

Questions & Answers
Water Year 2009 Central Valley Project Allocation
February 2009

Q: If Reclamation is shorting the senior water right holders, what does it mean for Agricultural and Municipal and Industrial (M&I) users?

A: It is California's third critically dry year, and the Bureau of Reclamation's deliveries for all water uses in California – environmental, urban, and agricultural – will be reduced this year. Drought is a very serious, but natural, event. The forecasted hydrologic conditions triggered shortage criteria reducing allocations for senior water right holders, agricultural, urban, and wildlife refuges. Reclamation is working closely with the State of California and exploring all options under our legal authority to help relieve drought impacts on Central Valley Project (CVP) water users and meet minimum public health and safety needs.

Q: Isn't it primarily Reclamation's obligations under the Endangered Species Act that are leading it to short other water users – including the agricultural users who are a critical driver of California's stumbling economy?

A: The key issue here is a third critically dry year: the lack of snow and rain is resulting in low upstream reservoir levels and limited runoff conditions that are stressing our water supplies in ways we've not seen for 3 decades. Reclamation has numerous water supply obligations and will be taking strong steps to balance competing beneficial uses of water. The reduced Delta pumping since last spring has not been the result of Endangered Species Act actions, but is the product of limited Delta inflows. We want to reiterate the primary problem – Californians are facing a third critically dry year. It's a real hardship for us all, and Reclamation is working in partnership with the State to minimize impacts.

Q: What will you be able to do for agricultural users this year?

A: We are optimizing water currently in storage together with a conservative outlook that our current dry scenario will continue. We have authorized rescheduling of 2008 water supplies currently in storage in San Luis Reservoir and Millerton Reservoir to the degree it is available and is not needed for health and human safety. We will also facilitate water transfers and are working with the State on a Drought Water Bank which has the potential to assist agricultural users.

Q: How much water do the wildlife refuges get under drought conditions?

A: All of Reclamation's water supply obligations are affected by the drought. Wildlife refuges are usually about 5-7 percent of the annual water delivered from the CVP. In critically dry years, the deliveries to the refuges may be reduced to 75 percent of their contracted water supply. We are working with our refuge managers on the scheduling of their contracted water. Typically, refuge water demands can be shifted to months outside the traditional agricultural season and, in some cases, we may be able to meet our legal obligations to the refuges through substitute groundwater supplies, which serve to free up more CVP water for agricultural and M&I needs.

Q: What specifically are you doing to help California's water users?

A: First, Reclamation has petitioned the State to evaluate the beneficial and detrimental effects of temporarily relaxing certain salinity standards in the Delta. Such a change could provide additional flexibility on meeting Delta outflow requirements. We are working with the State on that now.

Reclamation is also using the Accelerated Water Transfer Program (AWTP) to identify and expedite water transfers. This could help provide more flexibility in providing needed water in that we already have environmental coverage for water transfers under the AWTP and such transfers are presumed to meet the consumptive use and historical use requirements of the 1992 Central Valley Project Improvement Act.

One of the other tools available is the Reclamation States Emergency Drought Relief Act (Act), which authorizes Reclamation to provide assistance to the State. We continue to provide assistance under the Act consistent with the July 25, 2008, request from the Governor of California, which was concurred in by the Commissioner of Reclamation on August 5, 2008. The Act does provide access to limited Drought Relief Funds, but, more importantly, has allowed Reclamation to authorize the sale and transfer of water for critical agricultural needs and specifically delegates authority to Reclamation to participate in the Drought Water Bank. In addition, Reclamation has provided funding for two small tribal drought projects.

And, on a longtime basis, Reclamation has been working with our CVP partners on ways to avoid or soften impacts from drought – which we all know happens regularly in California. Since 2004, Reclamation has awarded \$7.5 million in grants to 36 projects in California under the Challenge Grant Program. While varied, these projects have generally assisted in water conservation efforts and in the development of alternative water supplies. We will continue this work.

Q: How much extra water are we talking about here? Enough so you can deliver water to agricultural users?

A: There is no extra water, but we are working to optimize available water supplies. Through the Water 2025, CALFED, and Water Conservation Field Services Programs, Reclamation gave several grants to water contractors for water use efficiency projects. These grants provided tools to water districts to better manage their water, and thus conserve by diverting less or using the water more efficiently within their service area. Districts that implemented water use efficiency measures either diverted or exported less water to help improve in-stream flows and delta critical habitats, which derives substantial environmental benefits. Other districts that implemented water conservation measures were able to use their water more effectively, using the same amount of water to meet additional or unmet needs. Reclamation is in the process of collecting information from these projects in order to estimate the amount of water conservation based on the reduced amount of district diversions or increased number of acres farmed in the districts.

Q: Will the curtailment of the delivery of CVP water impact public health in California's communities?

A: Reclamation is confident that we can meet health and safety requirements in our M&I allocation. Water allocations under the current dry-year scenario default to provide water to meet health and safety requirements. Because CVP water is typically a supplemental water supply, our reduced water allocation for M&I users is expected to be sufficient for our M&I customers.