

Calif. drought – worries, conservation increase

By Adam Nagourney, New York Times

LOS ANGELES – The rainy season drove into California in December with wet and windy promise: soaking rain, snow, dark gray skies and a flash of hope that the drought that has scorched this region had run its course. And then came January – with record high temperatures and record low rainfall.

And now, as the end of the official rainy season approaches – this state gets 90 percent of its water from December through April, most of it in December and January – California is facing a punishing fourth year of drought. Temperatures in Southern California soared to record-high levels over the weekend, approaching 100 degrees in some places. Reservoirs are low. Landscapes are parched and blighted with fields of dead or dormant orange trees. And the Sierra Nevada snowpack, which is counted on to provide 30 percent of the state's water supply as it melts through early summer, is at its second-lowest level on record.

The federal government has warned farmers for the second year in a row that it would not be providing any water from its Central Valley Project reservoir system. Any hope climatologists had that California would be rescued again by a wet El Niño winter weather system is fading with the arrival of spring.

State regulators voted Tuesday to impose a new round of water conservation rules, including sharp restrictions on landscape watering and orders to restaurants not to serve water to customers unless asked. Farmers said they anticipated leaving as much as one million acres fallow, nearly twice the area that went unplanted last year.

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