



The “scenic beauty” of Biden's Green Energy Policy (See page 8 for article)
Wind turbines in the California desert are seen from Highway 58 in 2021. (Irfan Khan / Los Angeles Times)

California Water and Infrastructure Report For November 9, 2023

(With expanded coverage of all the Western States)

by Patrick Ruckert

Published weekly since July, 2014

An archive of all these weekly reports can be found at both links below:

<http://www.californiadroughtupdate.org>

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www.californiadroughtupdate.org/20230803-California-Water-and-Infrastructure-Report.pdf

A Note to Readers

Accompanying the U.S. Drought Monitor map for California this week is one of many articles celebrating that for the first time in three years the state is now drought-free. Of course, that pretty much occurred in 2017 after five years of drought. Not really something to wear party hats for, but does give us some breathing room to hopefully and actually build some water infrastructure.

The most important article included in this week's report is by Edward Ring, whom, in my opinion is the best expert and advocate for non-rationing solutions to the state's never ending water crisis. His article is titled, *“California Bureaucrats Embrace Water Rationing.”* I include just a few paragraphs

from the article, but the link to the original is provided.

At least Governor Newsom has gotten the message about the building of water infrastructure. and has put the building of the Sites Reservoir on an expedited schedule, by-passing many of the usual regulations and environmental reports that delay projects for decades. See the article on page 4.

Meanwhile, California Forever, the group of Silicon Valley billionaires attempting to take over Solano County and turn the mostly farmland area into a “environmental paradise” are attempting to bribe the governments of the country with a land-swap deal, and demanding that the huge proposal be approved by the county, the cities and the water agencies of the area in two months, or the deal is off, they threaten. Three articles on the topic are included, some of which provide more links to background.

The next item is a report related to our cover photo this week. Its title tells the whole story, but the link is provided for the reader who would like more of the details: *“Offshore Wind in U.S. Is Fundamentally Broken,' Says Top Industry Leader.”*

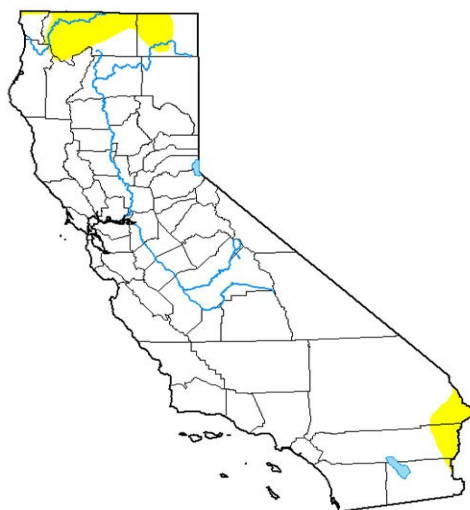
On the Colorado River, this week's report continues the discussion of short and long-term solutions to that ongoing crisis. A reminder to those who need it: Forty million people in the southwest states depend on the water from the river for drinking, agriculture and electricity production.

While the short-term policy of the states of California, Nevada and Arizona to cut about three million acre-feet from what they withdraw from the river over the next three years, it was only the abundant rain and snow of last winter that prevented entire areas of the river's service area from drastic mandatory rationing. But, as we have often reported here, the Colorado River Basin has been in a mega-drought for most of this century, and there is no guarantee that the coming winter will bring forth the rain and snow necessary to prevent a quick return to a crisis.

I am skipping the usual feature this week and will resume it next week.

U.S. Drought Monitor California

U.S. Drought Monitor California



November 7, 2023

(Released Thursday, Nov. 9, 2023)

Valid 7 a.m. EST

Drought Conditions (Percent Area)

	None	D0-D4	D1-D4	D2-D4	D3-D4	D4
Current	94.04	5.96	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Last Week 10-31-2023	94.34	5.66	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
3 Months Ago 08-08-2023	74.55	25.45	7.28	0.00	0.00	0.00
Start of Calendar Year 01-01-2023	0.00	100.00	97.93	71.14	27.10	0.00
Start of Water Year 09-26-2023	94.01	5.99	0.07	0.00	0.00	0.00
One Year Ago 11-08-2022	0.00	100.00	99.51	88.09	41.39	16.57

