EXHIBIT 27

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Drought, schmrought, water experts already fret the next dry year and still preach conservation

First time since 2011 no drought in California

Water is up in the Canyon Basin Spreading grounds in a former gravel pit in Azusa on Friday, March 15, 2019. (Photo by Sarah Reingewirtz, Pasadena Star-News/SCNG)

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You might think every water manager in the Golden State is sleeping soundly these days.

L.A. rainfall is 158 percent of average. Ten of the 12 state reservoirs are filled to more than 100 percent of their historical average for mid-March — before the all-important snowpack which stands at 152 percent of normal has melted.

Gone drought-free

For the first time in 376 consecutive weeks, not 1 acre of California is in drought, according to new data released Thursday by The National Drought Mitigation Center, a joint project of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the University of Nebraska.

Yet, even with all this wet news, local water manager still preach conservation and worry the drought will return next year and the year after. Also, they face the very real threat of climate change reducing snowpack forever, which may force them to stop relying on the open spigot from Northern California to keep water flowing through customers' pipes and into SoCal homes and businesses.

“If you were to ask me when are you going to sleep soundly? Maybe after three-to-four years not only of above average rain, but rain we are able to capture,” said Tony Zampiello, executive officer of the Main San Gabriel Basin Watermaster.

Zampiello and others are like bankers of water, socking away all they can in times of plenty for the nonrainy days to come.

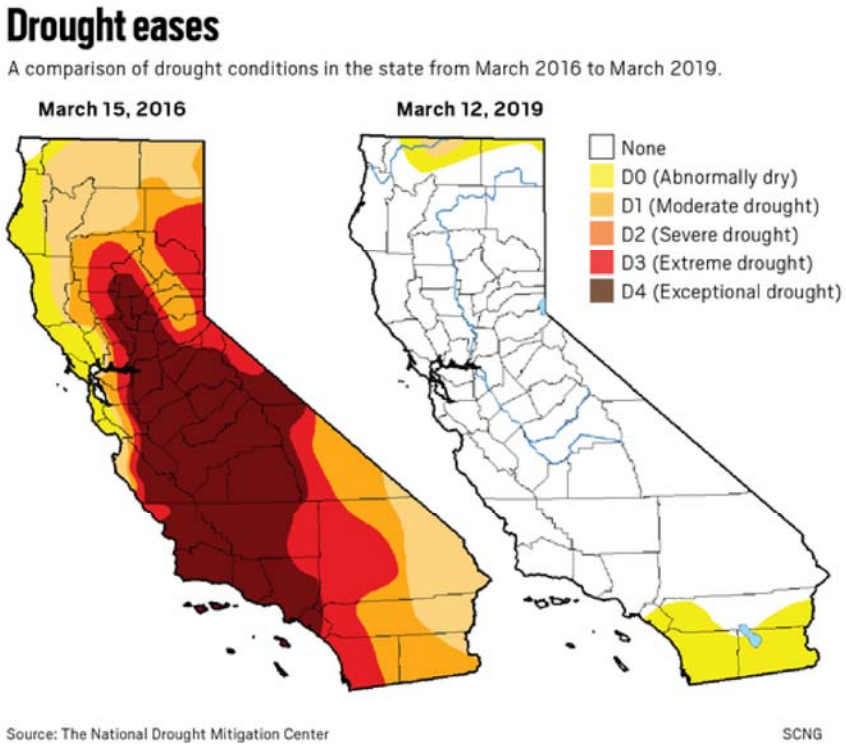
“Yes, maybe we are out of the woods,” he said. “But if we have another drought, that gallon of water you save today, you’ll be drinking in five years.”

It’s all about groundwater

What he and other managers are concerned about is groundwater — parked throughout the region in various underground caverns — that supplies more than 60 percent of water for some areas. This water sustains life for tens of millions of Southern Californians as it is pulled up through wells owned by cities, for-profit water companies and mutual water districts.

But because of years of over-pumping to the point of wells going dry, the basins remain too low and have not returned to pre-drought levels. The damage from so little rain for so long will take more than one wet year to reverse, water experts said.

“When people open their umbrellas, they are not necessarily thinking we still have a long time to go to restore water levels of groundwater basins. One really wet year doesn’t make up for 10 years of dry,” said Robb Whitaker, general manager of the Water Replenishment District of Southern California, who manages two basins: Central and West Coast, which include 43 cities from Norwalk to Hermosa Beach.



For example:

- The Orange County Ground Water Basin is about 78 percent full, up 12 percent from this time last year, according to John Kennedy, executive director of engineering and water resources. The basin serves 19 agencies and about 2.5 million people, the primary ground water source in Orange County.
- Main San Gabriel Basin is at about 60 percent or less. Another way to gauge the health is to measure the height of the water table. In 2010, before the drought kicked in, it was 237 feet above sea level. In November, it dropped down to 169.4 feet, the lowest in its history. As of Friday, it was at 182 feet, Zampiello said.
- Central and West Coast basins in Los Angeles County are about 60 percent full, Whitaker said. And that is after the rains rose the water table by 18 feet since March 2018, he said.
- San Bernardino Basin is filling up, but measurements won't be taken until November, said Craig Miller, Western Municipal Water District's general manager. "We know water is recharging into the aquifer because we are capturing rain water," he said, confidently.

