

State Agencies Present Framework for Voluntary Agreements to Improve Habitat and Flow in the Delta

By [California Water News Daily](#) on February 10, 2020



The California Natural Resources Agency and the California Environmental Protection Agency released a framework for potential voluntary agreements to improve river flows and habitats in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta last week.

The framework, which expands on previous commitments, outlines a 15-year program that would provide substantial new flows for the environment to help recover fish populations, create 60,000 acres of new and restored habitat, and generate more than \$5 billion in new funding for environmental improvements and science.

“This framework is an important milestone, but there is much work ahead to shape it into a legally enforceable program,” California Secretary for Natural Resources Wade Crowfoot said. “We’re committed to developing successful voluntary agreements because they hold the promise of improving environmental conditions more quickly and holistically than regulatory requirements, while providing more certainty to communities, farms and businesses.”

In an effort to implement the Bay-Delta Plan through an integrated program, the framework would include up to 900,000 acre-feet of new flows for the environment above existing conditions in dry, below-normal and above-normal water year types, and several hundred thousand acre-feet in critical and wet years to help recover fish populations. It also provides for 60,000 acres of new habitat and \$5.2 billion in investments funded by water users, the state and

the federal government to improve environmental conditions and science and adaptive management.

The California Natural Resources Agency and CalEPA will work with water users and other participants in the coming weeks to refine the proposed framework into a legally enforceable program.

The refined document will be submitted to the State Water Resources Control Board where it will undergo a third-party scientific review, environmental review and a public approval process by the Board.

Antioch offers to provide water, sewer hookups to annexed neighborhood — for \$30,000 per home

Older neighborhood annexed against residents' wishes now faces big fees to hook up to city services



ANTIOCH, CA – FEBRUARY 11: Elroy Booker, 79, who lived in unincorporated Contra Costa County for 12 years, now, after incorporation, must pay a \$23,000 permit fee if he wants to have the city's newly installed sewer and water lines hooked up to his home in Antioch, Calif., on Tuesday, Feb. 11, 2020. Booker is not happy, the city once said it would help pay these fees. Plus, he can't refinance through VA Home Loans because no one has proof whether he lives on a private or public road. (Doug Duran/Bay Area News Group)

By [Judith Prieve](mailto:jprieve@bayareanewsgroup.com) | jprieve@bayareanewsgroup.com | Bay Area News Group

PUBLISHED: February 12, 2020 at 3:11 p.m. | UPDATED: February 16, 2020 at 1:36 p.m.

Six years after the city of Antioch annexed a rural section of 110 homes over many residents' objections, it's finally able to offer them the sewer and water lines that are supposed to be the perks of city life.

There's a hook, though. The total cost of hooking up to those services will cost a household about \$30,000. And few are lining up for the privilege.

"There's a lot of elderly people there — how are they going to afford this," asked Murray Sexton, who owns the nearby Bridgehead Cafe and three houses in the area. For her, it's thanks but no thanks.

The hookup permit costs alone hover around \$20,000 when including an assortment of sewer and water fees, and then homeowners must pay thousands more to run the service lines to their homes, he noted.

Because the rural neighborhood between Wilbur Avenue and 18th Street was determined in 2014 to fit the state's definition of a "land island," residents had no say in becoming part of a larger annexation project that also included 481 acres of industrial waterfront with two natural gas-fired power plants and 94 acres of waterfront marina and storage surrounding it.

Today, the 103-acre neighborhood with its narrow streets, large yards, livestock and vineyards finally has paved roads, is served by the local police department and will soon have its storm drains completed.

But not everyone in this older, middle-class neighborhood — the same one that drew international attention with the 2009 discovery of Jaycee Dugard, who under the radar of authorities was held captive in a backyard there for 18 years — sees the benefits of annexation as such a big plus.

Many think the city should be helping with the hookup costs and fees as an earlier council promised.

“They considered us an island, but they should have just left us the hell alone,” Kurt Loomis, a 25-year Vine Lane resident said, noting he plans to keep his septic system and well until they break down and force him to hook into city lines.

“We’re talking about the 110 people that had no voice,” said Ken Luke, who urged the Antioch City Council at its Feb. 11 meeting to waive the \$20,000 or so in permit fees for hookups.

“This (annexation) was ramrodded down their throats,” he later said.

Luke’s friend, Elroy Booker, 79, is one of the few who wants to hook up to the city lines, but he can’t afford the \$20,000 in fees and \$10,000 or so to connect lines up to his property without a home loan. He’s not sure what the individual hookup cost will be yet as it depends on distance to his home from the connector line, and the costs of new pipes, concrete removal and repair, trenching, landscape repairs, and capping the old septic tank and well, among others.

The 12-year-resident said he tried to refinance his home through the Veterans Administration, but the city could not provide documentation on whether his previously private road is now public, so he couldn’t get a loan.

Luke, who has been trying to get answers for his veteran friend, said the council’s earlier promises to not put the burden on homeowners seems to have faded away.

“The city was going to help provide some money to do the hookups,” he said. “Most are on fixed incomes.”

The city and county each initially kicked in \$3 million for the sewer, water and other improvements. The council back then said it would make provisions and apply for grants to help residents cover some of the fees and costs to connect their homes to city services.

But City Manager Ron Bernal said such provisions were not included and grants never came through.

“Normally, an assessment district is formed with the property owners paying for the water and sewer (infrastructure), which the city usually doesn’t do,” he said, noting the city still has to pay for sewer, water service system installations, street lights and paved roadways in the other annexation areas as well.

But the council agreed to have staff look into the matter and report back.

For Booker, the struggle to find a way to hook up his property with services will continue, he says.

“I don’t have \$20,000 right now, but the interest rates are low enough that I could afford it (a refinance) now,” he said. “But if I wait longer and the interest rates go up, I won’t be able to afford it, and if something happens to one of the (water or sewer) systems, I would be up a creek.”

East Bay Times

Nearly \$600,000 spent so far in Danville Measure Y race, records show

Supporters outspending opponents on 69-home Magee Ranch Preserve by wide margin



Bicyclists travel on Diablo Road between Mt. Diablo Scenic Boulevard and Green Valley Road in Danville, Calif., near the proposed Magee Ranch housing development, in 2015. (Doug Duran/Bay Area News Group)

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PUBLISHED: February 13, 2020 at 11:10 a.m. | UPDATED: **February 13, 2020** at 4:19 p.m.

DANVILLE — The battle for Danville voters over the fate of a 69-home project near Mount Diablo has been marked by pronounced campaign spending, with supporters and opponents racking up nearly \$600,000 in expenses to date, according to financial statements.

Both sides have spent a combined \$599,819.77 from 2019 through Jan. 18 to defeat or defend Measure Y on the March 3 ballot. Supporters of the Magee Ranch Preserve project outspent opponents by more than a 15-to-1 ratio, [financial statements filed with the town of Danville show](#).

The [Yes on Y coalition](#), which describes itself as a group of Danville environmental and community leaders whose major source of funding is developer Davidon Homes, has spent a

total of \$567,574.14 from Jan. 1, 2019, through Jan. 18 of this year. The coalition is reporting a cash balance of \$66,303 as of Jan. 18.

