

# Drought could be a political test for Brown

By David Siders and Matt Weiser, Sacramento Bee

As California withered through a drought in 1977, Gov. Jerry Brown called for a 25 percent reduction in personal water use statewide and flew to Washington to press the Carter administration for federal aid. He reduced the spray of his shower head and, in a characteristic moment of stagecraft, replaced a pitcher of water at a news conference with a single cup.

Today Brown is governor again, and California is entering one of the driest winters on record. Two dry years already have depleted many reservoirs. The snowpack is meager, and streams and rivers are running low. Although California has experienced many droughts, historically there have never been clear rules about when to formally declare one. Scientists use the term to refer to abnormally dry conditions, which California is clearly experiencing. But for governors, formally declaring a drought has been largely a political decision based on mounting anecdotal reports of weather-related hardship and evidence that relief is not in the forecast.

If it remains dry – as long-term forecasts suggest – the drought will test the management abilities of a governor who, with the exception of the Rim Fire last year, has largely avoided widespread natural disasters since returning to the Capitol in 2011.

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