Local runoff is key

The snow-capped San Gabriels on Friday are more than a picture postcard to water folks. They are liquid gold. Water from this tremendous watershed is already flowing down the San Gabriel River until it reaches a rubber dam that slows the flow and diverts it to giant, spreading basins at the 605/210 freeways interchange near Irwindale. There, water stops and percolates into the groundwater basin.

In addition to local runoff, agencies will buy supplemental State Water Project water from Northern California. The San Gabriel basin will reach 195 feet by the end of December, he said, just shy of the safe operating level of 200 feet.

"The rubber dam is fully inflated," said Kelly Gardner, assistant executive officer of the San Gabriel Basin Watermaster during a tour Friday. "It allows the water to pass through the concrete juncture to the spreading grounds."

Water released beyond the Whittier Narrows Dam in Pico Rivera serves Long Beach and surrounding cities. All the cities in L.A. County must share this mountain water, according to a 1973 water rights adjudication in the courts. At first, about 700 acre-feet was let go to the ocean, but since the end of January, all the water in the soft-bottom San Gabriel River is captured and stored, Gardner said.

Just a few miles northeast of Irwindale, the Canyon Basin Spreading Grounds in Azusa are filling up with mountain runoff. Water managers can watch as the groundwater is replenished and dip in with wells that serve cities of Azusa and Glendora. This was working perfectly Friday, unlike during the drought years, when Glendora had to shut off some of its wells because they couldn't reach the shrinking aquifer.

The Inland Empire — both Riverside and San Bernardino counties — use water from the San Bernardino Mountains. For example, for the first time in 10 years, water is filling up behind the Seven Oaks Dam in Mentone, reaching 16,000 acre-feet of water. (One acre-foot is about 326,000 gallons or enough for a Southern California family for two years).

"For the last decade, we haven't been seeing that," said Miller. "It is a very good sign."

Adding other water

Orange County Water District gets 60,000 acre-feet annually from rainfall and 50,000 acre-feet from runoff coming down the Santa Ana River. But it also adds 103,000 acre-feet from its recycled sewage water system, the largest such system in the world, Kennedy said. The extra recycled water helps make the area nearly drought-proof.

"Orange County typically receives about 14 inches of rain and, so far, we've received just over 21 inches," he said. "But the next drought is around the corner. One wet year does not solve our water supply challenges, and we must all do what we can to practice ongoing conservation and support alternative water supply projects."

Typically, water from the Santa Ana River escapes to the ocean about five days of the year, Kennedy said. Zampiello said the San Gabriel River water is captured after a first blush of rain — which contains contaminants — 100 percent of the time. On the other end of the spectrum is the Los Angeles River — mostly concrete — which rarely captures any of its runoff.

Although contacted, the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power did not provide comments for this story.

By summer, the Water Replenishment District will have put into places its own a water recycling project that recharges groundwater levels. When that happens, it will not longer need to buy water from Northern California or the Colorado River, Whitaker said.

Conservation still preached

Metropolitan Water District of Southern California, the largest water wholesaler in the world, announced a plan last week with a goal of Southern California saving 180,000 acre-feet of water by 2040. The agency doubled its turf removal rebate to encourage removal of lawns.

Adan Ortega, a MWD director from Fullerton and former manager of MWD's water conservation efforts, said agencies need to tailor water savings to each community. For example, denser, lower-income regions don't have extensive lawns.

"We've got to get to the point where every community addresses its greatest source of water loss. Some places, it's lawns. Other places, you have to replace the old, leaky pipelines," Ortega said.

Water managers are gearing up for a different kind of water conservation campaign this summer, one that gets people to recognize the importance of filling up out-of-sight groundwater basins. Details for the new messaging are not available yet.

"The hills are green, but that doesn't mean everything is OK," he said.

Reservoir Levels (% historical average)

Trinity Lake, 98 percent

Lake Shasta, 112 percent

Lake Oroville, 103 percent

Folsom Lake, 110 percent

New Melones Lake, 138 percent

Don Pedro Reservoir, 118 percent

Lake McClure, 130 percent

San Luis Reservoir, 114 percent

Millerton Lake, 122 percent

Pine Flat Reservoir, 120 percent

Lake Perris, 103 percent

Castaic Lake, 93 percent

Metropolitan Water District Reservoir Levels

Lake Mathews, 91 percent full

Diamond Valley Lake, 91 percent full

Lake Skinner, 84 percent full

Staff writer Marin Wisckol contributed to this article.

Coast Lines

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