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## Continuing storms lead to increase in SWP allocations, official says

By **TIM HEARDEN**  
Capital Press

SACRAMENTO — Continuing rain and snow prompted California to change course and increase State Water Project allocations right away rather than waiting for the Oroville Dam rebuilding project to proceed.

The state announced April 14 that SWP contractors north of the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta would get their full allocations for the first time since 2006, while agencies south of the Delta would get 85 percent of normal supplies.

The increase from 60 percent came one day after acting Department of Water Resources director Bill Croyle said it could be May or June before a decision was made on whether to further boost deliveries.

Croyle said the logistics of Oroville Dam repairs were hindering another increase. But this season has seen a record 89.7 inches of precipitation at DWR weather stations in the northern Sierra Nevada and the number is still growing, agency spokesman Ted Thomas said.

"It's just one of those years when the precipitation just doesn't seem to be quitting," Thomas told the Capital Press. "It's building the snowpack, which is a key factor."

The increase also coincides with completion of repairs to an eroded intake structure at Clifton Court Forebay, which feeds pumps at the south end of the Delta, officials said.

The state allocation had remained at 60 percent since Jan. 18, even as this season's abundant rain and snow prompted the federal Central Valley Project to grant full allocations to virtually all of its contractors. They included the western San Joaquin Valley, which last year got only 5 percent of requested supplies.

State officials have been preoccupied with the crisis at Lake Oroville, the SWP's main reservoir, which irri-



Bill Croyle, left, the acting California Department of Water Resources director, talks to a reporter outside the agency's field office in Oroville, Calif., on April 13.

gates more than 600,000 acres of Central Valley farmland and serves 20 million urban residents in Southern California and the San Francisco Bay area.

The lake has been a veritable construction zone in recent weeks, as crews have removed nearly 1.6 million cubic yards of debris. Gov. Jerry Brown has waived some permitting and review requirements so that new or reinforced concrete could be in place on the upper stretch of the main spillway by a Nov. 1 target date.

Croyle said at an April 13 news conference in Oroville that a potential increase in deliveries "comes down to making sure all the demands (for water) are being met," which depends on how much water can be kept in the lake, he said.

"I don't have a full reservoir," Croyle told the Capital Press, adding his agency is forced to draw down the lake level to make room for runoff at a time of year when that isn't typically necessary.

But the continuing rain and snow leaves little doubt there

will be enough water for everyone. For instance, the first wave of a series of storms on April 16 dumped a half-inch of rain on Oroville and nearly an inch on nearby Paradise, according to the National Weather Service.

The DWR resumed use of the flood control spillway at Oroville on April 14, releasing 35,000 cubic feet per second to make room for runoff from the massive snowpack that remains. The releases were to continue for a couple of weeks.

"So far we've had fairly cool storms, and that's good," Thomas said. "If the weather remains cool up at the higher elevations, that will allow the snowpack to meter out slowly as we prefer. If we get really warm temperatures ... then that will increase the snowpack runoff."

The south-of-Delta allocation could still increase again later this spring.

"We're hopeful we'll be able to increase deliveries even more as we monitor conditions," Croyle said.

San Joaquin Valley growers have complained they had

to put off planting decisions or rely on guesswork as state and federal agencies took their time in determining their water allocations.

Late-season boosts provide more water for permanent plantings so they don't have to turn to groundwater, and perhaps will aid in fall planting, Fresno County Farm Bureau chief executive officer Ryan Jacobsen has said.

The increase comes as the DWR also made an about-face of sorts regarding the release of certain records related to the Oroville crisis.

The agency at first rebuffed the Sacramento Bee in its effort to gain access to records the newspaper argues would show how Brown's office handled the February crisis at Oroville Dam that led to the two-day evacuation of about 188,000 area residents.

The governor denied the



Courtesy of California Department of Water Resources  
Excavation continues just south of the Lake Oroville flood control spillway while mist from the flowing spillway is seen in the background. Water officials last week said spillway repairs were preventing increases in State Water Project deliveries, but then increased those allocations the next day.

Bee's California Public Records Act request, citing federal security regulations. That didn't sit well with Restore the Delta, an environmental group that is fighting Brown's plan to build two tunnel bypasses around the Delta.

"Restricting access to public records about the Oroville Dam is just another reason why Californians no longer trust Governor Brown's leadership on water and infrastructure," said Barbara Barrigan-Parilla, the group's executive director.

The state has already faced criticism over reported warnings about the emergency spillway's weakness from environmental groups in 2005 during the dam's relicensing process.

A lack of public access to such things as design specifications, inspection reports and internal communications within Brown's office would mean that Californians wouldn't know what the DWR knew before the crisis or who will pay for repairs, Barrigan-Parilla asserted.

But Croyle said last week

that the state will release some records, noting he is working with Butte County Sheriff Kory Honea and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security to redact information that officials believe could pose a security risk.

"We are committed to pushing as much information out as we can," he said, noting that state officials are planning a series of community meetings later this spring to answer questions about the dam.

The spillway's near failure in February threatened a large portion of the Eastern Sacramento Valley's \$1.5 billion agriculture industry, including rice and tree crops and several major processors along the Highway 99 corridor between Chico and Yuba City, industry leaders said.

About one-third of Butte County's \$773 million agriculture industry is within the affected corridor, Butte County agricultural commissioner Louie Mendoza said. Likewise, significant portions of Sutter County's \$544 million ag industry and Yuba County's nearly \$232 million industry were put at risk.



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