



# Media Release

## **STATE URBAN WATER USERS EXCEED 20 PERCENT CONSERVATION GOAL FOR DECEMBER** *INDIVIDUAL WATER USE CONTINUES TO DECLINE*

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SACRAMENTO – While much of California has so far endured an exceptionally dry 2015, the State Water Resources Control Board announced that the statewide urban water conservation rate climbed to 22 percent in December, aided by a very wet end of 2014.

Additionally, total water use by individual Californians continued to decline in December, another positive development as the state is threatened by a fourth consecutive dry year. Encouraged by the newest data, State Water Board officials called on Californians to continue conserving as the drought persists.

“Today’s announcement is welcome news that demonstrates the importance of outdoor water savings,” said State Water Board Chair Felicia Marcus. “We have just gone through the driest January on record and it appears we are entering a fourth year of drought, which is awful to contemplate but we must. Conservation is still the smartest and most cost effective way to deal with this difficult drought.”

In the most recent survey of nearly 400 urban water retailers, the amount of water conserved by the state’s large urban water agency customers statewide jumped from 10 percent in November to 22 percent in December, in year-over-year water use comparisons. While wet conditions in December reduced the need for outdoor water use, likely contributing to the dramatic reduction, the results reflect a steady improvement in water conservation among nearly all the state’s hydrologic regions.

“This was a wet December in most of the state, and people got the message not to water on top of the rain – that is good news,” Marcus said. “Our challenge will be to keep outdoor irrigation to a minimum as we move into the warmer spring months.”

The December data represents the highest water savings rate since the state’s largest retail water suppliers began reporting in July, when the State Water Board adopted the [Emergency Water Conservation Regulation](#) which requires water suppliers and residents to work together to save water during the drought, primarily through reduced outdoor water use.



Since data collection began in July, more than 134 billion gallons of water have been saved compared with last year – enough to supply 1.8 million California residents for a year. For December, nearly all of the state’s hydrologic regions exhibited the best water conservation numbers since data reporting began.

As part of its efforts to build on conservation gains statewide, State Water Board members held a [water conservation workshop](#) in Los Angeles in December to consider additional conservation ideas and get input from water districts, environmentalists, and water policy experts. At its next board meeting on Feb. 17, the Board will hear presentations by staff on what ideas were suggested and what actions could be implemented by the State Water Board to sustain and possibly improve statewide water conservation efforts during 2015.

While board members were pleased to see improved water conservation in December, they discussed the importance of the State Water Board having measures in place for 2015 to assist water districts and their customers to ensure water conservation remains a priority for all Californians.

Reducing outdoor water use will be one focus of those measures. On average, in peak warmer months, outdoor water use contributes to 50 percent on average of the water used every day by urban residents. Other steps for consideration could include reinforcing habits and practices aimed at reducing indoor water use. These measures could also include extending or strengthening the current regulations, adding new limitations, or focusing on specific practices or geographies.

“We need to treat water as the precious resource that it is. We need to be sensitive to the fact that many Californians don’t have or barely have enough water to drink, cook and bathe,” said Marcus. “Hundreds of thousands of acres of agriculture have been fallowed, thousands of people are out of work, and fish and wildlife are struggling. Each individual act of conservation – such as letting the lawn go brown or fixing leaks – can add up to huge savings if enough people act.”

### **Water Conservation Efforts Net Water Savings**

Year over year monthly residential water savings statewide increased to 22.2 percent in December, up substantially from 9.9 percent in November. Broken down by hydrologic region, the results show that some parts of the state saved more water in December than any month since reporting requirements began over the summer.

For example, the Central Coast hydrologic region decreased water use by 29 percent in December compared to the same time in 2013, achieving the highest savings of any hydrologic region. Central Coast was followed by: Tulare Lake hydrological region (27.42 percent water use decrease over December 2013); South Coast hydrologic region (23.18

percent water use decrease over December 2013); San Francisco Bay hydrologic region (21.61 percent water use decrease over December 2013); Sacramento River hydrologic region (21.37 percent water use decrease over December 2013); San Joaquin River (18.94 percent water use decrease over December 2013); North Coast (15.92 percent water use decrease over December 2013); North Lahontan (14.19 percent water use decrease over December 2013), and Colorado River (6.69 percent water use decrease over December 2013).

