



## **Background**

### **Drought Emergency Services: Protecting Our Most Vulnerable Communities**

Wednesday, July 15, 2015  
State Capitol, Room 437  
10:00 a.m.

#### **Hearing Overview**

This hearing aims to inform the Legislature of the services provided for those families and individuals in California who find their source of water compromised, their wells gone dry, or their ability to obtain clean reliable water at risk. Given the ongoing nature of the drought and the services needed for those affected, panelists will include representatives from the Governor's Office of Emergency Services (OES) as well as local government and community officials.

#### **Private Domestic Well Use in California**

According to the State Water Board (SWB), up to 2 million California residents are served either by private domestic wells or by very small water systems with fewer than 15 connections. As the state's drought emergency enters the summer season, the rate of domestic wells that have run dry continues to rise.

As of June 2015, statistics from the Department of Water Resources (DWR) show there are over 1,900 dry wells throughout California that have affected over 9,500 people. In Tulare County, the center of the drought's drinking water crisis, 1,350 well failures have been reported as of June 2015. Seven out of 10 dry wells are in Tulare County and nearly four out of 10 are in the town of East Porterville, an unincorporated community of approximately 7,000 residents, where the average household income based on 2013 U.S Census data is \$30,336.

County officials expect these numbers to increase in the coming months. Groundwater basins are already depleted from voracious pumping during the drought. Summer also marks the irrigation season, and farm demand is expected to lower water tables even further. As summer temperatures increase, more wells are expected to go dry.

## State of Emergency Drought Declaration

On January 17, 2014, as California entered its fourth consecutive year of extremely dry conditions, Governor Brown proclaimed a drought State of Emergency. That was followed on April 25, 2014, by a continued State of Emergency and on, April 3, 2015, by a seven-page Executive Order, B-29-15, with 31 directives to address the drought crisis. Among other actions, state officials are directed to assist communities that are economically impacted by dry conditions and to ensure the state can respond if Californians face drinking water shortages.

## Current State and County Efforts

Families in smaller, rural communities whose wells run dry because of falling water tables need financial support for alternative water sources, such as new wells, pipelines to other systems, and, in the short-term, trucked-in water. When domestic wells go dry, families can drill new wells if they have enough money, but, at a cost of \$15,000 or more, doing so is often out of their reach.

One of the temporary solutions to meeting the immediate water needs of affected residents so far has been bottled water deliveries. OES provided Tulare County with \$500,000 to supply drinking water to homes with dry wells. Homes are allocated a half gallon per person per day and bulk deliveries are made every few weeks. As of June 2015, over 920 households have qualified for the program. A second assistance program that pays for the installation of in-home water tanks with pumping systems to circulate water through the home's plumbing reports 120 tanks have been installed in Tulare County as of June.

The county placed two tanks, each filled with 2,500 gallons of non-potable water, in East Porterville to enable residents to fill drums and buckets for such basic uses as washing dishes and flushing toilets. Funds from OES also enable the county to operate portable showers for residents.

## Emergency Drought Response in the 2015-16 State Budget

As the state continues to experience severe drought conditions in all 58 counties, the Administration has worked to assist drought-impacted communities and fund critical water infrastructure projects that will make the state more resilient if the drought continues. The 2015-16 Budget includes an additional \$1.8 billion of one-time resources to continue the state's response to drought impacts. The funds will protect and expand local water supplies, conserve water and respond to emergency conditions.

## Current Legislation

Assembly Bill 937 (Salas) would require DWR to provide technical assistance to disadvantaged communities so that they may participate in groundwater planning, and would authorize DWR to fund some previously ineligible local groundwater plans and programs under special circumstances. It is intended to help DWR to establish a disadvantaged communities' assistance program similar in some ways to the program created at the SWB's Office of Sustainable Water Solutions (Office). The Office's purposes include, but are not limited to: providing assistance, including technical assistance, to small drinking water systems and disadvantaged communities without clean, safe, and reliable drinking water or wastewater treatment systems; promoting and facilitating regional

drinking water solutions and wastewater projects; and advancing the delivery of affordable, safe, drinking water throughout the state. AB 937 is pending in the Senate Natural Resources and Water Committee.

Assembly Bill 954 (Mathis) would provide financial assistance to individual homeowners who rely on their own groundwater wells. Specifically, it would provide \$10 million in water and waste water project grants and loans to owners of private homes who cannot afford conventional loans for needed water and wastewater improvements, such as deepening an existing groundwater well or installing a water treatment system if the groundwater does not meet drinking water standards. AB 954 is pending in the Senate Environmental Quality Committee.