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Federal Agencies and State of California Coordinating Response to Drought

Reclamation, NRCS announce additional funding opportunities for water conservation

SACRAMENTO, Calif. – With California in its worst drought in the state’s 160 years of record-keeping—and following Governor Edmund G. Brown Jr.’s declaration of a Drought State of Emergency on January 17—the Departments of the Interior, Agriculture and Commerce are working with the State of California to accelerate water transfers and exchanges, provide operational flexibility to store and convey water, expedite environmental review and compliance actions, and pursue new or fast-track existing projects that might help stretch California’s water supplies.

Federal and State officials met today to discuss a collaborative response to the drought to minimize its social, economic and environmental impacts. Led by Bureau of Reclamation Commissioner Michael L. Connor and California Department of Water Resources Director Mark Cowin, administrators from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Marine Fisheries Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), National Integrated Drought Information System and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers joined in a demonstration of support for an “all-in” strategy on ongoing efforts to address drought conditions in California. The agencies are seeking maximum flexibility in carrying out water supply operations, investing in conservation measures and coordinating with the California State Water Resources Control Board to implement any new operational standards.

Today Reclamation and NRCS announced they are working together to leverage Federal funds for water delivery agencies and agricultural producers, and will provide up to \$14 million in funding for water districts and associated growers to conserve water and improve water management. The projects funded through this partnership in Fiscal Year 2014 will help communities build resilience to drought, including by modernizing their water infrastructure and efficiently using scarce water resources, while continuing to support the agricultural economy.

“The drought situation is dire throughout the state, and communities, farms, ranches, businesses and the environment are feeling its effects,” stated Connor. “The federal and state governments can provide assistance in a variety of ways, and we are coordinating the federal response to bring resources and assistance to California through the National Drought Resilience Partnership.”

This funding opportunity builds upon an [announcement](#) yesterday from Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack that funding will be made available through the NRCS for agricultural water conservation efforts throughout California. Affected landowners have until March 3, 2014 to apply for \$20 million in available funds.

“The Obama Administration and USDA are doing everything within our power to support those affected by this devastating drought,” said Vilsack. “These funds will support a suite of scientifically-proven conservation techniques that will help California farmers and ranchers maximize every available drop of water while conserving and protecting water resources for future generations.”

On January 27, California’s Natural Resources Agency, EPA and Department of Food and Agriculture released the California Water Action Plan, defining the state’s goals and vision through 2019 with a focus on sustaining water supplies for people, the environment, industry and agriculture. The Governor’s proposed 2014-2015 budget recommends \$618.7 million in funding for water efficiency projects, wetland and watershed restoration, groundwater programs, conservation, flood control and integrated water management. Please visit http://resources.ca.gov/california_water_action_plan/ to view the plan.

Director Cowin stated, “The Department of Water Resources welcomes our ongoing, close partnership with the Bureau of Reclamation in managing water supplies for California. It will take our combined efforts to deal with the extraordinary drought conditions we now face. Alongside the Bureau, we plan to manage our limited available water supplies in a way that protects public health and safety, and preserves these supplies should dry conditions persist.”

As called for in President Obama’s Climate Action Plan, the National Drought Resilience Partnership will help coordinate the federal response to drought impacts and work closely with state, regional and local governments. The partnership includes the Departments of the Interior, Agriculture, Energy, and Commerce (NOAA), Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works, Federal Emergency Management Agency and Environmental Protection Agency.

“The federal family recognizes how serious the drought is for California,” said NOAA Acting Administrator Dr. Kathryn Sullivan. “NOAA and our partners are strengthening our real-time drought-related weather and water predictions for all the western states. As conditions on the ground in California change, we’re working to enable rapid adjustments in operations and water transfers in the Central Valley, while also looking to the future to plan for, and mitigate, on-going drought scenarios.”

In addition, today Reclamation released its 2014 Central Valley Project Water Plan, which was developed through a series of meetings that began in mid-2013 with water and power users, environmental interests, tribes, and state and federal agencies. The plan outlines numerous actions to help water users better manage their water supplies during drought conditions, such as expanding operational flexibility and streamlining the water transfer process. The plan is available at <http://www.usbr.gov/mp/PA/water> where visitors will also find a wide variety of current and historical information on CVP water operations, transfers, deliveries and contracts.

On Friday, January 31, the Bureau of Reclamation announced that, due to the severe drought conditions and with the consent of all settlement parties, it will begin reducing San Joaquin River Restoration Program’s Restoration Flows one month earlier than called for in the settlement, thereby

making available about 13,000 acre-feet to the Friant Division long-term contractors with first priority to meet human health and safety needs.

Connor also noted that pumping operations at the federal Jones Pumping Plant, located in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Bay Delta near Tracy, California, have been restricted by the lack of water due to drought conditions and State water quality permit requirements; they have not been curtailed by Endangered Species Act requirements for protection of imperiled fish species.

By continuing to work together and remaining focused on conditions, needs and relief measures, the managers of California's state and federal water projects remain dedicated to making decisions during this critical time that are right for California's people and communities, agriculture, businesses, imperiled species, power and the environment.

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