water officials decide in May to make changes.

Marc Benjamin: [559-441-6166](tel:559-441-6166), [@beebebenjamin](https://twitter.com/beebebenjamin)

Water conservation goals reduced

Changes took effect March 1

Supplier Name	Old standard	New standard
Bakman Water Co.	36%	34%
Clovis	36%	33%
Coalinga	32%	30%
Corcoran	36%	32%
Delano	24%	21%
Dinuba	32%	29%
Exeter	36%	34%
Fresno	28%	25%
Hanford	28%	23%
Kerman	32%	29%
Kingsburg	36%	34%
Lemoore	32%	28%
Los Banos	28%	24%
Madera	28%	26%
Merced	36%	34%
Pinedale Co. Water Dist.	36%	14%
Porterville	32%	26%
Reedley	24%	22%

Sanger	28%	26%
Selma	32%	30%
Tulare	32%	30%
Visalia	32%	29%

Source: State Water Resources Control Board