

Water Conservation

Increased Water Yield, Storage Capacity Key to State's Viability

Summary

Background

California is in the midst of a continuing drought. The existing water supply for residents, business and agriculture has been constrained not only by nature but also by various court orders and environmental regulations restricting deliveries. Water suppliers in water-short areas of the state are beginning to impose mandatory outdoor conservation measures on their customers in order to stretch supplies as far as possible.

The Governor is calling for 20 percent conservation measures by the year 2020. Conservation and water use efficiency are an important part of the equation, but equally important is increasing water yield, storage capacity and conveyance.

Current State/Federal Policy

The Urban Water Management Plan Act (UWMPA) requires urban water suppliers to prepare and submit plans to the Department of Water Resources every five years. Those plans are required to: describe the reliability of the water supply by water year type (average, wet, dry, etc); quantify, to the extent records are available, past, current and projected water use; identify the uses among water use sectors (residential, commercial, etc.); and describe each water demand management measure currently being implemented or scheduled for implementation.

The Agricultural Water Management Planning Act required agricultural water suppliers that supply more than 50,000 acre-feet of water annually to develop agricultural water management plans by 1992. The plans were to encompass current water conservation and reclamation practices being used; plans for changing current water conservation plans; and conservation educational services being used. It was also intended to outline whether the supplier, through improved irrigation water management, has a significant opportunity to do one or both of the following: save water by means of reduced evapotranspiration, evaporation or reduction of flows to unusable water bodies that fail to serve further beneficial uses and/or reduce the quantity of highly saline or toxic drainage water.

State government grants or loans are contingent on urban water suppliers' implementation of the water demand management measures identified in UWMPA. Under federal law, all Central Valley Project contractors (mostly agricultural water suppliers) were required to develop water conservation plans.

Impact on Business

Many businesses have invested significant amounts of money in new water-saving technologies. Modern growing techniques have allowed farmers to provide more tonnage of crops per acre using less water. Businesses are always trying to reduce production costs through the use of the most advanced technologies available.

Imposing across-the-board conservation measures without regard to specific industries' ability to meet them will increase costs that may not be absorbable, forcing an increase in product price when the economy is slow.

It will be extremely difficult for businesses that have already invested in water-saving technology to reduce consumption any further. For those that can't, it could possibly mean closure if penalties are to be imposed for non-compliance.

Anticipated Action

Legislation was introduced mandating the state achieve a 20 percent reduction in urban per capita water use by December 31, 2020, reflective of the Governor's call to do so. It mandated a variety of conservation measures that were unachievable. Baseline measures would be from the current year, thus no credit was given for conservation measures already undertaken. It also gave no credit for existing or future recycled water projects and punished water suppliers and their customers if the district followed recommendations of the California Urban Water Management Council by treating residential and business water uses in distinct but appropriate methods. A coalition of agricultural and industrial stakeholders was able to stop the bill, but it is almost certain that similar legislation will be reintroduced in 2009.

CalChamber Position

The California Chamber of Commerce supports a balanced approach to securing a safe and reliable supply of water for all businesses and residents of the state. Water conservation, recycling, reuse and water use efficiencies, in combination with an adequate water supply, storage and conveyance system, would provide enough water to ensure the state's viability.

Water Conservation (continued)

Reasons for Position

- Progressive businesses and agriculturalists have already invested in water-saving management techniques and new technologies that should be credited in water conservation plans.
- Conservation measures alone cannot supply all the water necessary for the state to thrive.
- Mandatory water conservation percentages should be expressed as goals and have regular assessments to measure progress.
- Constraining use in one part of the state does not guarantee that the conserved water could be used in another location.

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