

Gov. Brown declares drought over, issues conservation orders

By **TIM HEARDEN**
Capital Press

SACRAMENTO — Gov. Jerry Brown Friday declared an end to California’s five-year drought while proposing new long-term water conservation measures that must be passed by the Legislature.

Brown rescinded two emergency proclamations he made in 2014 as well as four drought-related executive orders in 2014 and 2015, but he maintained water reporting requirements and prohibitions on what officials consider wasteful practices, such as watering during or right after rainfall.

“This drought emergency is over, but the next drought could be around the corner,” Brown said in a statement. “Conservation must remain a way of life.”

The drought emergency was lifted in all counties ex-



Associated Press File

In this photo taken May 18, 2015, irrigation pipes sit along a dried irrigation canal on a field farmed by Gino Celli near Stockton, Calif. On Friday Gov. Jerry Brown declared California’s five-year drought over.

cept for Fresno, Kings, Tulare and Tuolumne, where emergency drinking water programs will continue to take pressure off depleted groundwater supplies.

The State Water Resources Control Board will continue to enforce urban con-

trols, including reporting requirements, and the state will continue to respond to an unprecedented bark beetle outbreak in drought-stressed forests that has killed millions of trees, the governor’s office stated.

Meanwhile, the state De-

partment of Water Resources, Department of Food and Agriculture and other agencies will push for legislation to establish long-term conservation measures and improved planning for future droughts.

Among the measures would be a requirement for agricultural water suppliers to submit plans on how they’ll increase water use efficiency and develop adequate drought plans, and improved drought planning for small water suppliers and rural communities.

“California’s farmers and ranchers practice conservation every day,” CDFA secretary Karen Ross said. “They are prepared to continue in that spirit in adherence to groundwater regulations and the adoption of more efficient irrigation systems.”

California was prompted to review its “drought status” after the DWR’s latest manual snow survey on March 30

found a season-high snow-water equivalent of 46.1 inches in the Sierra Nevada near Lake Tahoe, or 183 percent of average for this time of year, agency spokesman Doug Carlson told the Capital Press.

Brown’s new executive order on April 7 came as a wintry storm softened already saturated ground, brought wind gusts of up to 62 mph and knocked out power to more than 40,000 Pacific Gas and Electric Co. customers in the San Francisco Bay area, The Associated Press reported.

Up to 3 feet of new snow was expected in the Sierra Nevada, according to the National Weather Service.

Northern California legislators and water district officials had urged Brown to declare the drought’s end, 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 had 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.

The long-term measures proposed by Brown pleased environmental groups, some of which issued statements supporting the measures. Natural Resources Defense Council senior water policy analyst Tracy Quinn argued that the near-failure of a spillway at Oroville Dam demonstrated the vulnerability of the state’s water system and reinforces the need for efficiency.

Horticulturist appointed director of OSU’s Mid-Columbia center

By **ERIC MORTENSON**
Capital Press

HOOD RIVER, Ore. — Veteran horticulturist Steve Castagnoli is the new director of Oregon State University’s Mid-Columbia Agricultural Research and Extension Center in Hood River.

Castagnoli has worked at the center since 2000, and is well known among the area’s pear and sweet cherry growers. His appointment comes after a tumultuous couple years in which three key people resigned, including the previous superintendent. Tree fruit growers hope the center will

stabilize and resume research projects that were interrupted when the people conducting them left.

“I’m very supportive of Steve’s appointment,” said Mike Omeg, a cherry grower in The Dalles who also sits on the Capital Press board of directors. “He understands the tree fruit industry in the Mid-Columbia real well.”

But Omeg warned that Castagnoli has stiff challenges ahead of him, including “staff and funding issues that are profound.”

The center has seen significant turnover. Horticulturist Todd Einhorn, who was doing

what growers consider important dwarf root stock research on pears, left to work on apples at Michigan State University. Entomologist Peter Shearer, who had been the research center superintendent, resigned in 2016; he was among the Pacific Northwest’s key researchers on spotted wing drosophila and brown marmorated stink bugs, two damaging pests.

Preston Brown, who managed the center’s 55-acre experimental farm, also quit. And Brian Tuck, whom Castagnoli replaced, rotated back to his post as regional administrator of Extension in Hood River and Wasco counties.

Irrigation district may seek Bureau of Reclamation assets

By **DAN WHEAT**
Capital Press

KENNEWICK, Wash. — The Kennewick Irrigation District is looking into getting title to its canals and other assets as it nears the 2022 payoff of a 66-year, \$5 million lease-loan from the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation for construction of the infrastructure.

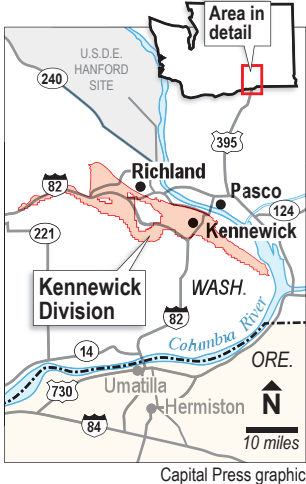
The federal agency has done about 30 similar title transfers across the nation in the past 20 years and the process can take up to 15 years, said Charles Freeman, KID manager.

“We hope to have a staff recommendation to the board on whether or not proceed by the end of the year and if we go forward to have it done by 2022,” Freeman said.

A title transfer would give the district direct control over the assets, remove a layer of bureaucracy for customers and would divest the USBR of responsibility, maintenance, regulation and liability for the assets, Freeman said.

District staff will try to determine if there are any benefits of not seeking title, he said.

District ratepayers have been paying off the zero-in-



Capital Press graphic

the process to ensure a title transfer benefits the community, the river and other stakeholders,” Freeman said.

Determining the current value of assets will be one of the tasks of the process, he said.

Assets include more than 100 miles of canals and laterals, a diversion dam at Prosser, three fish ladders and screens, two pumping plants, a power plant with two, six-megawatt hydro turbines and a switchyard.

The KID, referred to as the Kennewick Division by the USBR, is one of several irrigation districts served by the USBR through the Yakima Basin Project’s five mountain reservoirs, the Yakima River and canals.

The KID has 23,000 customer accounts and serves 20,201 acres with water that is returned to the system from the other districts upstream and diverted at Prosser.

The district serves mostly orchards but also provides water to vineyards, alfalfa and blueberry fields from Prosser to Finley and a lot of residential and commercial lawns in Kennewick and Richland.

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