In a separate filing, the Yes on Y coalition lists contributions and expenditures from Jan. 1, 2019, to Dec. 31, 2019, of \$604,850. It includes contributions from BaughmanMerrill, a San Francisco political consulting firm, for canvassing handouts, consulting and video production, social media ads and mailers; Goco Consulting of Reno, Nevada, for voter outreach and management fees for voter outreach; Land Use Strategies LLC of Danville, for consulting; and Miller Starr Regalia of Walnut Creek and Cole Perkins of Seattle, Washington, for legal services.

The [Danville Open Space Committee](#), the No on Y group, has spent a total of \$32,245.63 from July 1, 2019, to Jan. 18 and reported a cash balance of \$28,740.41 as of Jan. 18.

In separate financial contribution records, the Yes on Y coalition received a total of \$400,000 from Davidon Homes of Walnut Creek — \$150,000 on Jan. 28, \$100,000 on Dec. 26, 2019, and \$150,000 on Dec. 6, 2019, according to filings with Danville.

“In terms of the respective campaigns spending, Davidon has invested at least \$475,000 in a massive effort to buy results,” Bob Nealis of the Danville Open Space Committee, said in an email statement. “We are convinced this attempt to overwhelm Danville voters with massive outdoor signage, colorful mailers that are appearing in mailboxes at nearly a weekly rate and eliciting the direct support of Mayor Karen Stepper ... in mailers and Town Hall phone presentations will backfire on them.

“Danville voters will see through this effort and vote no to maintain our small town atmosphere local residents appreciate,” he said.

Attempts to reach the Yes on Y coalition were not successful.

As proposed, the project includes 69 houses on 29 acres of the 410-acre plot — or 7 percent of the land off Diablo Road. The remainder of the property would be open space, with two miles of public trails.

The housing development — which has been in the works since 2011 — was first approved by the Danville Town Council on July 2 — including support from Stepper, who wasn't mayor at the time and who voted for the project. In its decision, Danville council members voted unanimously 5-0 and praised the benefit of hundreds of acres of open space.

In addition to the Danville Town Council, Measure Y is backed by Contra Costa Supervisor Candace Anderson; the East Bay Regional Park District; Seth Adams, land conservation director for the nonprofit Save Mount Diablo; and bicycle groups, including Mount Diablo Cyclists, Bike East Bay and Dublin-based Valley Spokesmen Bicycle Club.

“The project is consistent with the town’s general plan,” Danville Councilmember Robert Storer said after the July 2 meeting, when he was the mayor. He noted the project calls for preserving more than 93 percent of the 410-acre property for open space and trails.

The Danville Open Space Committee opposes the project, which it contends is essentially the same one approved by the council in 2013. That project was the subject of a lawsuit that ended

with the council rescinding its approval. The town was ordered to redo its environmental impact report to address bicycle safety impacts.

The committee said the bicycle safety problems haven't been improved, traffic congestion in the area has not been addressed, and the project doesn't include parks or open space. It also says the town is circumventing the public vote required to change agricultural open space to residential use.

But an easement would be granted for an 8-foot-wide paved trail that's to run parallel to Diablo Road for both bicyclists and pedestrians, according to Danville town planner David Crompton. The town has budgeted the trail in its capital improvement projects, Crompton said.

Bicyclist Al Kalin, president of Mount Diablo Cyclists and chairman of the Danville Bicycle Advisory Committee, has said his groups endorsed the Magee Preserve Project. He said his organizations agree with other bike groups, including Bike East Bay and Valley Spokesmen Bicycle Club of Dublin, "that the cycling community and motorists will benefit from this precedent."

Adams, of Save Mount Diablo, praised the project at the July 2, 2019, council meeting.

"This has been a long time coming," Adams said. "There aren't many projects that Save Mount Diablo actually supports, but the conservation benefits of this one are superlative. This is one of the highest conservation value tradeoffs that we've seen in any project in Contra Costa County. Danville has had an incredibly thoughtful process in going through its considerations on the project, and we support the tradeoff."

Jed Magee, who owns Magee Ranch, voiced his support for the project at the July 2, 2019, meeting. And he expected opposition to the project to continue.

"The NIMBYs have all become BANANAs — which stands for 'Build Absolutely Nothing Anywhere Near Anybody,' " Magee said.

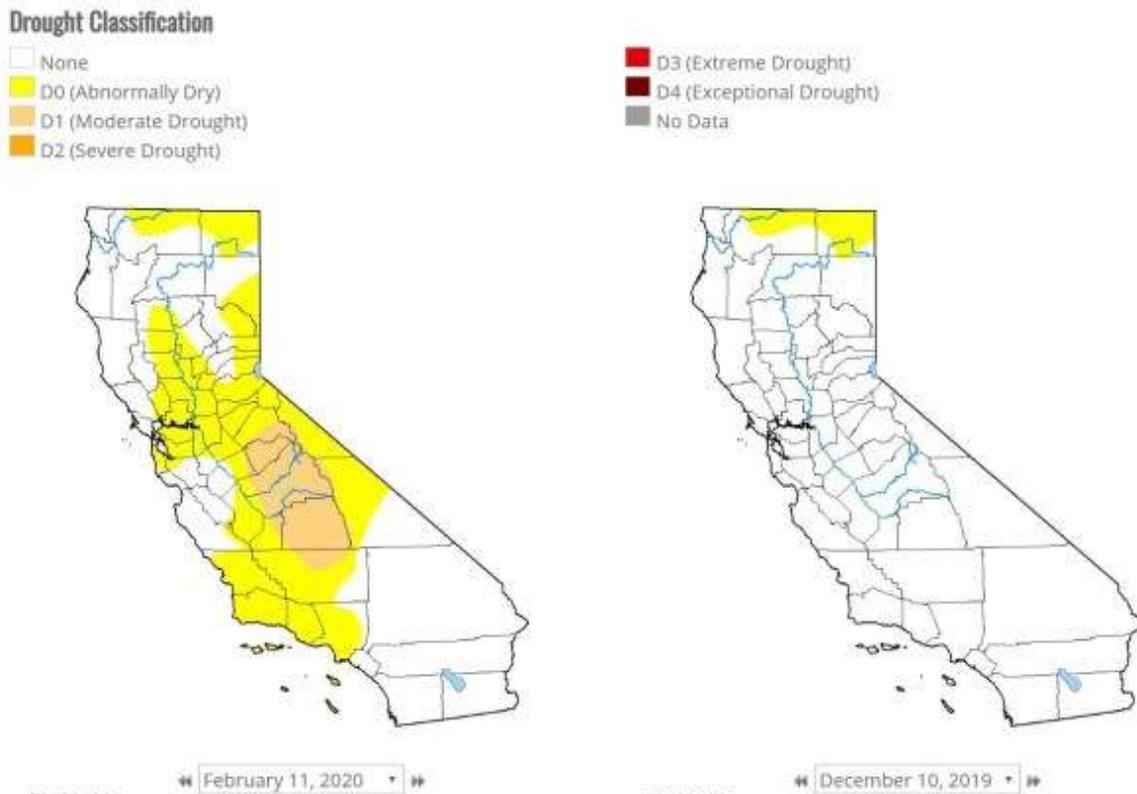
The Danville Open Space Committee began circulating referendum petitions July 17, one day after the council formally approved the project and collected enough signatures to force a referendum on the housing project.

