

# California faces third drought year

by Nicholas F. Benton

California is bracing for the imposition of a virtual state of martial law if the current trend continues into a record third consecutive year of severe drought this summer.

The state's Department of Water Resources issued a report to the State Legislature earlier this year noting that then-Governor Jerry Brown succeeded in revising the state's Emergency Services Act during the 1977 drought to provide police-state powers to the government in the event of water crises.

Under the provisions of this law, the governor of California may declare an emergency, which gives him the power to "make, amend, and rescind emergency orders and regulations that have the force and effect of law." He may also "suspend the provisions of any regulatory statute, or statute prescribing the procedure for the conduct of the state's business, or any orders, rules or regulations of a state agency."

In other words, the powers of the governor become almost limitless under the conditions which forecasters are now predicting will, indeed, occur this summer.

## International impact

Prospects of a third consecutive dry year in California will have dire consequences for the state, but the loss of billions of dollars of California agricultural production will have a national and even global impact.

Continued low rainfall levels this past winter have caused the state to brace for the worst drought since the 16th century, based on a survey of annular rings on trees.

Draconian conservation measures have already been drawn up and are ready for emergency implementation. They would wreak havoc on the state's \$8 billion-a-year agricultural industry, and present public health hazards in cities where stiff prohibitions on water use, as for showers and flush toilets, would be invoked.

Some conservation measures have continued in effect since last April. Last summer, for example, mandatory rationing went into effect in San Francisco and Alameda County, across the Bay, aimed at reducing overall water use by 25%. Use above 400 gallons per household per day has been penalized by increased rates.

Even more severe penalties are being exacted in El Dorado County, where local authorities invoked the power to warn, cite, fine, or cut water services to customers violating district rationing policy.

According to the state's Department of Water Resources, one-third of California's 25 million people and more than 40% of its agriculture were directly affected by the drought. A total of 14 counties declared drought emergencies, while ranchers in 42 counties were accepted into federal emergency feed programs, and over 180 water purveyors in 45 counties had water supply shortages.

A total of 84 water agencies from 41 counties are reporting plans to ration water if the drought continues this year.

One of the most severe problems is on the eastern slope of the Sierra Nevada mountains, in the Tahoe-Truckee Basin. Shortages there caused Lake Tahoe to drop below its rim last October, cutting the flow of the Truckee River to 33% of normal.

In the San Francisco and East Bay areas, which depend heavily on importations from the Tuolumne and Mokelumne Rivers, the threat of another dry year will require much more severe rationing than now exists.

Central Valley farmers who depend on the federal and state water projects are also bracing for the worst. Agricultural contractors for the State Water Project are already being warned that their supply will be cut back by 40% if the drought persists.

## Need to think big again

The drought in California has only underscored the folly of so-called "environmentalist" and anti-growth forces in the state who have successfully blocked the development of new water resources in recent decades.

Nothing could make this clearer than the fact that southern California, historically much drier than the part of the state north of the Tehachapi Mountains, will not be nearly as severely affected by the drought as will areas in the north and central regions.

The reason for this is that most of southern California's water comes from the Colorado River through water diversion canals, and there was plenty of snow in the Rocky Mountain headwater regions of the Colorado this past winter.

So, southern Californians are relatively insulated from the effects of the drought because of their ability to rely on a source made available to them by a large-scale water diversion project—exactly the kind of project that has been so vociferously and effectively opposed by the "environmentalist" and anti-growth zealots.

If there is any redeeming feature to the prospect of a third drought year in California, it lies only in the hope that the public there will snap out of the anti-growth stupor of recent decades, and begin to embrace big ideas again as a way to solve their needs.

The North American Water and Power Alliance idea from the 1960s would have diverted northern-flowing Canadian and Alaskan waters southward via a series of river and canal linkages. It is again time to look seriously at projects that will bring surplus water from Canada and Alaska.