



Long-term Drought: Expert Panel on Drought Preparedness and Response Strategies

Introduction

Water Resilience Portfolio Action 26.3 tasks the State with developing strategies to protect communities and fish and wildlife in the event of drought lasting at least six years. As part of its exploration of Action 26.3, the California Water Commission will host a panel of experts who will present policy perspectives and hands-on practitioner perspectives on implementation of drought preparedness and response strategies.

Heather Cooley, Director of Research at the Pacific Institute, will discuss the need to enhance California's water resilience by prioritizing water conservation and efficiency and embracing non-traditional water sources. California is already seeing progress in these areas, but we can and must do more in the face of a hotter, drier climate and more frequent and intense droughts.

Dr. Jeffrey Mount, Senior Fellow at the Public Policy Institute of California, will discuss what it will take to protect species during times of drought. Freshwater-dependent species in California are in decline. The loss of is due to many factors, but the impacts on native species populations are greatest during drought. With increasing drought intensity, the threats are becoming larger, requiring urgent responses: allocating resources to the environment and strategic investments in physical habitat. The challenge is to rebuild drought resilience in a landscape full of novel ecosystems in a rapidly changing climate. To better manage risk to native species, the State must take risks.

James Sarmiento, Executive Director of Cultural Resources for the Shingle Springs Band of Miwok Indians, will discuss a Tribal perspective on drought and how drought conditions affect cultural resources.

Elizabeth Salomone, General Manager of the Mendocino County Russian River Flood Control and Water Conservation Improvement District and Association of California Water Agencies Region 1 Board Member, will provide a rural viewpoint on the impacts of drought on small communities, agriculture, and environment, discussing how response and preparation in these resource-limited areas often requires innovation and grass roots solutions. There is a need to cultivate relationships and build coalitions of stakeholders to work in cooperation with regulators and elected officials. Open-minded collaboration in rural areas is essential to creatively unravel pressing resource issues.

David W. Pedersen, P.E., General Manager of the Las Virgenes Municipal Water District (LVMWD), will share his agency's experience managing its current emergency drought response and how it can inform a more comprehensive long-term approach to water resiliency. LVMWD was among the most severely impacted agencies in Southern California during the current statewide drought, facing a 73% reduction in its normal dry-year water supply. Aside from its water recycling efforts, LVMWD lacks local water supplies and is exclusively dependent on imported water from the State Water Project. Mr. Pedersen will explain how LVMWD and its customers conserved a record amount (an average of 38% from June 1 through December 31, 2022), while simultaneously planning for a future that is expected to be hotter and drier.

Tom Butler, Vice President of the Sutter Basin Corporation and California Rice Commission, California Rice Producers chairman and Executive Committee member, will highlight the effects of water shortages on farmers, its related businesses, their employees and most importantly, the habitat agriculture creates. California agriculture provides many unique benefits to the world population and has continually led the way in new methods of water conservation, improved habitat for species, and coexisted with expanding urban areas. Going forward, in Northern California, there needs to be continued development in water use and conveyance, and California agriculture stands poised to be proactive in doing so.

Panelists have been asked to address the following questions in their presentations:

- How do we protect communities and fish and wildlife from the impacts of drought?
- What kind of planning is needed to prepare for drought? Governance?
- What are the data gaps? How do we fill them?
- What role does public education, communication, and engagement play in drought preparedness and response?
- What policies and investments should the State make to best prepare for long-term drought?

Background

On July 28, 2020, the California Natural Resources Agency, California Environmental Protection Agency, and the California Department of Food and Agriculture issued the final [Water Resilience Portfolio](#) (portfolio) in response to Governor Newsom's Executive Order N-10-19, which calls for a "set of actions to meet California water needs through the 21st century." The portfolio outlines a broad suite of actions designed to move the state toward water resilience. The portfolio includes Action 26.3: Develop strategies to protect communities and fish and wildlife in the event of drought lasting at least six years. Action 26.3 is assigned to the California Natural Resources Agency and the California Environmental Protection Agency; the State Water Resources Control Board, Department of Water Resources, Department of Fish and Wildlife, and Department of Food and Agriculture represent these agencies. Action 26.3 is embedded in a section of the portfolio that is focused on preparation for a changing climate, which includes actions designed to help regions prepare for inevitable drought.

In a letter dated December 14, 2021, the Secretaries for Natural Resources, Environmental Protection, and Food and Agriculture requested that the Commission assist with this action by educating itself about potential long-term strategies for managing sustained drought and delivering a proposed set of investments and policies that would better position the state to manage severely constrained water supplies for at least six consecutive years. The Commission proposes to accomplish this work by leading a thorough and inclusive public dialog, similar to the Commission's recent efforts to assess a state role in financing climate-resilient conveyance and in supporting locally driven, in-basin groundwater trading programs that protect natural resources, small- and medium-sized farms, and disadvantaged communities. The Commission has coordinated with other agencies and developed a [framework](#) to advance its work without disrupting immediate drought response efforts. At the end of this process, the Commission will produce a paper that describes a set of strategies to protect communities and fish and wildlife in the event of long-term drought that agency policy makers can draw on when considering future policy and financial investment.

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The Commission's work on long-term drought will implement Goal One of the Strategic Plan, which calls on the Commission to "serve as a primary public forum for the discussion of improving water management policy to assist regions in achieving climate resiliency ... including those actions of the Water Resilience Portfolio assigned to the Commission."

Meeting Overview

Commissioners will hear from the panelists noted above, take questions from the public, and then engage in a discussion with the panelists.

This is an informational item.

Contact

Laura Jensen

Assistant Executive Officer

California Water Commission

916-820-5897