Drought conditions returning to California, new report shows

Nearly 10% of California now in drought, federal government says

By [Paul Rogers](#) | progers@bayareanewsgroup.com |

PUBLISHED: February 13, 2020 at 6:49 a.m. | UPDATED: February 14, 2020 at 4:13 a.m.



On Thursday Feb. 13, 2020, nearly 10% of the state’s land area was classified as being in drought conditions, according to federal scientists, as the state has seen little rain in recent weeks.

Driven by weeks of unusually dry weather, the federal government on Thursday classified parts of California as back in a drought for the first time since last year.

Altogether, 9.5% of the state’s land area is now in a moderate drought, with forecasts showing no rain in most of the state for at least the next 10 days. The area classified as being in moderate drought Thursday was in the Central Valley, covering roughly 10 million acres from Tuolumne County to Kern County.

That’s the most since Feb. 12, 2019, when 10.5% of California’s land area also was in a moderate drought, according to the [U.S. Drought Monitor](#), a weekly report put out by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

“Across Nevada and California, dryness and drought intensification prevailed,” wrote Richard Tinker, a meteorologist with NOAA in College Park, Maryland, who wrote this week’s report.

The Drought Monitor also classified nearly half the state — 46% — as being “abnormally dry,” up from just 3% a month ago. Much of that dry area is in the Central Valley. But it also includes large portions of the Bay Area, such as San Mateo, San Francisco, Alameda, Contra Costa, Solano, Napa and northern Santa Clara counties, along with the coastal region from San Luis Obispo to Los Angeles counties.

The last time any part of California was classified as being in a moderate drought was three months ago, when .01% of California’s land area had that classification.

The new report does not mean, however, that California is heading back into the type of harsh conditions that occurred during the state’s historic drought from 2012 to 2017. “Moderate drought” is the mildest of five categories that the federal scientists use to classify drought conditions in the report.

How bad was it back then? By comparison, exactly five years ago, on the week of Feb. 10, 2015, an overwhelming 98% of the state was in at least a moderate drought, and 40% was in exceptional drought, the most severe of the five categories.

Nevertheless, after a series of soaking atmospheric river storms late last year that drenched California around Thanksgiving and into December, much of California has seen little rain or snow in the seven weeks since the new decade began.

“It’s been disappointing as rainfall totals go,” said Jan Null, a meteorologist with Golden Gate Weather Services in Half Moon Bay. “We had half of normal rainfall in January, and now we’ve gone 0-for-February.”

San Francisco is often used as a measure of Bay Area weather history because its records go back the furthest. This month, the city has recorded no rainfall so far, Null said. The only time San Francisco had no measurable rain in February was in 1864, when Abraham Lincoln was president.

To the east, the statewide Sierra snowpack, the source of nearly one-third of California’s water, on Wednesday was 58% of its historic average for that date, down from 92% on New Year’s Day.

Most Bay Area cities have received about half their average rainfall so far this winter season, and only one day in 2020 so far, Jan. 16, brought more than 1 inch to San Francisco, Oakland and San Jose.

Overall, San Francisco has received 8.83 inches of rain since Oct. 1, or 58% of its historical average. San Jose, with only 3.82 inches, is just 42% of average. And Oakland is at 45% of average with 5.8 inches.

Ridges of high pressure have blocked storms coming off the Pacific Ocean, sending them to Washington and Oregon.

There is still another month and a half of winter left, however. And the state has had “Miracle March” conditions before. Last year, after a dry start to the season, a wet late February and March boosted the statewide Sierra Nevada snowpack from 69% on Jan. 1, 2019, to 161% by April 1.

Another positive sign: Many of California’s biggest reservoirs are holding plenty of water, the result of wet winters over the last two years. On Thursday, Shasta Lake, the state’s largest reservoir, was 78% full — 111% of its historic average for mid-February. Oroville was 65% full, or 94% of its historic average. And San Luis Reservoir near Los Banos was 75% full, or 92% of average for this time of year.

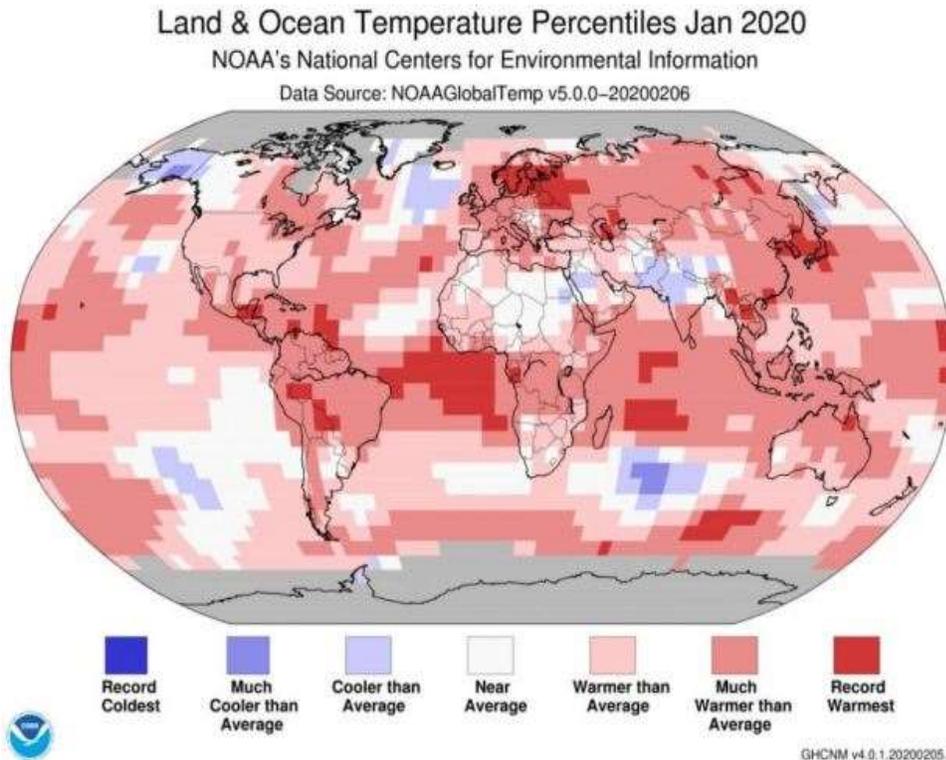
“It’s not like we’re in the second or third or fourth year of a drought and the reservoirs are low. It’s not so bad,” said Jay Lund, director of the UC Davis Center for Watershed Sciences. “It normally takes a year or two of dry years for a drought to settle in.”

With each passing day, however, as winter conditions begin to wane, the chances of hitting historic seasonal averages fall.