Intensity

None	D2 Severe Drought
D0 Abnormally Dry	D3 Extreme Drought
D1 Moderate Drought	D4 Exceptional Drought

The Drought Monitor focuses on broad-scale conditions. Local conditions may vary. For more information on the Drought Monitor, go to <https://droughtmonitor.unl.edu/About.aspx>

Author

Lindsay Johnson
National Drought Mitigation Center



droughtmonitor.unl.edu

The West

An atmospheric river cascaded over parts of the Pacific Northwest, bringing several inches of new rain and snow accumulation along with last week's precipitation. With this continued influx of precipitation, modest 1-category improvements were made across the northwest, particularly on the windward side of the Cascade Range.

Further improvements were seen in northern Idaho and Montana, which received up to 4 inches of precipitation in some areas. Despite the deluge of precipitation over the last one to two weeks, temperatures have been 1-3 degrees above normal, and south-central Montana even had temperatures of 6-9 degrees above normal. The remaining states in the West remained status quo.

California has been declared drought-free for the first time in years

by: [Iman Palm](#)

Posted: Nov 8, 2023 / 04:16 PM PST

<https://ktla.com/news/california/california-has-been-declared-drought-free-for-the-first-time-in-years/>

California has been declared drought-free after the [latest update from the U.S. Drought Monitor](#) shows most of the Golden State is free from any drought classification.

Drought conditions across the state have retreated after [last year's winter season](#) brought heavy rain and historic snowfall to multiple regions. [Tropical Storm Hilary](#) brought even more rain during the summer.

About 94% of the state is free from any drought classification, data released on Nov. 2 shows.

Siskiyou, Modoc and Del Norte counties in Northern California are still classified as "abnormally dry," the U.S. Drought Monitor's least severe classification. Small portions of Riverside, San Bernardino and Imperial counties have the same classification.

The "abnormally dry" classification indicates that a region is "going into or coming out of a drought," according to the [U.S. Drought Monitor](#).

No area in the Golden State is considered to be in an "extreme or exceptional" drought, the U.S. Drought Monitor's two worst classifications.

In November 2022, virtually all of California's Central Valley was deemed to be in an "exceptional drought," which prompted [state water regulators to adopt emergency water rules](#) meant to ensure more aggressive conservation statewide.

“California Bureaucrats Embrace Water Rationing”

- By [Edward Ring](#)
- November 3, 2023 6:30 AM

<https://www.nationalreview.com/2023/11/california-bureaucrats-embrace-water-rationing/>

What is being put in place today is a misguided set of laws that remove the incentive for water agencies

to invest in water abundance.

On October 4 the California State Water Board held a hearing to discuss how it will implement [Senate Bill 1157](#), passed by the state legislature in 2022, which lowers indoor water-use standards to 47 gallons per person starting in 2025 and 42 gallons in 2030. The title of the hearing was “[Making Water Conservation a Way of Life](#).” Rationing would be a more apt term for what’s coming for California’s households.

It isn’t as if conservation hasn’t been a way of life in California for decades. Despite the growth of the state’s population [to over 39 million today](#), total urban water consumption in the state has been falling each year since the mid 1990s. At just over 7 million acre-feet (MAF) per year in 2022, urban water consumption [hasn’t been this low since 1985](#), when the population of the state was only 26 million.

That’s not enough, however, for California’s water bureaucrats, and the environmentalist organizations they answer to. As they move toward implementing S.B. 1157, their [officially stated goal](#) is to reduce total urban consumption by 400,000 acre-feet per year by 2030. Put into the perspective of California’s [total water withdrawals per year](#), this is small potatoes. Diversions for agriculture average 30 MAF per year, more than four times the urban use, and diversions — captured rainfall that is released from reservoirs during the summer and fall — to maintain ecosystem health range between 20 MAF in dry years to over 60 MAF in wet years. A reduction of 400,000 acre-feet in urban water consumption represents barely more than one-half of 1 percent of the amount of water California diverts and manages even in its driest years.

