

Quest to save water may come at an ecological cost

By Haya El Nasser, Al Jazeera America

LOS ANGELES – Lush lawns have become vilified during California's historic drought that is searing the state for the fourth consecutive year. And removing thirsty turf has been rewarded with generous incentives from local water districts, rebates so popular that the demand has outstripped funds available.

But now, some ecologists are raising concern that the state's water conservation fervor may be harmful to the environment.

"The key thing is what are we replacing lawns with," said Peter Gleick, president and co-founder of the Pacific Institute, a global water think tank based in Oakland.

Mulch and native plants are the preferred environmentally sound alternatives. But some are painting their brown grass green and even paving over their yards.

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