Meanwhile, the federal government Thursday reported that the Earth’s climate continues to warm. Federal scientists at NOAA [announced Thursday](#) that this January was the warmest January ever recorded on Earth back to 1880, when modern temperature records first began.

The January 2020 global land and ocean surface temperature was 2.05 degrees Fahrenheit above the 20th century average of 53.6 degrees Fahrenheit, the researchers said. Russia and parts of Scandinavia and eastern Canada experienced temperatures 9 degrees above average.

While California has had droughts many times in its history, scientists say climate change exacerbates them, making them hotter and drier and increasing the risk of wildfires in the summer and fall months.



“Let’s hope we’re not going into another drought again,” Lund said. “But this is California. And whether we are going to have it this year or next year, or another year, California is going to have another drought. It’s just part of life here, and it will probably become even more so with climate change.”

January, 2020 was the warmest January ever recorded on Earth back to 1880 when modern temperature records began, NOAA reported Thursday Feb. 13, 2020. (NOAA)

East Bay Times

East Bay park district will get nearly 350 acres of new open space if Danville's Magee Ranch housing ballot measure passes

Opponent of the plan says developer is trying to distract voters



This aerial view shows the Magee Ranch Preserve housing plan and open space that was approved by the Danville Town Council on July 2, 2019.. The proposal is the subject of a referendum, Measure Y, on the March 3 ballot. (Town of Danville)

By [Jon Kawamoto](#) | jkawamoto@bayareanewsgroup.com | Bay Area News Group

PUBLISHED: February 14, 2020 at 11:50 a.m. | UPDATED: **February 14, 2020** at 6:03 p.m.

The East Bay Regional Park District will gain nearly 350 acres to expand an open space preserve in Danville — for free — if voters approve a ballot measure that allows 69 new single-family homes to be built on Magee Ranch agricultural land.

But opponents of the plan cried foul, saying the last minute announcement — three weeks before the March 3 election — sought to distract voters from what the ballot measure is really about: rezoning agriculture land for yet another large housing development.

The park district made the announcement Monday as part of agreement with the landowner and developer, which was already being negotiated long before Measure Y was placed on the March 3 ballot, according to a district official. The ballot measure requires that 381 of the 410-acre

property be dedicated to permanent open space, regardless of whether the park district accepts the land or not.

If the measure is approved, the park district would receive fee title or conservation easement to 343 acres of the site, and use it to expand the Sycamore Valley Open Space Preserve as part of the Magee Ranch Preserve development plan, according to Carol Johnson, EBRPD assistant general manager of public affairs.

“Since 1998, the park district has been acquiring land to create Sycamore Valley Open Space Preserve, a gorgeous publicly accessible Danville park stitched together by land dedications from six different housing developers over the years,” said EBRPD General Manager Robert Doyle in a statement. “With the additional ... acres, Sycamore Valley Open Space will reach a total of 1,085 acres with over 3.5 miles of new trails of beautiful vistas of Mount Diablo and the Tassajara Valley.”

Johnson said in an email that the deal between the park district and developer Davidon Homes depends on voters approving the ballot measure.

According to Johnson, the park district has been “engaged since 2010 with the Town of Danville and the prospective developers of the Magee property to amend their development footprint to preserve maximum open space, including ridge lines and connections to Sycamore Valley Regional Preserve.

“Two years ago and prior to Measure Y, Magee developer (Davidon Homes) asked if the park district would accept a dedication of open space expanding public trails access at Sycamore Valley Open Space,” Johnson continued. “The detail of the dedication and access was worked out in 2019 and presented to EBRPD Board by staff where they offered their full support. Given the uncertainty over the project with Measure Y, formal real estate transactions are pending.”

The opposition to Measure Y, the Danville Open Space Committee, was quick to criticize the agreement, which it said it learned of Monday.

“The last-minute press release by EBRPD is yet one more example of the pressure that this development is feeling,” said Bob Nealis of the Danville Open Space Committee in an email statement. “This ballot measure is about rezoning existing open space to construct a major 69-home subdivision in our back yard, not about hiking trails.

“The fact that a few miles of trails might be created simply masks over the fact that this development ignores congestion, decreases road safety for both bikes and cars on a narrow-overburdened country road and significantly adds increased risk during emergency evacuations for all current residents,” Nealis continued. “If people are looking for miles of trails and open space, they need go no further than just across the street to Mount Diablo State Park.”

The Danville Town Council approved the project by a 5-0 vote on July 2, 2019, but opponents successfully forced a referendum on the proposal.

Los Angeles Times

Is California headed back into drought, or did we never really leave one?

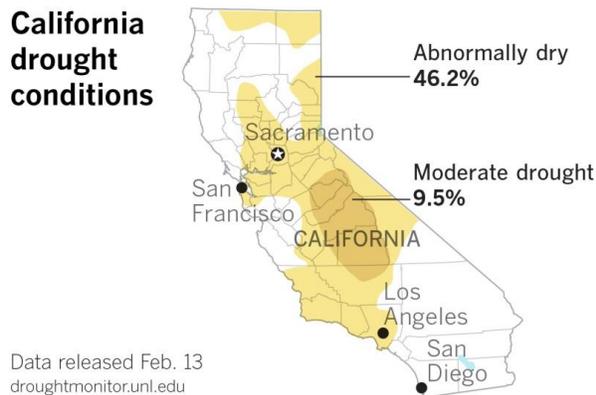
By [Paul Duginski](#), Graphics and Data Journalist

Feb. 15, 2020

6:18 PM

The [most recent U.S. Drought Monitor](#), issued on Thursday, shows an oval-shaped patch of Central California slipping back into moderate drought. This is after a couple months where the Drought Monitor showed the state to be [almost drought-free](#).

California drought conditions



The [2018-19 water year](#) that came to a close last June was good — above average in many places in the state — but not great. The 2019-20 water year got off to a fast start with [a couple of potent storms](#), and Southern California was [above seasonal norms](#) even as Northern California lagged. Then January and February — two of the state’s wettest months — turned bone dry. And February looks unlikely to overcome its arid habits before the month ends, even though the calendar has given it an extra day this year in which to try.

A persistent ridge of high pressure has taken up residence in the eastern Pacific, and it shows no sign of budging. It is diverting storms into the Pacific Northwest region, which means more dry weather for California.