The Fight, For More Than Two Decades, To Build Sites Reservoir Has Been Won

COURTHOUSE NEWS: California governor taps new law to streamline Sites Reservoir project

[Courthouse News Service](#)
[News and Features](#)

November 6, 2023

<https://mavensnotebook.com/2023/11/06/courthouse-news-california-governor-taps-new-law-to-streamline-reservoir-project/>

The Sites Reservoir Project is slated to hold up to 1.5 million acre-feet of water, enough for 3 million households for a year.

By Alan Riquelmy, Courthouse News Service

California Governor Gavin Newsom fast-tracked a massive reservoir project Monday using a law he signed this past summer to accelerate construction.

The Sites Reservoir Project near the town of Maxwell, about 81 miles northwest of Sacramento, is slated to hold up to 1.5 million acre-feet of water — enough for 3 million households for a year. Once complete, it’ll increase Northern California’s water capacity by up to 15%.

Additionally, it’s expected to lead to ecosystem improvements, benefits to flood control and added recreational opportunities.

The Sites project already has \$46.75 million in state funding. It's eligible for a total of \$875.4 million in Water Quality, Supply, and Infrastructure Improvement Act of 2014 funds. The total project cost is estimated at \$4 billion.

Permitting and approvals currently are set for late 2024, with construction beginning in 2025. The reservoir would start operations in 2030.

"We're cutting red tape to build more faster," Newsom said in a statement. "These are projects that will address our state's biggest challenges faster, and the Sites Reservoir is fully representative of that goal — making sure Californians have access to clean drinking water and making sure we're more resilient against future droughts."

California's proposed reservoir could be streamlined, faces opposition

Cutting corners or cutting through red tape? Differing opinions voiced on fast track for the Sites Reservoir project.

Author: Devin Trubey

Published: 6:16 PM PST November 7, 2023

Updated: 6:16 PM PST November 7, 2023

<https://www.abc10.com/article/news/local/california/californias-proposed-reservoir-faces-opposition/103-27c2dcef-1273-4688-a800-9006de64697f>

Silicon Billionaires Throw Another Threat at Solano County

California Forever proposes land exchange near Travis Air Force Base

Swap with Fairfield, Solano and SCWA would complete 15,000 acre prairie reserve



A herd of horses walks in a pasture south of Travis Air Force Base in Fairfield. A group of investors, California Forever, which describes itself as the parent company of Flannery Associates, has been purchasing plots of farmland around the Air Force base from Suisun City to Rio Vista along Highway 12 in hopes of building a new tech city. (Chris Riley/The Reporter)

By [Nick Mcconnell](mailto:nmccConnell@timesheraldonline.com) | nmccConnell@timesheraldonline.com

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<https://www.mercurynews.com/2023/11/08/california-forever-propose-land-exchange/>

[share=rm8wetnmwar0w0pprdct](https://www.abc10.com/article/news/local/california-forever-community-advisory-committee/103-b2ca166f-3999-4967-ae1e-45ef4b9e66f6)

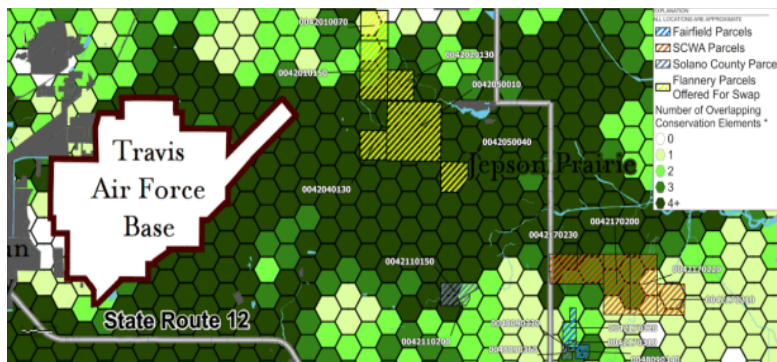
California Forever sent a letter on Monday to Solano County, the City of Fairfield and the Solano County Water Agency proposing a land exchange of thousands of acres near Travis Air Force Base.

