WET
WATER & ENERGY TOPICS

UF | IFAS
UNIVERSITY of FLORIDA
Marion County
FLORIDA

Volume 2, Issue 4 April 2015

From the Agent

On April 1, Governor Brown ordered mandatory water use reductions for the first time in California's history, saying the state's four-year drought had reached near-crisis proportions after a winter of record-low snowfalls. The newly mandated 25% cut is in relation to total water use in 2013. Cuts will vary from community to community, reflecting that per capita water use reduction has been better in some areas than others.

This is not an April Fool's joke, it is for real. With the first-ever water restrictions in California, let's move our focus to California's water in this month's WET. I hope you find the information helpful. Thanks for reading WET. As always, you can also find more updated information on water and energy from the WET Facebook page (www.facebook.com/marionwet).

Yilin Zhuang

Today's order from the governor should not only alarm Californians, but the entire nation should take notice that the most productive agriculture state in the country has entered uncharted territory.

Figure 1. Houseboats Float in California's Drought-Lowered Oroville Lake

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Statewide Mandatory Water Reductions in California

For the first time in California's history, the governor has directed the State Water Resources Control Board to implement mandatory water reductions in cities and towns across California to reduce water usage by 25% by the end of next February. There are 411 urban water districts in California, and the 25% reduction will be drawn from all of them combined. This will save approximately 1.5 million acre-feet of water in the next nine months.

What do the numbers mean?

Nine months is when California's wet season expects to start. One acre-foot is literally an acre of land covered with one foot of water. One and half million acre-feet of water is about 500 billion gallons of water, which is the annual household water use in Florida last year.

Will everyone have to reduce water use by 25%?

The details are still in works, but it is expected that each individual water district will work to reduce water use among its customers, though not necessarily all by 25%. Those with higher per-capita water use will have a higher reduction goal. Those with lower per-capita use will have a lower goal.

From its hot, dry deserts to its snowcapped peaks and foggy shores, California is a mosaic of diverse culture, climate, and geography. The state's varying water needs and resources are both a reflection and a consequence of this diversity. Balancing water supply and demand is a perennial problem in the state.

Figure 2. Satellite Images of Sierra Nevada Snowpack in 2013 and 2014

Will there be penalties if water use is not reduced?

This is up to each individual water district. Take for instance the Los Angeles Department of Water — the state's largest water utility — has issued just two $200 fines so far this year as well as eight $100 fines so far.

Can the homeowners keep their lawns?

Yes, they can, but eventually it might cost more for the privilege of indoor and outdoor uses are metered separately. Meanwhile, officials are doing ever more to convince homeowners to ditch lawns. In Governor Brown's executive order, he called on the state's urban water agencies to replace 50 million square feet of lawn. The primary mechanism to achieve this has been cash incentives to get homeowners to voluntarily give up their lawns. For example, Los Angeles Department of Water pays one of the state's highest incentives, offering $3.75 per square foot for the first 1500 square feet and $2 per square foot thereafter.

How about farms?

California's farms as a whole do use significantly more water than its cities. But that gap has narrowed somewhat as the drought has intensified. This year and last, California's farmers got little to no water from the federal government's system of canals and reservoirs because of the drought. Last year, the state's system provided only 15% of requested allocations. Many growers have been forced to leave their farms unplanted. About 400,000 acres were taken out of production. Brown's order didn't completely let the agricultural industry off the hook, though. Agricultural water suppliers will be required to file yearly drought management plans that describe the actions the suppliers will take to manage water demand during the drought. Included in the plans will be how much water farmers requested and how much the suppliers provided.

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To receive future electronic copies of WET, please contact Yilin Zhuang.

Energy Efficient Home Workshop

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Please call 352-671-8400 to register by July 3.

Registration includes materials and refreshments.

Topics and Dates

July 9: Air Conditioning and Duct System

July 16: Lighting and Windows

July 23: Appliances and Electronics

July 30: Indoor Environmental Quality

Instructor and Cost

Yilin Zhuang, Ph.D.
UF/IFAS Extension Agent
$10 for each session and $30 for all.

Time and Location

6:30 pm - 8:30 pm
UF/IFAS Extension Marion County
2232 NE Jacksonville Rd.
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