The South Coast hydrologic region showed impressive gains, with 23.18 percent savings for December, compared to the 3.2 percent water conservation for November. With 56 percent of all the residential water customers statewide in the South Coast region, this conservation result significantly improved the December statewide average for residential water savings.

Prior to December, the highest statewide conservation rate was the 11.6 percent water savings rate for August, compared with August 2013 water use. California urban water use is generally the highest June through October.

The report also found that in December, 94 percent of the water agencies reporting had instituted outdoor water use restrictions. Outdoor water use restrictions are a key requirement for urban water suppliers under the [Emergency Water Conservation Regulation](#) because outdoor watering accounts for as much as 80 percent of urban water use in some areas.

### **Decline in Per Capita Daily Water Use Continues Statewide**

In addition to the December conservation data, the State Water Board also reported residential gallons per-capita per day (R-GPCD) for December. The report estimates daily water use by residential customers for nearly 400 urban water agencies statewide.

The statewide R-GPCD average for December was 67.2 gallons per person – a significant drop from November, when the statewide average use was 88.9 gallons per person, per day. State Water Board staff continues to study this trend in an effort to understand what is driving the reduction in water use in some hydrologic regions, but not others. Some of the R-GPCD drop was expected as outdoor watering tends to go down when cooler temperatures or precipitation arrive.

The water use reports are a requirement of the Emergency Water Conservation Regulation adopted by the State Water Board in July and are provided to the Board monthly by urban water suppliers, along with total water conservation for each month. The complete report is posted [here](#).

According to the R-GPCD data, water use varies widely by hydrologic region and showed consistent declines in water use during this fourth month of reporting. At the low end, the San Francisco Bay region averaged 53 gallons per person per day. On the high end, the Colorado River region averaged 151 gallons per person per day.

Examples of some communities with the respective R-GPCD averages for December 2014 in various hydrologic areas (in parenthesis) include: California-American Water Company Monterey District (Central Coast) with 33 R-GPCD; San Francisco Public Utilities Commission (San Francisco Bay) with 40 R-GPCD; City of Santa Cruz (Central Coast) with 41 R-GPCD; City of San Diego (South Coast), with 46 R-GPCD; San Jose Water Company (San Francisco Bay), with 53 R-GPCD; City of Santa Rosa (North Coast) with 56 R-GPCD; City of Stockton (San Joaquin River) with 57 R-GPCD, Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (South Coast), with 62 R-GPCD; City of Fresno (Tulare Lake), with 62 R-GPCD; City of Sacramento (Sacramento River) with 63 R-GPCD; City of Riverside (South Coast), with 63R-GPCD Sacramento County Water Agency (Sacramento River), with 78 R-GPCD, and California Water Services Company, Bakersfield (Tulare Lake) with 81 R-GPCD).

For additional information on water use, please visit the following resources:

- The Pacific Institute has an R-GPCD mapping tool [here](#).
- The State Drinking Water Program has an urban water R-GPCD Calculator [here](#).

## **Background**

In his Jan. 17, 2014, Emergency Drought Proclamation, Governor Brown called for Californians to voluntarily reduce their water use by 20 percent. The trend of increasing reductions and specific local data shows that many California communities have met and even exceeded the call to conserve. However, more can and must be done to protect water supplies should the drought persist. Current forecasts indicate that Californians cannot count upon a wet winter to end the drought.

The Emergency Water Conservation Regulation will be in effect until April 25, 2015, and will likely be extended if drought conditions persist. The State Water Board will closely monitor the implementation of the regulations and the weather over the coming months to determine if further restrictions are needed.

During 2014, the State Water Board took action to increase access to recycled water in an effort to augment scarce water supplies. Water recycling is the use of treated municipal wastewater for beneficial purposes, such as agricultural and landscape irrigation, industrial processes, and replenishing ground water basins. In March, the Board approved new low-interest financing terms for water recycling projects to help California produce an additional 150,000 acre-feet of recycled water annually. The effort makes \$800 million available for projects that will be eligible for funding such as recycled water treatment, distribution and storage facilities that can be completed by 2017. In June, the Board adopted a general order that makes it easier for communities to use non-potable recycled water for agriculture, landscape and golf course irrigation, and other uses. During the year, various regional boards took action to approve the use of recycled water for local projects under their jurisdiction.



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Visit [SaveOurWater.com](http://SaveOurWater.com) to find out how everyone can do their part, and visit [Drought.CA.Gov](http://Drought.CA.Gov) to learn more about how California is dealing with the effects of the drought.