The company has offered to swap 1,573 acres of high habitat value land on Jepson Prairie near Travis Air Force Base, for 1,403 acres of pasture with medium agricultural value six to 10 miles away from the base, mostly east of Rio Dixon Road.

The letter, signed by California Forever CEO Jan Sramek, was addressed to Fairfield City Manager David Gassaway, County Administrator William Emlen and General Manager of Solano County Water Agency Chris Lee.

The letter says that California Forever is offering the exchange because it learned the parcels it purchased on the Jepson Prairie are included under the Department of Defense's Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration program, and that its ownership of them could also pose a threat to the goals of the Solano County Habitat Conservation Plan.

"We believe this exchange proposal is a win-win transaction that makes good sense for all sides involved," the letter reads.



A map included in the California Forever Letter shows the land involved in its exchange offer. Parcels shaded in yellow currently belong to the company, and parcels shaded in other colors currently belong to Solano County, Fairfield, or SCWA. (Courtesy image California Forever).

California Forever announces 21 member Community Advisory Committee, land exchange

The committee was created to give feedback and help shape the new city's proposal which will eventually be on the ballot along with a vote on exchanging land.

Author: Krys Shahin, Devin Trubey

Published: 6:55 PM PST November 8, 2023

<https://www.abc10.com/article/news/local/california-forever-community-advisory-committee/103-b2ca166f-3999-4967-ae1e-45ef4b9e66f6>

SOLANO COUNTY, Calif— Flannery Associates, the company who purchased tens of thousands of acres of land in Solano County, announced its 21 member advisory committee made up of community members Wednesday.

The list, found on the [California Forever website](https://www.californiaforever.org/), includes members like Solano County Sheriff Tom Ferrara, President and CEO of Visit Fairfield Anand Patel and Travis Armed Forces Committee Executive Board member Erick Fierro among others.

The committee was created to use their "broad and diverse" backgrounds to give feedback and help shape the California Forever proposal which eventually will be voted on, according to California Forever.

RELATED: [What we know about Flannery Associates, California Forever in Solano County](#)

RELATED: [Rio Vista council rejects city law firm representing Flannery Associates](#)

WATCH MORE: [California Forever CEO talks with ABC10 | Extended Interview](#)

Local leaders react to land swap proposal

Most still unsure how Solano County, its Water Association, City of Fairfield will respond



Sheep graze in a plot of land east of CA 113 in Rio Vista owned by the government that California Forever hopes to exchange for a section of Jepson Prairie. (Chris Riley/The Reporter)

By [Nick McConnell](#) | nmcconnell@timesheraldonline.com

PUBLISHED: November 7, 2023 at 5:06 p.m. | UPDATED: November 8, 2023 at 5:07 p.m.

<https://www.thereporter.com/2023/11/07/local-leaders-react-to-land-swap-proposal/>

“I don’t think anyone in California — or anyone in the country — has seen anything as audacious as this,” he said.

Kromm said that’s exactly why he thinks it’s “ridiculous” to make this offer with less than two months before a deal needs to be made. If California Forever were serious about getting a deal done, he said, they would have offered this two years ago.

“You don’t make land deals in six weeks of this magnitude,” he said.

Wanting three local governments to firmly commit to a land swap while not locking themselves into any action until after next year’s election is a poor way to structure this deal, Kromm said, and he thinks it is unserious.

“It’s a PR ploy,” Kromm said, “it’s not an offer

“Offshore Wind in U.S. Is Fundamentally Broken,” Says Top Industry Leader

Tuesday, November 07, 2023

GoLocalProv News Team

<https://www.golocalprov.com/business/offshore-wind-in-u.s.-is-fundamentally-broken-says-top-industry-leader>

BP's top renewables executive said last week that the U.S. offshore wind industry is "fundamentally broken." The offshore wind industry is supposed to be an economic engine for Rhode Island's economy of the future.

At the beginning of the year, Maryland, Virginia, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, and New Jersey had planned more than 17 gigawatts of offshore wind projects under contract; now, about two-thirds of that production has been canceled, according to reports.