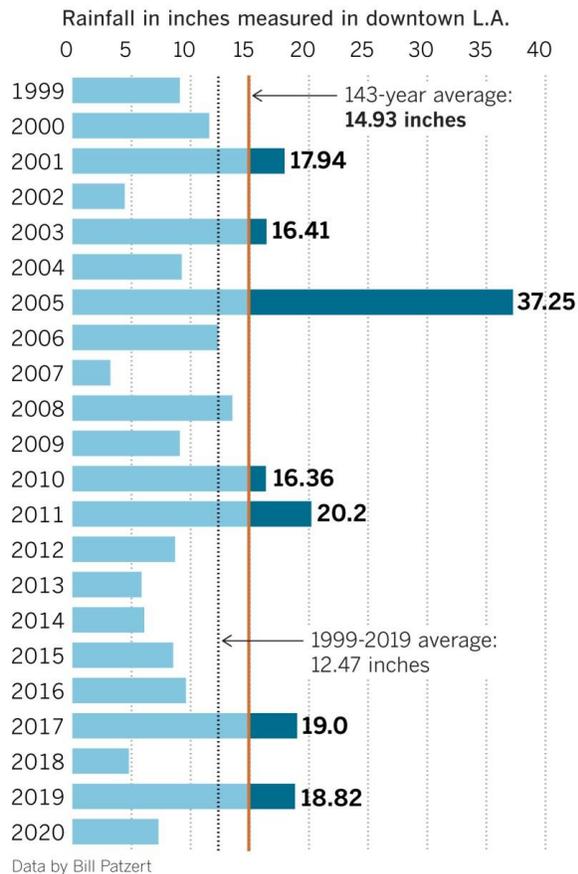
But did the drought in California ever really end? Climatologist and weather expert Bill Patzert thinks Southern California continues to be mired in a two-decade drought, and he uses rainfall figures for downtown Los Angeles to illustrate his point.

Over a period of 143 years, the average annual rainfall recorded in downtown Los Angeles has been 14.93 inches. Rainfall figures for downtown Los Angeles from 1999 to 2019 show many more disappointingly dry years than robustly wet ones.

During the 21 years ending with the 2019 season, 14 years have been below average, and only seven have been above, according to Patzert, who until recently was with NASA’s Jet Propulsion Laboratory. In fact, three of the driest years since 1878 occurred during this period: 2002, 2007 and 2018. The period from 2012 to 2016 accounted for the five driest consecutive years on record, when the average rainfall each year was only 7.74 inches, or 50% of normal.

Is this what a 20-year drought looks like?

For the rainfall years ending in 1999 through 2019, 14 have fallen below the 143-year average.



Between 1999 and 2019, downtown Los Angeles was a total of almost 52 inches below average, Patzert points out. “That’s like losing 3½ average years of rainfall over the last 21 years.”

The lower rainfall brought the average for those years down to 12.47 inches per year — 2.47 inches short of normal each year, on average. “That’s mucho groundwater, irrigation for crops, lots of dead lawns and mass mortality in the great forests of California,” said Patzert.

“This drought did not simply come and go every other year, it has continued to deepen for two decades,” Patzert explained. “And the impacts have been long-lasting for urban dwellers, farmers, water managers and especially firefighters.”

The effects of persistent drought last a long time. For example, Lake Mead, a key reservoir formed by the Hoover Dam on the Colorado River, supplies water to millions of people in Arizona, California and Nevada, including Los Angeles. In 1999, its level was 1,212 feet above sea level. Now it’s at 1,094 feet — 118 feet lower — which represents a 50% drop in the

volume of the lake. It will take decades for the reservoir to recover, Patzert warns.

“That’s ominous because the population served by water from the Colorado River has exploded since the 1950s,” said Patzert. “Lake Mead is our drought monitor for the American Southwest.”

Patzert emphasizes that although one or two dry years can be punishing, a slowly building, large-scale drought is much more damaging. Long, major droughts are not zero or 50% below-normal rain. Droughts are when you drop from an average of 14.93 inches of rain per year to 12.47 inches — a subtle 16% decrease in average rain for 21 years, he explained. The two-decade drop in the level of Lake Mead is the result.

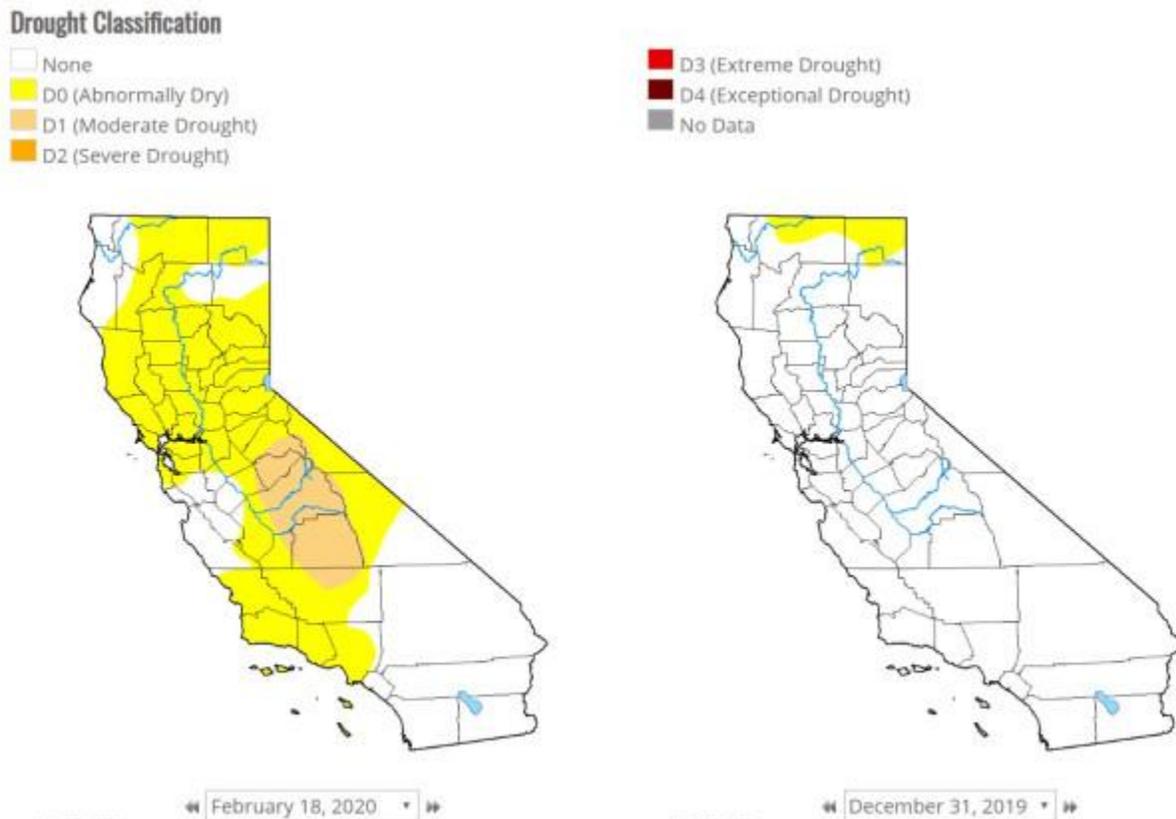
“History and science show us that droughts are large, long-lasting, and they wax and wane,” said Patzert. “This is especially true in the American West. The great Dust Bowl started in 1930 and lasted for almost a decade. California experienced on-again, off-again drought from the mid-1940s through the late 1970s. During these prolonged dry spells, a single wet year or two can provide temporary relief but will not break a multiyear drought.

“Droughts build incrementally, and recovery happens in slow motion, not with one wet year,” he said. “Droughts fool you. You think you’re out, and they pull you back in.”

