



Media Release

Low water levels trigger curtailments for Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta

Acute water shortages prompt urgent action following emergency regulation in early August

August 20, 2021

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SACRAMENTO – With climate change-induced drought conditions reducing water levels in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta to alarming lows, the State Water Resources Control Board today issued curtailment orders to approximately 4,500 right holders to protect drinking water supplies, prevent salinity intrusion and minimize impacts to fisheries and the environment.

Today's orders follow the [emergency curtailment regulation](#) adopted by the board on August 3 in response to acute water shortages. Altogether, there are 6,600 right holders in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta.

Without enforcement of unauthorized water diversions in the Delta, the drinking water supply for 25 million Californians and irrigation for over three million acres of farmland could be at significant risk within the next year.

“Curtailing water rights has an impact on livelihoods and economies, but it is painfully necessary as severe drought conditions this year and next could threaten health, safety and the environment,” said Erik Ekdahl, Deputy Director of the Division of Water Rights. “We will do everything we can to make compliance both straightforward and fair. We are offering reporting and technical assistance to all right holders and will also be regularly conducting inspections and investigating complaints to ensure that diverters are complying.”

The number of right holders that have been directed to cease all diversions may be adjusted throughout the fall as water supply in the Delta fluctuates and weather conditions change. For instance, the board projects that about 1,500 fewer right holders will need to be curtailed in September due to increased water supply in the Sacramento River watershed from annual rice field drainage.

Curtailments give the State Water Board the tools it needs to prevent diverters from taking water they do not have a right to use when water levels are low. The board is



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requiring right holders to confirm their compliance with curtailment orders or to indicate if they will seek an exemption for any of the reasons allowed under the regulation, such as supplying water for human health and safety needs. Those diverting more than 5,000 acre-feet per year must provide additional information about their previous diversions and projected use to improve the board's supply and demand forecasting.

The board is offering compliance assistance to right holders in various ways, including:

- A virtual webinar on August 31 to help impacted right holders satisfy reporting requirements and complete the online certification form;
- Video tutorials on reporting requirements available the week of August 23;
- Regularly [updated website information](#) and email updates about water board actions and changes to curtailment status;
- A dedicated phone line and email staffed during business hours to answer questions from right holders.

Dry conditions in the Delta worsened this spring when climate change-induced warm temperatures led to unprecedented losses of runoff to rivers, streams and reservoirs, and prompted water diverters below the reservoirs to withdraw their water earlier and in greater volumes than in previous critically dry years. This confluence of events resulted in the loss of nearly 800,000 acre-feet of water, enough to supply more than one million households for a year and nearly the entire capacity of Folsom Reservoir.

Governor Gavin Newsom on July 8 expanded a drought state of emergency that now covers 50 of California's 58 counties and called on all Californians to voluntarily reduce their water usage by 15%.

More information on drought, curtailments, water use methodology tools and related topics, can be found at the board's [Drought Information and Updates webpage](#).

The State Water Board's mission is to preserve, enhance, and restore the quality of California's water resources and drinking water for the protection of the environment, public health, and all beneficial uses, and to ensure proper water resource allocation and efficient use for current and future generations.