

California Water Action Plan Finalized Amidst Historic Drought Conditions

Locked in one of California's driest winters ever recorded, on January 27 state officials released the final version of the California Water Action Plan. A high-level outline of the state's official vision and goals for water management over the next five years, the Water Action Plan describes **10 major actions** intended to address the most pressing water issues facing California.

1. Make conservation a California way of life.
2. Increase regional self-reliance and integrated water management across all levels of government.
3. Achieve the Delta Reform Act's "coequal goals" of reliable water supply and improved environmental quality for the Delta.
4. Protect and restore important ecosystems.
5. Manage and prepare for dry periods.
6. Expand water storage capacity and improve groundwater management.
7. Provide safe water for all communities.
8. Increase flood protection.
9. Increase operational and regulatory efficiency.
10. Identify sustainable and integrated financing opportunities.

Prepared by a collaboration of state agencies, with direction from Governor Brown and input from nearly 100 stakeholders, these action items are intended to serve as a **policy road map** both for coping with the current drought situation as well as building a more resilient and sustainable water management system for the future. The full text of the California Water Action Plan is available from the California Natural Resources Agency website [here](#).

Though it chiefly outlines plans in very broad strokes with few concrete details, the California Water Action Plan describes some **specific objectives**, including:

- Consolidate the drinking water, surface water, and groundwater quality programs under the authority of a single agency.
- Establish a new levee assessment district with authority to collect fees for funding repair of over 1000 miles of Delta levees.
- Provide increased funding to local governments and



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“integrated” projects that accomplish multiple water-related functions (e.g. water supply, water quality, and flood control).

- Clarify (possibly by legislative amendments) the application of Proposition 218 procedures to water-related fees and taxes.
- Remove fish passage barriers within the Yolo Bypass.
- Restore 10,000 acres of strategic mountain meadow habitat in the Sierra Nevada and Cascade ranges.
- Update the 2003 “California’s Groundwater” bulletin (Bulletin 118) with the latest field data.

The [Governor’s proposed 2014-15 budget](#) provides further substance to the action plan. It allocates \$618.7 million in funding for Water Action Plan items, including water efficiency projects, wetland and watershed restoration, groundwater programs, conservation, flood control, and integrated water management. Of that \$618.7 million total, \$472.5 million would be allocated to the Department of Water Resources as Proposition 84 funds for Integrated Regional Water Management (“IRWM”) Program grants facilitating improved regional self-reliance. **IRWM grant funding** is awarded to projects on a regionally competitive basis according to specific criteria that vary depending upon the type of project. Details regarding the IRWM grant award procedures are available [here](#) and [here](#). According to the most recent grant solicitations schedule, available [here](#), applications for new projects will likely next be due in winter 2014/2015.

“It is a tall order,” as Governor Brown admitted with regard to the California Water Action Plan in his January 22, 2014 State of the State address. “But it is what we must do to get through this drought and prepare for the next.”

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