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California

Huge snowpack prompts state officials to revisit drought status

By **TIM HEARDEN**
Capital Press

SACRAMENTO — Is California about to formally declare an end to its five-year drought?

After abundant winter rainfall and snow accumulation, state officials plan an announcement about California's "drought status" within the next week, said Doug Carlson, spokesman for the state Department of Water Resources.

Exactly when the statement will come is still unknown, as is when and if the State Water Project will increase its current allocation of 60 percent of its 29 member water agencies' requested supplies, Carlson said.

But the DWR's manual snow survey on March 30, which found a season-high snow-water equivalent of 46.1 inches in the Sierra Nevada near Lake Tahoe, makes the state's rebound from drought all the more evident, officials say.

"I think that the winter season has certainly been encouraging, and one might be justifiably optimistic about what our availability for water distribution will be later in the year," Carlson said. "Certainly it's a better picture than we've seen the last five years. I think anybody can take heart in that."

The manual survey at Phillips Station, about 90 miles east of Sacramento, was 183 percent of the late March and early April average for the site, which is 25.2 inches. Snow accumulation has increased each month since



Rich Pedroncelli/Associated Press

Frank Gehrke, right, chief of the California Cooperative Snow Surveys Program for the Department of Water Resources, places the snow survey tube on a scale held by Nic Nistice, of the Sierra Nevada Conservancy, while doing the manual snow survey at Phillips Station on March 30 near Echo Summit, Calif. State water officials are considering changing California's drought status.

January, when just 6 inches of snow-water equivalent was found.

The survey came as electronic measurements showed that water content in the northern Sierra was 40.8 inches on March 30, 147 percent of the multi-decade average for the date, according to the DWR. The central Sierra's 50.5 inches is 175 percent of average, while the 43.9 inches in the southern Sierra is 164 percent of average, the agency reports.

The big snowmelt will result in high water in many rivers through the spring, state climatologist Michael Anderson said.

"The snowpack at Phillips today was almost 8 feet deep," Carlson said. "That is a tremendous contrast for anybody to recognize what kind of a year it has been. Two

years ago ... there was literally no snow there."

Northern California legislators and water district officials have urged Gov. Jerry Brown to declare that the drought is over, citing the winter's deluges and heavy snowpack. The governor's executive orders mandating continued, long-term water savings were appropriate, "but this power should not be abused," state Sen. Jim Nielsen, R-Gerber, said in February.

State water regulators have so far been hesitant, noting that some Central Valley communities still depend on trucked and bottled water and that groundwater — the source of at least one-third of the supplies Californians use — will need more than one wet winter to be replenished in many areas.

Roads bill would limit truck pollution mandates

SACRAMENTO (AP) — A plan to raise taxes and fees to pay for California road repairs includes a concession to the trucking industry that would block the state from requiring truck owners to upgrade to lower-emission models.

The provision angered environmentalists, who implored lawmakers to reject it Monday, saying it would perpetuate health problems in neighborhoods around ports and other

areas exposed to a high volume of truck traffic.

Commercial truck emissions are one of the largest sources of pollution in areas with the dirtiest air, but the giveaway to truckers would undermine future mandates to deal with them, said Adrian Martinez, an attorney for Earthjustice.

"Our communities cannot breathe, and we thought that our right to breathe would be worth more than a few billion

dollars in transportation improvements," Katie Valenzuela Garcia told the Senate Appropriations Committee.

Valenzuela Garcia is the co-chair of a committee that advises the California Air Resources Board.

Following a rare direct appeal from Gov. Jerry Brown, Democrats on the committee voted along party lines to send the measure to the full Senate, which was expected to take it up on Thursday.

Growers still seeking alternatives to chlorpyrifos despite reprieve

By **TIM HEARDEN**
Capital Press

SACRAMENTO — Don't expect a renaissance for chlorpyrifos use among California growers now that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has declined to ban the pesticide.

So opines Pete Goodell, a University of California Cooperative Extension pest control adviser who held a series of grower workshops last year on the proposed ban.

Some growers may be glad to still have chlorpyrifos available when nothing else works, but in many cases farms have already found alternative treatments and preventive measures, he said.

