

A Proactive Approach to Building Long-Term Resiliency to Drought

Western's 2022 Drought Contingency Plan

The Western Municipal Water District (Western) was formed in 1954 to bring supplemental water to the growing western Riverside county. Today, Western provides water supply, wastewater treatment and disposal, and water resource management to nearly one million people in a service area covering roughly 527 square-miles in western Riverside County. Western serves approximately 25,000 retail and 14 wholesale customers with water from the Colorado River, State Water Project, recycled water, and local groundwater.

With drought and emergency situations continuously a threat to water supply, Western has had a Drought Contingency Plan (DCP) in place since 1992. In 2020, Western received a grant from the United States Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) WaterSMART program to update their DCP with the goal of developing a more comprehensive, proactive, and robust regional plan that considers drought impacts to local water supplies and infrastructure. Starting in mid-2020, Western embarked on the DCP update through a collaborative process with a Drought Task Force comprised of 29 organizations represented by knowledgeable community leaders. These 29 organizations span the range of entities responsible and involved in water management for all beneficial uses of water across all levels of water need.

Together with the Drought Task Force over a two-year period, the regional DCP was updated to answer the following questions:

How will we recognize drought in the early stages?

How will drought affect us?

How can we protect ourselves from the next drought?

Planning for and Managing Drought

How will we recognize drought in the early stages?

Planning for and managing drought requires monitoring to identify the onset of drought and to assess its severity. Western, along with the Drought Task Force, developed a regional Drought Monitoring Framework to establish a process for monitoring near- and long-term water availability and for predicting the probability of future droughts or confirming an existing drought. Included within this framework is a Regional Drought Portal and ongoing Drought Task Force meetings.

The Regional Drought Portal is in the conceptual planning phase, and would provide a platform to post, collect, and disseminate key datasets identified as being pertinent to regional drought planning and response. In addition to the information-sharing framework that is proposed as part of the Regional Drought Portal, moving forward, Western will convene the Drought Task Force based on regional conditions to further enhance regional coordination and information sharing regarding droughts and shortages.

Drought Monitoring Framework Benefits

- Early alerts of troubling drought indicators
- Information and knowledge exchange
- Opportunity to promote consistent messaging
- Address regional challenges and identify collaborative opportunities
- Grant and other funding opportunities

REGIONAL TRIGGERS AND STAGES FOR DROUGHT TASK FORCE MEETINGS

Regional Drought Stage	Meeting Frequency	Regional Conditions				
		U.S. Drought Monitor (DCP Region)	MWD WSAP/ Similar Action	Agencies in Declared Shortage*	Statewide Drought Proclamation	Riverside County Drought Proclamation
Normal	Annual	None-Abnormally Dry	--	None	--	--
Watch	Quarterly	Moderate-Extreme Drought	Levels 1 and 2	3 or more	Drought	Drought
Alert	Monthly	Exceptional Drought	Levels 3 thru 5	6 or more	Drought	Drought
Emergency	Weekly	Exceptional Drought	Levels 6 and 10	10 or more	Drought	Drought

*Not including State-mandated shortage

Identifying and Mitigating the Risks and Impacts of Drought

How will drought affect us?

