



# Western States Water

## Addressing Water Needs and Strategies for a Sustainable Future

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### **WESTERN GOVERNORS/ADMINISTRATION** **California/Atmospheric Rivers**

On January 4, Governor Gavin Newsom (D-CA) declared a state of emergency after a series of atmospheric rivers systems struck California, and in advance of additional forecasted storms and expected flooding. The proclamation noted that the storms threaten critical infrastructure and burn scars from recent wildfires, and that counties have not had time to mitigate the cascading impacts of the storms.

On January 8, Governor Newsom submitted a request to President Biden for a Presidential Emergency Declaration under the provisions of the Stafford Act. He noted that the atmospheric river systems “have pummeled California since December 27, 2022” and “are forecast to continue...through at least January 19, 2023.” He said the impacts of the “significant, if not historic” flooding have strained local, tribal, and state resources. “The cumulative effects of all the recent precipitation to a now saturated State are a stark contrast from the extremely dry environmental conditions previously. River, creek, stream, roadway, and urban floods will be at their highest during this period. In addition to the probability of flooding, there is grave concern regarding the risk of mud and debris flows from approximately 21 burn scars due to recent wildfires across California.”

President Biden approved the request of January 9, authorizing the Department of Homeland Security and Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to coordinate all disaster relief efforts and to provide appropriate assistance for required emergency measures, authorized under Title V of the Stafford Act, to save lives and to protect property and public health and safety, and to lessen or avert the threat of a catastrophe in seventeen counties.

As of January 11, for the water year, average precipitation statewide totaled 15.08 inches, or 153% of the historical average of 9.85 inches, with more storms since and more to come. The historic maximum precipitation total is 18.44 inches. Statewide snowpack levels are 104% of the average peak snow water

equivalent (with 27.6 inches, or 224% of normal for January 13). The Southern Sierra range is at 126% of the April 1 average peak (and 266% of normal), with the Central Sierra is at 106%/226% and the Northern Sierra at 87%/191%. <https://cwww.water.ca.gov/>

Statewide, major reservoir levels are at 87% of average, with most still below their historic average and well below their capacity. Between December 26 and January 9, reservoir levels behind Shasta Dam, part of the federal Central Valley Project, rose 21 feet, with recent inflows peaking at 41,502 cfs and operational releases ramping up, as storage has topped two million acre-feet (maf). The California State Water Projects largest reservoir, Lake Oroville, similarly rose 62 feet over the same time period, and storage is now over 1.8 maf with recent inflows of up to 27,964 af. Other reservoirs have also seen similar increases in inflows and storage. ([northcountydailystar.com](http://northcountydailystar.com), 1/9/2023)

Of note, 64% of groundwater monitoring wells report below normal levels, and eleven dry wells have been reported so far this year to the California Department of Water Resources (CDWR).

On January 5, Jeanine Jones, CDWR Interstate Resources Manager, explained: “The last three water years, from October 2019 to October 2022, have been the driest three-year period on record going back to 1896. This has created a huge water deficit that will take time – and much more rain and snow – to erase. While current storms have created a strong start to the wet season, we’re still in early January with over half of the wet season remaining. Major reservoir storage remains below average, and conditions could turn dry again this winter, offsetting recent rain and snow.” [www.sfgate.com/california-drought/article/is-the-california-drought-over-17713806.php](http://www.sfgate.com/california-drought/article/is-the-california-drought-over-17713806.php)

### **CONGRESS** **House Leadership/Committees**

With the ultimate election of Rep. Kevin McCarthy as Speaker of the House, leadership moved forward with House rules changes and the selection of committee

chairs. Rep. Glenn Thompson (R-PA) returns to chair the House Agriculture Committee, with jurisdiction over the U.S. Department of Agriculture, including the Natural Resources Conservation Service and U.S. Forest Service. Rep. David Scott (D-GA) is now the Ranking Minority Member.

