

Governors can't make it rain, but can prepare for droughts

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Governor Brown stated at a recent press conference that, while his administration was preparing to declare an official drought for the state, "[Governors can't make it rain](#)," acknowledging his limited ability to entirely alleviate California's drought woes through government actions.

He is right, of course. Governors have no more power over the weather than any other human being. What governors, and other politicians for that matter, ARE accountable for is how prepared our state is for dealing with what Mother Nature provides.

It is no secret that California experiences drought conditions on a semi-regular basis. The last time that conditions were this bad was some time ago, in 1977, but not so long ago that we should not have been prepared for a redux. Ironically, that 1977 drought was presided over by Governor Jerry Brown as well, in his first incarnation as California's chief executive.

With water rationing already occurring in the state, even in historically wet areas in Northern California, on January 17, Governor Brown declared an official Drought Emergency for California. The declaration eases water transfers so those in desperate need can get water (assuming it is available) without bureaucratic red-tape. It also directs state agencies to evaluate and manage the changing impacts of drought on threatened and endangered species, efficiently manage reduced water resources and consider modifying water quality requirements in order to mitigate water supply losses. These measures will help some water users cope with the limited supply, but there is frustratingly little that can be done by anyone besides Mother Nature to

actually provide more water in the short term.

However, this is not an excuse for government inaction. This should be a lesson about what the government SHOULD HAVE done to prepare for this situation. If we learn anything from the current drought, it is that California is ill prepared for prolonged droughts and must make the needed investments to shore up our future water supply security.



Lake Oroville, (above) the State Water Project's largest reservoir, was at only 36 percent of capacity on January 23.

Inadequate water storage and conveyance infrastructure has left some regions in dire straits. This year, State Water Project contractors received an initial allocation of just 5 percent of their water supply. That allocation is usually a conservative estimate and has been raised in the past after

December and January precipitation. With barely any rain falling so far this winter, those allocations may not be increased any time soon, if at all. However, even in years with adequate rainfall, such as 2011, State Water Contractors and Central Valley Project agricultural contractors received only 80 percent of their allocations due to the state's lacking water system.

The Brown administration has taken the initial steps toward creating a more reliable water supply for the state, with the release of the California Water Action Plan and continued support for the Bay Delta Conservation Plan process. Now it is time to follow through with these plans and address the state's aging water system. Investments in storage, conveyance and efficiency will do little to alleviate the current drought, but will make a world of difference when the next dry spell hits the state. In California, we can be certain that there will always be a next one.



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