East Bay Times

California drought 'pretty likely' by summer as new report shows state growing more dry

Majority of California landscape is now classified as "abnormally dry"



On Thursday Feb. 20, 2020, the U.S. Drought Monitor report classified 59% of California as “abnormally dry” and 9.5% as in “moderate drought,” a significant change from Dec. 31, 2019, when just 3.5% was abnormally dry and none was in drought.

By [Paul Rogers](#) | progers@bayareanewsgroup.com |

PUBLISHED: February 20, 2020 at 6:46 a.m. | UPDATED: **February 21, 2020** at 10:27 a.m.

Following another week without rain — and none forecast through the end of this month across Northern California — the federal government on Thursday announced that unusually dry conditions are expanding across a wider swath of California’s landscape, increasing concerns about summer fire risk and the possible return of at least a modest drought this year.

Overall, 59.9% of the state’s land area is now classified as “abnormally dry,” up from 46.1% last week, according to [the U.S. Drought Monitor](#), a weekly report issued by the National Oceanic

and Atmospheric Administration, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

All nine Bay Area counties are now classified as abnormally dry. So are places that have suffered devastating fires in recent years: Sonoma, Napa, Lake and Mendocino counties. Without significant rain in March or April, fire danger in those areas and other parts of the state will be higher than normal again this summer.

“Given what we’ve seen so far this year and the forecast for the next few weeks, I do think it’s pretty likely we’ll end up in some degree of drought by this summer,” said Daniel Swain, a climate scientist at UCLA, on Thursday.

Swain noted, however, that the state is equipped to handle one-year droughts pretty well without major water shortages because of water stored in reservoirs, groundwater wells and conservation.

It’s when dry conditions persist for several years, as they did during the state’s historic drought from 2012 to 2017, that problems arise.

“Assuming this year ends dry, which is pretty likely,” Swain said, “the question is what happens next year?”

Of note in Thursday’s federal report: The area of California where abnormally dry conditions are now present is 14 million acres larger than it was last week, a landscape 44 times the size of Los Angeles.

“The plants and the forests don’t benefit from the water storage reservoirs,” Swain said. “If conditions remain very dry heading into summer, the landscape and vegetation is definitely going to feel it this year. From a wildfire perspective, the dry years do tend to be the bad fire years, especially in Northern California.”

Last year, following a wet February and March, the state experienced a mild fire year, with high moisture levels in grasses, shrubs and trees — a welcome departure from prior years when major fires devastated Napa and Sonoma County, along with the town of Paradise in Butte County.

Altogether, Thursday’s report noted, 58% of California’s population, or 21.7 million people, are currently living in areas that are in moderate drought or are abnormally dry.

The amount of the state in “moderate drought,” a more serious category, remained the same this week as last week, at 9.5%. But that’s expected to increase if the National Weather Service’s dry forecast for the next two weeks bears out.

The reason for the dry conditions is a persistent weather pattern that is sending California’s rain toward Seattle.

“High pressure off the California coast kept much of California, Nevada, Arizona, and Utah precipitation-free this week, with above-normal temperatures in California,” wrote David Miskus, a NOAA meteorologist and author of Thursday’s drought report.

“Instead, Pacific storm systems were deflected northward or southward, allowing the Pacific Northwest to receive welcome moisture.”

The area in moderate drought Thursday, the driest in California, was in the Central Valley, covering roughly 10 million acres from Tuolumne County to Kern County.

The new report does not mean, however, that California is heading back into the kind of severe drought that the state experienced from 2012 to 2017.

There is still another month in the state’s rainy season. And California has had very wet “Miracle March” conditions in years past.

By comparison, five years ago, on the week of Feb. 17, 2015, an overwhelming 98% of the state was in at least a moderate drought, and 41% was in exceptional drought, the most severe of the five categories used in the report. That drought was broken by a series of massive atmospheric river, or “Pineapple Express,” storms that roared in off the Pacific in early 2017 and caused flooding in downtown San Jose and the collapse of the spillway at Oroville Dam in Butte County.

This winter season, although California experienced some decent rainfall around Thanksgiving and into December, the storms all but shut down after the New Year, and January and February have been unusually warm and dry.

Just one day in 2020 so far, Jan. 16, has had enough rain to bring at least 1 inch to San Francisco, Oakland and San Jose.

So far in February, not a drop of rain has fallen in San Francisco. If the month ends without any rain, it will be the first time since 1864 when February, usually one of the wettest months of the year, came up completely dry.

Lack of rain has meant lack of snow. On Wednesday, the statewide Sierra snowpack, the source of nearly one-third of California’s water, was at 52% of its historic average for that date, down from 92% on New Year’s Day.

The good news is that last year’s wet winter filled reservoirs, boosting the state’s water supply. On Thursday, Shasta Lake, the state’s largest reservoir, was 78% full — 109% of its historic average for mid-February. Oroville was 64% full, or 93% of its historic average. And San Luis Reservoir near Los Banos was 73% full, or 88% of average for this time of year.

Water managers are watching the weather trend nervously. Because of the reservoir storage, California usually needs at least two dry winters in a row before significant water conservation measures are imposed.

“I’m keeping my fingers crossed for some rain,” Swain said. “But there isn’t any on the horizon right now. At this point the odds of ending up at average for the whole winter are astronomically low. A Miracle March wouldn’t dig us all the way out of the hole, but it could help.”

East Bay Times

March 30 deadline for Danville term limits ballot measure

Backers of term limits must collect 3,000 valid signatures to qualify for the November ballot



The Town of Danville offices at 510 La Gonda Way, where the Town Council holds its meetings. (Google Street View)

By [Jon Kawamoto](#) | jkawamoto@bayareanewsgroup.com | Bay Area News Group
PUBLISHED: February 19, 2020 at 2:00 p.m. | UPDATED: **February 21, 2020** at 3:02 p.m.

DANVILLE — The backers of an effort to impose term limits on the Danville Town Council have until March 30 to collect the necessary signatures to qualify for the November ballot.

The Danville Term Limits group is seeking to cap council members' service to two terms and eight years. It must gather 3,000 valid signatures, roughly 10 percent of the registered voters in Danville, before the deadline, said town Clerk Marie Sunseri.

Although the group said it is confident it will be successful in getting the measure on the ballot, it declined to say how many signatures it has collected so far.

“We are guaranteed that will we get this on the ballot,” said Nasser Mirzai, of the [Danville Term Limits](#) group.

Mirzai said the term limits group’s efforts has benefited from questions and concerns about [Measure Y, the Magee Ranch Preserve](#) project on the March 3 ballot. The project, approved unanimously by the Danville Town Council and endorsed by Save Mount Diablo and several bicycle groups among others, proposes to build 69 homes and create more than 300 acres of open space and trails on a 410-acre parcel.

Mirzai said the group is not targeting any members of the Council.

“This is not an attack on any individual,” he said. “We need to have the system in place. It’s time to have new energy, new blood” on the council. He pointed out that term limits are in place for the U.S. president and the California Legislature.

According to its Danville Term Limits website, the current five Town Council members have served on either the council or commissions for a total of 93 years. Councilmember Newell Arnerich has served as a councilman or on commissions 31 years.