Rep. Kay Granger (R-TX), a fiscal conservative, will chair the Appropriations Committee, with Rep. Rosa DeLauro (D-CN) as the Ranking Member. Granger has served in the House for 25 years. Rep. Jodey Arrington (R-TX) will chair the Budget Committee, and a priority will be addressing the national debt. Republicans have promised to hold down Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 spending to no more than FY2022 levels. Rep. Brendan Boyle (D-PA) is the Ranking Member.

Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers (R-WA) is the new chair of the Energy and Commerce Committee. A member since 2005, she is the former chair of the House Republican Conference, and a long-time proponent of domestic energy production. The Committee's jurisdiction also covers broadband, public health and research, and environmental quality. Rep. Frank Pallone (D-NJ) is the Ranking Member.

The Natural Resources Committee will be chaired by Rep. Bruce Westerman (R-AR), with jurisdiction over public lands and water, energy production, mining, fisheries, wildlife and Native American issues. He is a Yale graduate with a master's degree in forestry. Rep. Raul Grijalva (D-AZ) is now the Ranking Member.

Rep. Frank Lucas (R-OK) will lead the Science, Space and Technology Committee, with Rep. Zoe Lofgren (D-CA) as the Ranking Member. The Committee has jurisdiction over federal science development (non-defense related), including oversight of research activities of the Environmental Protection Agency, National Aeronautics and Space Administration, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, including all activities related to weather and climate, marine fisheries and oceanic research, as well as risk assessment.

The new Chair of the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee is Rep. Sam Graves (R-MO). He has said, "T&I will have a full agenda over the next two years, including oversight of the Administration, its implementation of the massive \$1.2 trillion infrastructure law, and its policies.... I am also looking forward to working across the aisle to develop...the next Water Resources Development Act." Rep. Rick Larsen (D-WA) is the Ranking Member.

## **WATER RESOURCES**

### **Drought/Water Supply Outlook**

Record drought gripped much of the contiguous U.S. in 2022 with annual precipitation totaling 28.35 inches (1.59 inches below average), making it the third driest year on record. Nebraska saw its fourth-driest year on record, while California had its ninth-driest. Across the West, drought peaked in early May covering 91.3% of the region, according to the U.S. Drought Monitor. Following multiple years of drought, some major reservoirs dropped to their lowest levels on record. In 2022, the western/central U.S. drought and heatwave cost an estimated \$22.2B, making it the second costliest disaster of 18 separate billion-dollar weather and climate disasters. (NIDIS Dry Times, 1-12-2023)

However, at present, there is an abundance of snow across much of the West, as a series of storms associated with atmospheric rivers, beginning in the last few days of December, brought huge amounts of precipitation (including mountain snowfall) to the Sierra Nevada, Great Basin, and parts of the Upper Colorado River Basin. While helping to alleviate drought conditions, the abundant rainfall caused major flooding in parts of California. There are still small isolated areas where the snowpack is below average, including the Sangre De Cristo Mountains, straddling the Colorado-New Mexico border, where the snow water equivalent (SWE) at most SNOTEL sites is about 40-70% of normal. In the northern Rockies, many locations are at near-to-slightly below normal SWE in northern Idaho, western Montana, and northern Wyoming. (NIDIS Dry Times 1-12-2023)

## **ORGANIZATIONS/WATER RESOURCES**

### **IFC/AFS/Instream Flow Research Center**

The Instream Flow Council (IFC) and American Fisheries Society (AFS) draft feasibility assessment to establish a national instream flow and water level conservation training and research center (Center) is now available for download and review. See <https://www.instreamflowcouncil.org/instream-flow-and-water-level-conservation-center/>.

The 10-person Steering Committee (SC) is seeking public review and online feedback on this document from all interested stakeholders. Responses will be reviewed by the entire SC to help finalize this report and improve the prospect for successful establishment and operation of the Center. The deadline for feedback is February 6, and may be submitted at the link above.

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**The WESTERN STATES WATER COUNCIL is a government entity of representatives appointed by the Governors of Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming.**