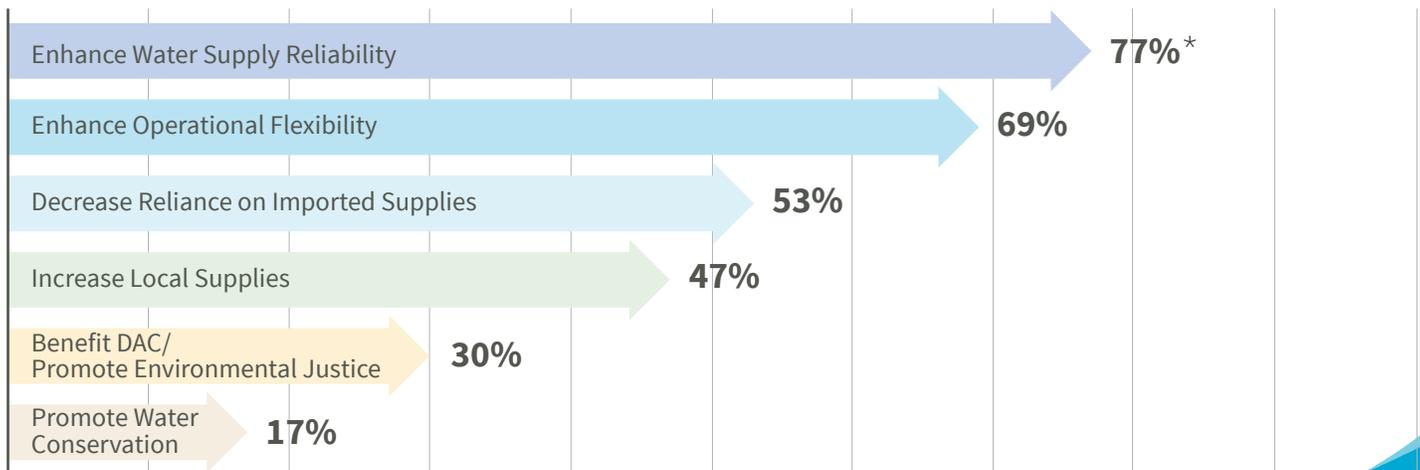
Understanding how drought will affect the region requires evaluating the risks from drought, and the factors driving those risks. To evaluate these risks and the factors that drive them, Western performed a vulnerability assessment which incorporated projected climate change data and the potential impacts to future water supplies and demands. Overall, the results of the vulnerability assessment indicated projected decreases in surface water supplies, precipitation, and natural recharge, and increases in outdoor water use. These findings demonstrate that the region’s dependence on imported water, which is highly variable and is projected to be more expensive in the future, will increase if Western does not implement strategies ahead of drought to address these potential impacts.

The results from the vulnerability assessment also provide Western’s retail agencies the opportunity to evaluate future estimates of supplies and demands considering the effects of climate change. The tools to perform these evaluations are available upon request from Western.

How can we protect ourselves from the next drought?

Understanding that the region’s dependence on imported water could increase in the future if Western does not implement mitigation strategies ahead of drought, a suite of mitigation actions was compiled by Western and the Drought Task Force. These mitigation actions have the potential to protect the region from the next drought by increasing local supply, enhancing water supply reliability and operational flexibility, decreasing reliance on imported supplies, and promoting water conservation. Select projects also benefit disadvantaged communities and/or promote environmental justice. Inclusion of these actions in the DCP not only identifies ways that the region can reduce the future risks and impacts of drought, but it increases opportunities for grant funding, and provides a mechanism for Western and its retail agencies to identify regional partners for upcoming projects which can make grant applications more competitive.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF THE REGIONAL DCP MITIGATION ACTIONS



* Percentage of Mitigation Actions Included in the Regional DCP that would Enhance Water Supply Reliability

Looking to the Future— Providing Long-Term Resilience to Drought

Drought Management Moving Forward

With drought becoming a more persistent way of life in California, the region must continue to prepare and plan for droughts in the future. To ensure effective regional drought contingency planning, the region will take the following steps as related to the DCP:

- Enhance regional coordination, collaboration, and information sharing by convening the Drought Task Force based on local conditions and considering the establishment of a regional drought portal
- Evaluate opportunities to collaborate on projects that address drought impacts and support investments in drought resilience and drought management
- Continue exploring funding opportunities for planned and potential future actions to enhance drought resilience using the regional DCP as a tool to strengthen grant applications
- Plan for future DCP updates to meet the needs of the region to support member agencies and regional interests in ensuring the region has access to safe drinking water, while maximizing conservation efforts, and supporting climate-smart practices to meet the region's socioeconomic and environmental needs

Stay Informed and Involved

To stay informed and involved in Western's ongoing programs and efforts, check out our website at www.wmwd.com, or follow us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.



Last year the Governor and the Legislature enacted an historic three-year, \$5.2 billion investment in California water systems to support immediate drought response and to build water resilience statewide. This includes \$750 million for drought-response activities in 2022-2023, including:

- \$200 million for water conservation
- \$150 million for water storage and reliability
- \$85 million for lands management and habitat enhancement
- \$65 million for immediate drought response
- \$250 million in unallocated drought funding

Given the intensification of drought conditions since January 2022, the May 2022 Revise allocates an additional \$1.6 billion to continue the state's drought response. These additional funds are allocated to immediate drought support, including support of efforts to encourage conservation and replenishment of drought-relief grant programs.