Since Danville incorporated in 1982, no incumbent Town Council member has ever lost a re-election contest.

“Danville has a collective Town Council incumbency of nearly 100 cumulative years, with several members having been in power for 20 and 30 years individually,” the Danville Term Limits stated on its website. “History has shown that long-time incumbency delays progress, perpetuates old ideas, and results in a stagnated vision. Term limits will decisively put an end to 30-year incumbents and usher in new, vibrant leadership with fresh perspectives to improve our town, rather than continue with political ‘business as usual.’ ”

Councilman Robert Storer, who served as mayor last year, took issue with the term limits campaign when the drive began this past October.

“As a council member in the Town of Danville, we are already limited to a four-year term,” he said in an email. “Then voters are presented with a whole new opportunity to vote to select their elected representatives.

“The whole concept of term limits suggest that voters lack the ability to make educated choices and need to have their options further narrowed by eliminating some experienced candidates who have strong records to stand on,” he continued.

East Bay Times

Editorial: Danville should stop NIMBYism, vote for Magee Ranch homes

Vote yes on Measure Y for project with new houses, traffic improvements, 93% open space and safe bike route



This aerial view shows the Magee Ranch Preserve housing plan and open space that was approved by the Danville Town Council on July 2, 2019. The proposal is the subject of a referendum, Measure Y, on the March 3 ballot. (Town of Danville)

By [East Bay Times editorial](#) |

PUBLISHED: February 22, 2020 at 5:10 a.m. | UPDATED: **February 22, 2020** at 6:55 a.m.

For about a decade, a small group of Danville homeowners have been fighting plans for construction of 69 homes on the 410-acre Magee Ranch property off Diablo Road.

Now, they've used a signature-gathering drive to force the issue to the ballot. It's time for voters to end this NIMBYism.

Danville residents should vote yes on Measure Y, which would reaffirm the City Council's decision to rezone the land so Davidon Homes can build the houses.

The plans also call for East Bay Regional Park District to take control and open for public use most of the 381 acres of open space that's part of the deal; the city to move forward on a critical

bike path to get cyclists off dangerous Diablo Road; and the county to install a new signal that would significantly improve traffic flow during the dreaded morning commute.

That's right: The road improvements required with the development would make traffic better. The Magee Preserve project is a win-win: More homes, plus improvements that benefit the community.

The owners of the land were actually entitled to build more houses on the property. And they could have spread them out over the 410 acres. Instead they plan to cluster the construction near Diablo Road, setting aside 93% of the land as permanent open space.

The City Council, which unanimously approved the rezoning necessary for the clustering, understood the benefits. Unfortunately, members of the opposition group, which first sued unsuccessfully to stop development on the site, is now trying to overturn the council decision through a ballot referendum.

Opponents admit that what they really want the city to do is stop the rezoning that enables the clustering of homes. They figure the developer wouldn't be able to cost-effectively build as many houses if they're spread out. Simply put, they want to make it more expensive to build on the property.

It's mind-boggling: We're talking about 69 homes along a thoroughfare that has thousands of homes around it, including those of the opponents. We're not talking about a development that pushes beyond the county's urban growth boundaries. We're talking about a project that's essentially suburban in-fill.

Opponents say they're worried about traffic the project would generate. But the developer would be required to install a much-needed signal light that would replace stop signs at the intersection of Diablo Road and Mt. Diablo Scenic Boulevard.

The result, according to traffic studies for the project's environmental impact report, would be a 39% reduction in travel time along a two-mile stretch of Diablo Road during the morning commute and average speed improvement from 18 mph to 29 mph.

Opponents say they're worried about fire danger, but the environmental study and fire officials say the project would not hurt the ability of firefighters to serve the area.

Opponents say they're concerned about bike safety. But this project would improve bike safety. The developer would be required to dedicate land the city has been seeking for a new paved trail that cyclists heading for Mount Diablo, or just going for a local jaunt, could use instead of risking their lives on Diablo Road. That's why cycling groups have supported the development.

The City Council got it right. The Magee Preserve project deserves support. Vote yes on Measure Y.

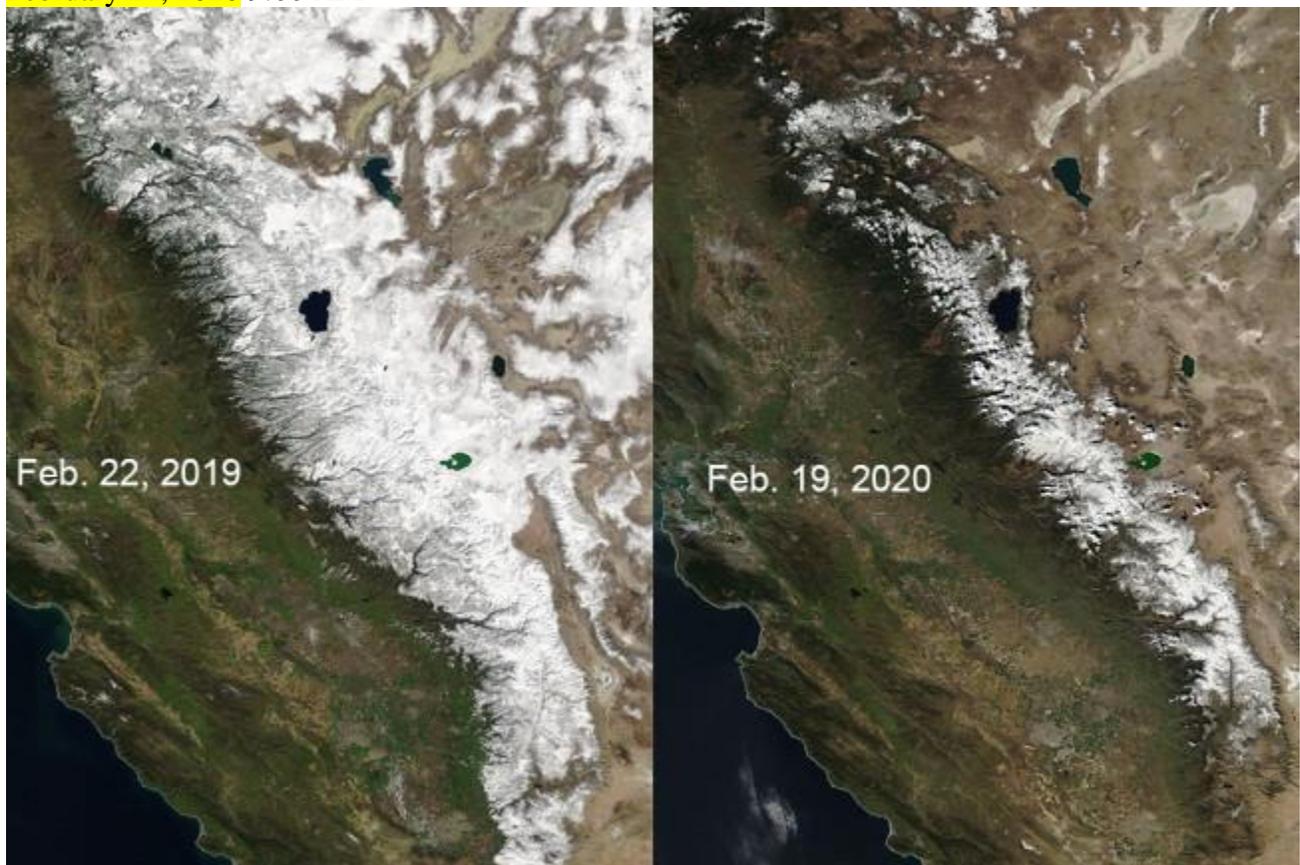
Discover Magazine

California's Snowpack Shrivels, Raising Fears of Future Wildfires

Meanwhile, the Colorado Rockies have so far received a bounty of snow. But new research portends a dry future ahead for 40 million people in the western U.S. and Mexico.

