

Crescenta Valley Water District

Weekly News Articles

February 19, 2023



February 22, 2023

What to Know: How California Decides If We're in a Drought



A slew of different measurements go into determining whether the state is in a drought – and how severe that drought is

Some of the rainiest weeks since the Gold Rush left the state and the Bay Area drenched, but didn't technically end California's drought.

Here's what to know about how the state decides what's a drought and what's not.

The Golden State is, of course, no stranger to droughts: we've been living through them for most of the last decade. They can mean big wildfires, bad growing conditions for farmers, and water restrictions.

Three Kinds of Drought

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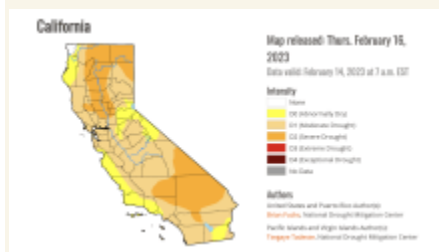
Droughts can be measured in a lot of different ways, but there are three basic kinds of drought that scientists look at.

- A *meteorological* drought means a lack of rainfall. In this case, those big storms left California doing just fine in that department.
- An *agricultural* drought generally means there's not enough moisture in the soil, which makes it hard for plants to grow.

- A *hydrologic* drought means that rivers, streams and groundwater are lower than normal.

The U.S. Drought Monitor

All three of those factors go into something called the [U.S. Drought Monitor](#). It's a map that comes out every week on Thursdays, and you might've seen it in our weather forecasts here at NBC Bay Area.



Courtesy: National Drought Mitigation Center

A U.S. Drought Monitor map for February 16, 2023 showed the majority of California in a moderate drought, with some parts of the state remaining in a severe drought.

It breaks up the country into color-coded areas — from yellow, which is just abnormally dry, all the way to a deep red color that signifies an "exceptional" drought — the kind where entire crops die off, and wells run dry.

Right after the heavy rains in January 2023, the U.S. Drought Monitor map showed most of California in a "moderate" drought, and left a few places in a "severe" drought — the kind where fire danger is high, and fire season lasts longer.

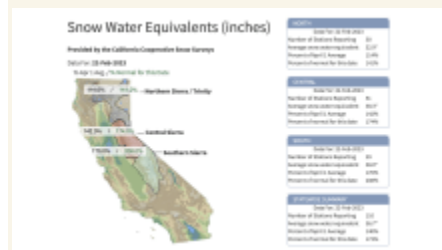
The rains did manage to eliminate the areas of "extreme" drought, which is when fire season can last year round.

Reservoirs and Snowpack

The U.S. Drought Monitor is a national index. But here in California, there are other things state regulators look at.

First, there are reservoirs, including the big ones that are part of the [State Water Project](#). Even the biggest rainstorm is not enough to refill the state's largest man-made lakes after a multi-year drought — but that incredibly wet January got close, and brought them to 96 percent of their historical average.

Then there's the [Sierra snowpack](#), which actually makes up 30 percent of the state's water storage. A month of storms at the start of 2023 put that above its historical average, at 138 percent by mid-February.



Courtesy: California Department of Water Resources

A map of snow water content measured in California showed the state with an above-average amount of water stored in snow as of February 22, 2023.

But the more important snowpack measurement happens in April, at the end of snow season, because snow can start to melt early during a warm winter. Water managers want it to pile up and stay frozen, so it can melt in the summer, and run off into creeks and streams that feed the state's water system.

Wells Running Dry

In just the last decade, the state started tracking another indicator: problems with wells — especially in areas that depend heavily on groundwater, like the Central Valley. Some communities get most or all of their water from huge underground lakes that both homes and farms rely on, and those subterranean bodies of water can take a lot longer to fill back up than lakes on the surface.

In the summer of 2022, there were more household wells that literally ran out of water than any other quarter since state authorities started keeping track. And even after the big storms a few months later, almost

two-thirds of the wells the state uses to measure and monitor groundwater were below their normal level.

It all means the wet start to 2023 got California closer to being out of a drought, but not all the way there. Droughts are stubborn, and even those unprecedented storms left the state needing more rain and more cool temperatures to officially get out of drought status.

<https://www.nbcbayarea.com/news/local/digital-originals/how-california-decides-measures-drought/3162986/>

Maven

February 22, 2023

THIS JUST IN ... DWR Announces Modest Increase in State Water Project Allocation – now 35%



The Department of Water Resources (DWR) today announced a modest increase in forecasted [State Water Project](#) (SWP) deliveries this year due to early gains in the Sierra snowpack. DWR now expects to deliver 35 percent of requested water supplies, up from 30 percent forecasted in January, to the 29 public water agencies that serve

27 million Californians. That would translate to an additional 210,000 acre-feet of water.

Record-breaking [atmospheric rivers](#) that pounded the state in January gave way to a mostly dry February that saw less than an inch of precipitation statewide to this point.

“We’re hopeful that more storms this week are a sign that the wet weather will return, but there remains a chance that 2023 will be a below average water year in the northern Sierra.” said DWR Director Karla Nemeth. “Careful planning and the use of advanced forecasting tools will enable the Department to balance the needs of our communities, agriculture, and the environment should dry conditions continue this spring and into next year.”

The SWP will continue to optimize water storage in Lake Oroville to support environmental needs in the summer and allow for carryover storage for next year if the spring becomes extremely dry. Additionally, the forecasted allocation could be adjusted back down if extreme dry conditions warrant.

The 35 percent allocation forecast announced today takes into account snowpack and reservoir storage from those storms, current hydrology conditions, spring runoff forecasts, and an anticipation of dry conditions ahead. The updated SWP forecast is on par with the [Central Valley Project](#) (CVP) initial allocations announced today by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation.

In addition to optimizing water storage, California continues to accelerate investments in habitat restoration, including [\\$52 million in grants](#) announced last week to help restore and protect fish and wildlife habitat throughout California.

Today’s updated SWP delivery forecast takes into account new snowmelt runoff data, known as Bulletin 120. This report provides a forecast of snowmelt runoff and is a key tool for water managers across the state to understand how the melting snow in the Sierra Nevada will reach streams, rivers and eventually California reservoirs. Bulletin 120 offers a range of possibilities to allow water managers to prepare for spring

runoff and eventual summer water supply. The forecast is updated regularly throughout the winter and spring.

DWR uses advanced forecasting tools that include Airborne Snow Observatory (ASO) surveys which are now underway to collect snow measurements farther upslope of the Sierra Nevada. The data from these flights, which use LiDAR and spectrometer technology to measure snowpack across broad swaths of key watersheds, is used by DWR to get a more accurate account of California's snowpack and possible spring runoff.

More than a month still remains in the state's wet season, but there's uncertainty about a return to warm and dry conditions prior to April 1, typically when the state's snowpack peaks and begins to melt. DWR is scheduled to conduct the next two snow surveys at Phillips Station on March 1 and April 3. Dates are subject to change depending on weather conditions and DWR will provide updates as the date approaches.

Conditions in the Colorado River Basin and California's groundwater basins continue to have an impact on available water supply. Californians should continue to use water wisely to help the state adapt to a hotter, drier future.

<https://mavensnotebook.com/2023/02/22/this-just-in-dwr-announces-modest-increase-in-state-water-project-allocation-now-35>