

Drought Impact on Water Rights in California

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If your food was grown or raised by California farmers or ranchers, you depend on someone who either has a Water Right or buys water from a water supplier who has a Water Right (such as an irrigation district). If you live in the city or suburbs and drink, cook with, wash with, or water your yard with water, you are able to do so because your city has a Water Right or buys water from someone who has a Water Right. When you turn on your lights or use appliances in California, it is likely that at least some of the electricity you are using was generated by a power company that is able to operate a hydropower plant because it has a Water Right. If you swim, fish, or boat in a man-made lake or raft below a dam, you are able to do so because the owner of the dam has a Water Right.

Dry is the new normal, or so some predictions say. Given current drought conditions and competing demands for water in California, it is more important than ever before that the Water Boards strategically use their full range of authorities and funding capabilities to enact policies that address water supply and environmental protection in a coordinated manner. Doing so requires an understanding of how streams and species react to variable flow conditions and opportunities for improving flow conditions while still providing for critical human needs. All Californians should have an interest in water-shed issues in our state.

eWRIMS provides the public and staff Internet access to California's water rights information by combining a tabular database with a Geographic Information System database system.

During times of drought, vegetation is visibly dry, stream and river flows decline, water levels in lakes and reservoirs fall, and the depth to water in wells increases. As drought persists, longer-term impacts can emerge, such as groundwater level declines, land subsidence, seawater intrusion, and damage to ecosystems. Unlike the immediate impacts of drought, however, long-term impacts can be harder to see, but

more costly to manage in the future. One key area in dealing with the current 5-year drought we are facing, involves Water Rights.

What is a Water Right? A Water Right is legal permission to use a reasonable amount of water for a beneficial purpose such as swimming, fishing, farming or industry. If you take water from a lake, river, stream, or creek; or, from underground supplies for a beneficial use, the California Water Code (Division 2) requires that you have a Water Right.

The State Water Board is the only agency with authority to administer Water Rights in California. Local governments, water districts, and the California Regional Water Quality Control Boards do not administer Water Rights. The State Water Board shares the authority to enforce Water Right laws with the state courts.

The State Water Board encourages Water Right holders to assist in the prevention of unlawful diversion of water and in discouraging any waste or unreasonable use of water. The Web-based Enhanced Water Right Information Management System (eWRIMS) was developed by the State Water Board to track information on Water Rights in California. eWRIMS contains information on Water Right permits and licenses issued by the State Water Board and other claimed Water Rights. eWRIMS is also a module of the State Water Board's California Integrated Water

Quality System (CIWQS) program. eWRIMS provides the public and staff Internet access to California's Water Rights information by combining a tabular database with a Geographic Information System database system. The eWRIMS Web-based GIS displays real-time data by:

- Providing a printable graphic display of Points of Diversion (PODs)
- Moving between the data application and mapping functions for easy searches
- Mapping for upstream and downstream POD searches
- Displaying fully-appropriated streams to determine if water is available
- Providing USGS quadrangle and aerial photograph layers

Further information can be found by going to our website at:

http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/waterrights/water_issues/programs/ewrims/index.shtml

For additional information contact us at ewrims@waterboards.ca.gov or call (916) 341-5300.



The screenshot shows the eWRIMS website interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links for Home, About Us, Public Notices, Board Info, Board Decisions, Water Issues, Publications/Farms, and Press Room. Below this is a search bar and a 'Quick Links' section with links to the eWRIMS Database, Report Management System (RMS), Help Center, and Disclaimer. The main content area is titled 'eWRIMS – Electronic Water Rights Information Management System' and includes a description of the system, a list of links to various eWRIMS tools (Database, Mapping Application, Report Management System, and Help Center), and a 'CONNECT WITH US' section with social media and contact information.