[ImaGeo](#)By [Tom Yulsman](#)

February 24, 2020 9:00 AM



Satellite images taken about a year apart show a dramatic difference in snowpack in California's Sierra Nevada range — source of 30 to 50 percent of the state's water. In late February last year, snowpack stood at nearly 150 percent of normal. Now, it's barely above 50 percent. (Images: NASA Worldview)

What a difference a year makes.

As the comparison of satellite images above shows, last year at this time California's Sierra Nevada range was buried in snow. And even as recently as January of this year, snowpack was looking pretty good.

But since then, the jet stream has ferried storms north of California, causing the snowpack to shrivel — from about 150 percent of average last February down to just a little more than 50 percent now.

Although the Sierra Nevada covers just a quarter of California, the range provides [60 percent of the state's fresh water](#), serving 23 million people. The water also is vital to the state's agricultural production, which supplies [more than a third](#) of the fruits, vegetables, and nuts consumed in the United States.

Agricultural exports are also a key part of the California — and U.S. — economies. Ag exports from the state total some \$20 billion a year, which by [one estimate](#) generates nearly 175,000 jobs.

There is one bright spot: Water storage in eight of 12 major California reservoirs is close to or above average for this time of year, thanks to abundant precipitation during last year's wet season. But without replenishment, those reservoirs levels will come down.

Shriveling snowpack doesn't only put water supplies at risk. A dry winter can lead to disasters in summer and fall. "A below-average snowpack in the Sierra at this time of year will often mean a more severe wildfire season is ahead, beginning in the summer," [according to AccuWeather Meteorologist Bill Deger](#).

With about six weeks left to the wet season, things could still turn around. In fact, in 2018 one key measurement on March 1 showed snowpack barely pushing 50 percent of average. But then the mountains were pummeled with snow in what was described as a "miracle March." By April 1 conditions had improved to 93 percent.

Even so, 2018 turned out to be a [horrific year for California wildfires](#). More than 3,000 square miles burned — an area two thirds the size of the Los Angeles metropolitan area — and 24,226 structures were damaged or destroyed. One hundred people lost their lives that year, 75 of them in the Camp Fire, which ranks now as [California's deadliest](#).

Even as concerns mount in California, things are looking better to the east, with some parts of the Colorado Rockies receiving a bounty of snow.

Things may look good now, but over the long run, snowpack in the mountains that feed water into the Colorado River is likely to decline significantly, thanks to human-caused warming. A [new study](#) shows that if greenhouse gas emissions remain high in the absence of policies to mitigate climate change, the Colorado could lose 31 percent of its flow by mid-century compared to the average for 1913–2017.

If policies were enacted to rein in emissions of planet-warming carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases, the losses would be limited to 14 percent, according to the study. That's obviously much better than losing nearly a third of the flow.

But it's important to keep this in mind: More water is already being drawn from the Colorado River Basin [than is actually flowing within it](#). So further declines in the water supply, even at the low end, will only make things worse.

Here are the numbers: An estimated 20 million [acre-feet](#) are used each year, compared to the Colorado's long-term average flow of about 12 million to 15 million acre-feet of water annually. The result: a steady drawdown of the two giant hydrological savings banks on the Colorado River. The first is Lake Powell, impounded by the Glen Canyon Dam, seen in the satellite image above. It currently stands at just [50 percent of capacity](#).

Downstream along the Colorado is Lake Mead near Las Vegas, created by Hoover Dam.

You can watch the dramatic impact of demand outstripping supply in the animation of Landsat images above. One image was acquired in 1984, when the reservoir was brimming with water. The other was captured in 2016, after nearly 20 years of low flows in the Colorado.

Today, Lake Mead stands at just [43 percent of capacity](#). Despite decent snowpack this winter in the mountains upstream, inflow this year is projected to be just [80 percent of average](#).

With the future promising even drier conditions, much is at risk. The Colorado River Basin supplies water to 40 million people in seven U.S. states and Mexico. It's estimated to support [\\$1.4 trillion in economic activity](#) and 16 million U.S. jobs. That's one twelfth of the total U.S. domestic product.

From month to month and year to year, snowpack levels from California east through the Rockies will vary, [perhaps even more dramatically](#) due to climate change. But despite any short-term upticks, over the long run we are clearly in an era of limits.

San Francisco Chronicle

SF expecting first dry February in 156 years, but rain possible Sunday

[Alejandro Serrano](#) Feb. 24, 2020 Updated: Feb. 24, 2020 4:33 p.m.

As temperatures increase throughout the Bay Area, weather officials spotted something hopeful in the seven-day forecast: a chance of rain.

The lack of precipitation in downtown San Francisco this month is nearing a historic feat. The city has not had a February with no rainfall since 1864, according to the National Weather Service.

There is a [20% to 30% chance of rain across the region Sunday](#), when an upper-level trough of low pressure from the northwest is expected to import cooler temps, according to the National Weather Service. Of course, that would be March 1.

“It is very exciting — if it happens,” said Matt Mehle, a meteorologist with the weather service.

The last recorded rainfall in San Francisco was Jan. 28, when weather officials marked nine-hundredths of an inch downtown. Santa Rosa also measured its last apparent rainfall that day, while the East Bay hills and, outside the Bay Area, parts of Monterey got a light splash over the weekend.

“Enough to wet the ground and wet the cars and stuff,” Mehle said.

The closest San Francisco has come to a dry February was in 1953, when four-hundredths of an inch fell downtown.

“Last year, we had 7.94 inches of rain in San Francisco,” Mehle said.

The dry conditions have raised concerns, and Mehle said a recent report indicated that several Bay Area communities may be headed toward a drought if the trend continues into March.

“It is basically the first stage of drought concern, which makes sense,” he said.

The lack of rain has been caused, in part, by a high-pressure system sitting in place over the region, keeping storms at bay.

“Almost like a roadblock in the atmosphere,” Mehle said. “The storm track has been to the north.”

Dry winds moving from land to sea and high pressure are expected to warm up temperatures across the region this week.

Temperatures in San Francisco should approach 70 by the end of the week. Forecasters said much of the inland valleys will have high temps in the mid-70s, but the Santa Rosa area may reach 80 degrees.

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