



# CA Water for All

## Myths vs. Facts



### Myth

California has enough water; we simply need to conserve it better.

### Fact

Conservation alone cannot keep pace with the growing demand for water – and the prospect of more, severe droughts – in California.

### Background

As stated by the [Public Policy Institute of California](#) (PPIC), “it is not enough to rely solely on conservation to meet demand.” Firstly, Californians are already skilled at conserving water. Today, the state’s communities use roughly the same amount of water as they did in the 1980s—except now there are 10 million more Californians. Over time, per-capita water use has greatly declined due to water-saving indoor plumbing fixtures and appliances, better leak detection, less thirsty landscaping, and more efficient irrigation systems, per the PPIC. Unfortunately, that progress leaves us “more vulnerable during droughts,” because communities that “have already attained low levels of per-capita use... have less flexibility to further reduce water use.” This isn’t to say we cannot possibly conserve more water. “Continued progress is still possible in many communities,” the PPIC says. But given what we’ve already conserved, and what little may be left during future droughts, conservation alone is insufficient.

### Myth

There isn’t any place left to store more water; all the feasible locations are already taken.

### Fact

California has plenty of room to store more water—especially underground.

### Background

While it is true that reservoirs already exist at the most advantageous locations throughout the state, our options for “surface” storage are not completely exhausted, as the proposed Sites Reservoir, near Maxwell, Calif., shows. Still, the greatest potential for more storage is in California’s aquifers, which can store 3x as much water as the state’s reservoirs can (total surface storage capacity: 42 million acre-feet; total aquifer storage capacity: 150 million acre-feet). By capturing and diverting excess stormwater into specially designed percolation ponds, or simply onto open fields and agricultural lands where it can seep down into the ground, we can replenish our “natural infrastructure” and overall water supply. Moreover, such work will be critical to carrying out the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA).

## Myth

Water management in California is best left to local municipalities.

## Fact

The realities of California's geology, climate, and population require statewide coordination.

## Background

California's water system is highly engineered. 75% of our water comes from the northern 1/3 of the state, yet 80% of that water is used in the southern 2/3. Rainfall in forests and snowmelt from mountains must be transported great distances, via California's two main water systems. The Central Valley Project (CVP) moves water 400 miles, from as far north as Lake Shasta to as far south as Bakersfield. The State Water Project (SWP) goes even farther (700 miles), from as far north as Lake Oroville to as far south as Riverside County. Because the sustainability of life in Los Angeles or Fresno relies on water supplies that originate hundreds of miles away, statewide coordination is necessary to manage the needs of L.A., Fresno, and others in between. This isn't to undermine the work of local water agencies, districts, and utilities – the ones responsible for literally delivering water to homes, farms, and businesses – of which California has thousands. These providers, in addition to their regular work, may improve sustainability through conservation measures, recycling wastewater, desalinating salt water, or building new surface or groundwater recharge facilities. But in the overall, they can only work with as much water as they receive from larger projects like the CVP or SWP. Furthermore, many smaller, rural water providers lack the resources to maintain aging infrastructure, let alone build new sources of supply. Simply put: By the facts of California's hydrology, and the construction of its water system, we're all in this together.

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## Myth

California sets an annual target for how much water its cities and towns, agriculture, other industries, and environment need.

## Fact

No statewide goal or target for a sustainable water supply exists.

## Background

Instead, water managers around the state work together on project-specific partnerships, to hold onto as much water as the system can store, basically. From the 1930s, when the Central Valley Project began in earnest, to as late as the '90s, when major construction on the State Water Project ended, that standard proved sufficient. But now that California's population is pushing 40 million, while facing an increasingly volatile climate, the absence of a clear, overarching target has left California with a policy that lacks a vision and is unprepared to address a changing climate. Statewide target-setting has been done in other sectors. In transportation, all new cars sold in California shall be zero-emission vehicles by 2035. In energy, the state shall use 100% clean electricity by 2045. And in housing, the state shall build 2.5 million new housing units by 2030. Without such a target for water, our water supply will be increasingly in peril.

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