"People have shifted away for a number of reasons," said Goodell, an associate director of the UC's Statewide Integrated Pest Management Program. "One is that some of the crop may require contracts that say you aren't going to use certain products. For others, with the restrictions and regulations, they've moved away because it's not as difficult to use other products."

In California, chlorpyrifos is used to tackle pests that can destroy some 60 different crops, including almonds, alfalfa, walnuts, oranges, cotton and grapes, explained Charlotte Fadipe, spokeswoman for the state Department of Pesticide Regulation.

Use of the pesticide has been declining over the last decade, from more than 2 million pounds in 2005 to about 1.3 million pounds in 2014, the last year for which data is available, Fadipe said.

Growers were sent scrambling for alternatives when the EPA announced a plan to revoke food residue tolerances for chlorpyrifos, which is produced by Dow AgroSciences and acts as a contact or stomach poison to pests. The agency took comments in the fall of 2015.

But on March 29, new EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt said the agency was denying a petition by environmental groups to ban the pesticide's use in agriculture. The EPA banned home use of chlorpyrifos in 2000 and ordered buffer zones around sensitive



Tim Hearden/Capital Press

Pete Goodell, left, and Lori Berger of the University of California's Statewide Integrated Pest Management Program prepare to give a presentation on chlorpyrifos at an almond workshop last year in Chico, Calif. Goodell said he doesn't expect an upsurge in chlorpyrifos use in California now that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has declined to ban the substance for agricultural use.

sites, such as schools, in 2012.

In recent years, California has put significant controls on the use of chlorpyrifos, requiring training, licensing and local county approval for anyone who uses it. Growers must explain to their county agricultural commissioner when, where and how they want to use the pesticide, and counties require buffers of up to 150 feet between the user and a school, river or other sensitive site.

California's rules remain intact, and the DPR "may put further restrictions in place if warranted," Fadipe told the Capital Press in an email.

In 2014, the DPR contracted with the UC's pest management program to create commodity-specific guidelines for using chlorpyrifos. Teams focused on its use on alfalfa, almonds, citrus fruit and cotton, identifying alternatives as well as instances when use of the chemical is critical to protecting the crop.

A resulting report by UC IPM examined other pest-control tactics, including pest-resistant varieties, mating disruption, field sanitation and other insecticides.

But in some cases, no alternatives were available. For instance, almond growers need chlorpyrifos to combat leaffooted plant bugs and stink bugs, which both feed

on and damage developing nuts, scientists found.

"It's still one of those tools ... that's good to have there in situations when you do need it," Goodell said.

Several farm groups put out statements praising Pruitt's announcement. California Citrus Mutual president Joel Nelsen said the decision shows that the EPA is taking more of a science-based approach to regulating pesticides.

Among chlorpyrifos' uses for citrus growers is to battle the Asian citrus psyllid, which can carry the deadly tree disease huanglongbing.

National Council of Farmer Cooperatives president Chuck Conner said he hopes the decision "can serve as a roadmap as the EPA moves forward in assessing other crop protectants in the review and registration process."

But the Center for Food Safety complained that President Donald Trump's administration disregarded long-term studies from the EPA and National Institutes of Health concluding that exposure to chlorpyrifos could harm children's brains.

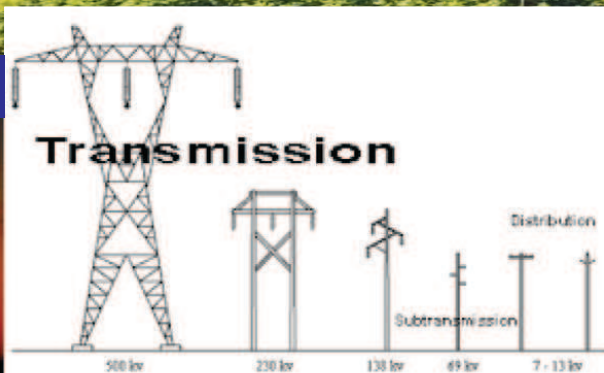
"This reversal ... is a frightening indicator that the new administration will stop at nothing to protect corporate interests," said Andrew Kimbrell, the center's executive director.

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