



Media Release

State Water Board Notifies Junior Water-Right Holders of Necessary Cutbacks in the Sacramento River Watershed

For Immediate Release:
May 28, 2014

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With California's extreme drought resulting in insufficient water to serve all water-rights holders, the State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board) announced today that junior water-rights holders in the Sacramento River watershed would receive curtailment notices. The notices advise the recipients to stop diverting water from the watershed and allow it to flow to more senior water-right holders, as required by state law.

California water rights law is seniority based, and in dry years, when there isn't enough water in the system to serve all water-rights holders, junior water-rights holders may be required to stop diverting water from rivers and streams. Approximately 2,648 junior water-right holders in the Sacramento River watershed will receive curtailment notices.

"While the storms we enjoyed from February through April brought us some minimal relief, it wasn't enough to alter the fact that there is simply not enough water to satisfy all water-rights holders," said State Water Board Chair Felicia Marcus. "We recognize how challenging this drought is for junior water-right holders and their customers, and we will make adjustments in real time, based upon the flow in our rivers and streams, adequate voluntary agreements, and other new information, to give notice of water availability and lift restrictions whenever possible, as quickly as possible."

Despite late-season rains, California remains in a drought due to low water supplies in reservoirs from two previous dry years and a low snowpack. The May 1st snow survey by the Department of Water Resources measured the moisture content of the Sierra snowpack at 18 percent of normal for this time of year.

Today's action affects holders of junior "appropriative" water rights only in the Sacramento River watershed and North Delta area. An appropriative water right is one obtained for storing water or for the use of water on land that is not directly abutting a waterway. Under the state's water-rights system of "first in time, first in right," junior water-rights holders are those with permits and licenses issued after 1914 by the State Water Board and its predecessors, also referred to as "post-1914 appropriative rights."

When there is not enough water in a river system to fill all water users' rights, state law requires that junior water-rights holders stop diverting to allow the water to flow to more senior water-right holders, including those with claims of pre-1914 rights and those on land directly abutting a waterway.



The curtailment notices advise suppliers of water for municipal or domestic uses to contact the State Water Board's Division of Water Rights regarding emergency needs for continuing diversions to meet very limited public health and safety requirements when there is no other water supply available. Many of these suppliers also have other local sources, such as local storage, groundwater, recycled water or stormwater.

Water-right holders in several watersheds are developing local cooperative agreements in their respective watersheds in an effort to "share" available water and avoid curtailment. The State Water Board will consider these voluntary agreements and has advised cooperatives that the agreements must not result in injury to more senior water-right holders or unreasonably harm fish and wildlife.

In April, the State Water Board launched a web page to assist water-right holders in several important watersheds to plan for possible limits on water supply availability. The web page, titled "[Watershed Analysis](#)," details projected water supply, demand and availability for the watersheds most likely to face restrictions during the drought as demand outstrips available water supply.

The right holders being curtailed in the Sacramento River watershed, includes many creeks and rivers draining to the Sacramento River and the North Delta. The watershed includes the Pit, McCloud, Feather, Yuba, and American Rivers as well as the Sacramento River Delta (North Delta). A copy of the letter can be found [here](#).

A map of the Sacramento-San Joaquin watershed can be found [here](#).

Conditions in other watersheds continue to be monitored and curtailment notices for several other watersheds may be imminent. Those watersheds include the Russian River above Healdsburg and the San Joaquin River system and its tributaries.

A [Curtailment Fact Sheet](#) provides additional details on the curtailment process.

Governor Brown has called on all Californians to reduce their water use by 20 percent and prevent water waste – visit [SaveOurH2O.org](#) to find out how everyone can do their part, and visit [Drought.CA.Gov](#) to learn more about how California is dealing with the effects of the drought.

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