In Rhode Island, the smaller of two significant offshore wind projects moved forward last week. At least for now, the Revolution Wind project is still in development. In July, Pennsylvania-owned Rhode Island Energy (RIE) rejected the bid by Ørsted and Eversource to build a larger offshore wind project off the coast that would have generated 884-MW.

The Colorado River

Arizona and other states have agreed to use considerably less water from the river through 2026, thanks in part to a wet winter.

By Wyatt Myskow, Inside Climate News

<https://mavensnotebook.com/2023/11/07/inside-climate-news-feds-bet-on-paying-for-water-conservation-to-protect-the-colorado-river/>

Arizona's future was at a [critical juncture](#) at the beginning of 2023.

Massive cuts to the state's Colorado River water supply were being imposed. Deadlines loomed from the federal government for the [seven states that rely on Colorado River water to come up with a solution for how to cut use even further](#) as the nation's [two largest reservoirs recorded among their lowest levels ever](#) after decades of drought caused by overconsumption and climate change.

All the while, Arizona's growth—both in population and in business—continued to boom, [prompting questions over the long-term sustainability](#) of the state's economy.

That precarious moment has now passed, Gov. Katie Hobbs said Friday at Phoenix City Hall as state, city, tribal and federal officials gathered to [celebrate voluntary reductions of Colorado River water](#) that will help preserve the system through 2026 as new operating guidelines for the entire region are negotiated.

“Almost every challenge has a solution,” Hobbs said. Along the Colorado River Basin, that solution, for now, is coming in the form of a wet winter, a bit of collaboration between stakeholders in the region and billions of dollars from the federal government to entice users to conserve water.

Friday's event celebrated Arizona tribes and farmers agreeing to leave 162,710 acre feet of water

unused through 2026, when current drought operating guidelines expire and new ones currently being negotiated will be implemented. That water will come at a cost—\$64 million from the federal government. It’s a small portion of what’s planned to be spent, with Arizona users already pledging to conserve about 786,000 acre feet for \$314 million. Under the Inflation Reduction Act, \$4.6 billion was allocated for addressing drought throughout the Western U.S.



Despite the wet winter, experts and environmentalists have cautioned that 2023 was just a reprieve from 23 years of drought and [the system still lingers on the verge of collapse](#). Lake Mead is 34 percent full, and Lake Powell is slightly higher, at 37 percent. The federal analyses found that through 2026, the chance of falling below critical elevations was reduced to eight percent at Lake Powell and four percent at Lake Mead.

Federal government’s short-term Colorado River stabilization plan paints a “rosy” picture

Colorado water experts say the federal proposal to cut Lower Basin water use is a start, but dry winters in the next three years could send the river back to the brink of a crisis

[Shannon Mullane](#) 4:02 AM MDT on Nov 3, 2023

<https://coloradosun.com/2023/11/03/rcolorado-river-plan-paints-rosy-picture/>

Colorado scientist Brad Udall spent hours digging — with frustration — through the federal government's 700-page proposal for managing key dams and reservoirs in the Colorado River Basin over the next three years.

"I just wish they would really simply say, 'And here's how the system would perform under these really bad years we've seen over the last 23 (years),' " said Udall, senior water and climate research scientist at Colorado State University. "If they would do that, you would see that this system crashes."

Udall is one of many water experts and officials across the West who are carefully [analyzing the federal proposal released Oct. 25](#) by the Bureau of Reclamation. The draft document focuses on how water is stored in and released from two key reservoirs: Lake Powell and Lake Mead. It says basin conditions have improved and outlines options to either maintain the status quo or to conserve 3 million acre-feet of water in the Lower Basin, which includes Arizona, California and Nevada.

Water officials and experts say the proposed savings are "a start," and Reclamation's option to conserve water would be a "prudent" choice. Regardless, this winter's precipitation, officials say, will be key in whether the basin's stored water supply can skate through 2026 without issue — or whether 40 million water users could be hit with another water supply crisis. Udall had some concerns, mainly that the federal analysis could be too optimistic.

"The biggest takeaway is that the wet year in 2023 gave us some breathing room," Udall said. "But I will say that based on my own knowledge of how this system operates ... we're still on the edge."