



Media Release

Continuing drought prompts readoption of emergency curtailment regulation in Russian River

State Water Board revises and renews existing regulation

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SACRAMENTO – With California experiencing one of the driest winters on record and water in the Russian River expected to again reach critically low levels due to a third consecutive year of drought, the State Water Resources Control Board today readopted an emergency regulation authorizing the Division of Water Rights to curtail diversions in Sonoma and Mendocino counties to protect threatened drinking water supplies and migrating fish.

Per the renewed regulation, curtailment orders will be issued based on water supply shortage or when insufficient flows imperil fish in the Lower Russian River watershed. As of May 5, both Lake Mendocino and Lake Sonoma were below 60 percent of storage capacity.

Approximately 2,000 right holders are expected to receive the orders although some might not be directed to curtail their diversions until later in the summer. Water users will be required to track their water availability and curtailment status on the [“Curtailment Status List”](#) on the Russian River Drought website.

“Climate change-induced drought conditions are not easing, making it critical that we continue taking actions to protect the state’s diminishing water supply,” said Erik Ekdahl, deputy director of the Division of Water Rights. “If we didn’t issue curtailments last year, Lake Mendocino might have gone completely dry. So, while we understand that curtailments can impose some hardship, failing to maintain sufficient water levels poses potential harm to human health, fish and the environment.”

The updated regulation includes a refined water availability method, protections for fish habitat in certain Lower Russian River tributaries and a pathway for a voluntary savings program in the upper watershed that would allow right holders to reduce their water use in lieu of curtailments.

The Russian River starts in Mendocino County and flows 110 miles south through Sonoma County before entering the Pacific Ocean. Water stored in Lake Mendocino, a reservoir north of Ukiah, is released downstream to maintain flows in the upper section of the river. The supplemental water from the lake protects multiple fish species and



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municipal and agricultural uses and, during drought, accounts for nearly all the water in the river.

Sonoma and Mendocino were the first counties placed under a region-specific drought state of emergency on April 21, 2021, by Gov. Gavin Newsom. To address acute drought impacts, the proclamation called on the State Water Board to consider modifying reservoir releases, limiting and curtailing diversions in the Russian River watershed when necessary to ensure the availability of drinking water.

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 allocation and efficient use for present and future generations.