

Lesson Learned – Preparing for Droughts Ahead

The mission of the Nipomo Community Services District is to provide its customers with reliable, quality, and cost-effective services now and in the future.

The arrival of rainy weather on the Mesa brings hope that the drought has lifted and all concerns that come with it melt away. For years Californians have dealt with the nagging question, when will this drought end? These last five years we've reshaped our habits and behaviors by a force of nature out of our control - the weather. While we can't control when the rain comes and where it falls, we can learn from the past and plan to be better positioned when we are faced with drought conditions.

Governor Schwarzenegger's administration recognized that something needed to be done to address the State's water security. In 2008, the Governor wrote to the California State Senate leadership outlining key elements of a comprehensive solution to problems being experienced in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta. The Governor's plan put California residents on a water diet. The plan set out to achieve a 20 percent reduction in per capita water use statewide by 2020. Water purveyors must demonstrate in their Urban Water Management Plans how they will meet what has come to be known as the 20x2020 Water Conservation Plan (<http://ncsd.ca.gov/resources/reports-by-subject/#urban-water-management>).

The dry years continued to come and the cycle of drought hit again before Governor Schwarzenegger's plan could reach its goal. But even the 20% reduction called out in his plan falls short of the conservation levels required to weather this latest drought. Governor Brown, in his effort to take on the drought, ordered communities up and down the State to reduce up to 36% of their water consumption. Nipomo CSD's mandated reduction was 28%. Our community answered the call and reduced water use by almost 32%. But how sustainable is this level of conservation and what consequences can we expect?

The Executive Summary of the Governor's 20x2020 Water Conservation Plan may have tapped into an understanding we Californians need to internalize as the population grows. (http://www.swrcb.ca.gov/water_issues/hot_topics/20x2020/). It recognizes that "the success of this 20x2020 Plan...relies on the fundamental revolution of the way Californians view water." Over the greater half of a decade water users across the State have been in training, reducing their water use to better align with their water supply. The Executive Summary goes on to suggest that it is necessary "to bring Californians to recognize that the water our lives depend on is indeed a very limited resource, and that it must be used wisely, innovatively, responsibly, and efficiently."

Looking back on historical California rainfall records, we see that every decade has had dry spells. We also see increased population and water demand over the same period of time. With these steady increases, it was only a matter of time before our demand for water would routinely exceed the rainfall we could reliably count on.

This winter's rainfall gives us some breathing room, but solutions need to be developed and implemented. Knowing what we know about water in California, we can't allow other issues to distract us from the task at hand – finding a more permanent solution to our water woes for ourselves and the generations that follow us.

Until next time...