



Media Release

State takes action to make urban water conservation a way of life

Coupled with ongoing actions, conservation regulation for urban retail water suppliers is expected to save 500,000 acre-feet per year by 2040

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SACRAMENTO – As part of the state’s all-of-the-above strategy to boost California’s water resilience amid climate change impacts, the State Water Resources Control Board today approved a nation-leading regulation that will promote more efficient water use by large water utilities across California.

Water conservation is an important component of the state’s multi-pronged [Water Supply Strategy](#) to address the 10% water supply shortfall anticipated by 2040 due to hotter and drier weather conditions.

The regulation applies to the state’s largest water utilities (urban retail water suppliers), which serve 95% of California residents. It does not apply to individuals or households. Actions already underway by suppliers, businesses and residents combined with the regulation are expected to produce about **500,000 acre-feet of water savings annually** by 2040 — enough to supply more than 1.4 million households for a year.

“Reaching this milestone goes beyond adopting the first-ever conservation regulation that uses a water budget; it’s a definitive step toward ensuring California’s long-term resilience to the hotter, drier climate we all are experiencing,” said Secretary for Environmental Protection Yana Garcia. “Along with investing in water infrastructure and other measures, conservation is a vital solution for addressing the state’s water supply needs.”

The State Water Board developed the regulation to implement [legislation passed in 2018](#), and its adoption follows extensive participation and input from water suppliers, non-governmental groups and the public. It requires the state’s largest suppliers to calculate water budgets based on residential indoor water use; residential outdoor water use; commercial, industrial and institutional landscapes with dedicated irrigation meters; and a supplier’s maximum allowable volume of water loss from leakage. By 2040, standards will be at their most efficient levels. The sum of the standard-based budgets is called the “[water use objective](#),” which is what water suppliers must comply with starting in 2027. This is the first regulation in the country to use a water budget to promote conservation.



To meet their overall objective, suppliers can adjust conservation actions to suit their local conditions and unique circumstances. Suppliers have a variety of tried-and-tested tools at their disposal to drive additional water conservation, including education and outreach, leak detection, rebates, and direct installation of efficient appliances or landscapes.

“Today is an exciting and historic moment for California because we have now formalized water conservation as a way of life,” said Joaquin Esquivel, board chair. “We’ve done this by building on lessons learned from drought and extensive input from water systems, customers and the public. The result balances saving water with making sure that suppliers have the flexibility they need to tailor their conservation strategies to local needs and climate.”

The board has in the past adopted temporary water conservation regulations during drought emergencies, and Californians stepped up in big and small ways, retaining water savings from those periods even after conditions returned to normal. The regulation adopted today could lessen the need for the kinds of emergency water use reduction targets that were important amid recent drought emergencies. It provides water suppliers with time to gradually evolve and expand programs to help make conservation a California way of life.

The regulation also accommodates suppliers with special circumstances. For example, suppliers may request variances (additional water budgets) for unique and significant uses of water, which could help them meet their objective. Examples include water use associated with horses and other livestock, supplementing ponds or lakes that sustain wildlife, evaporative coolers, and irrigating existing trees.

Protecting trees is a key board priority. In addition to the regulation allowing water suppliers to request a variance for irrigating existing trees, the regulation also incentivizes planting new, climate-ready trees.

The regulation is expected to be in effect by Jan. 1, 2025. To learn more about how the state is emphasizing efficient water use and long-term conservation goals, visit the board’s [Water Conservation Portal](#).

The State Water Board’s mission is to preserve, enhance and restore the quality of California’s water resources and drinking water for the protection of the environment, public health, and all beneficial uses, and to ensure proper resource allocation and efficient use for present and future generations.