

Groundwater law triggers aquifer-recharge experiments

By Emily Benson, Mercury News

WATSONVILLE – A historic 2014 law requiring water agencies across California to replenish the state's imperiled aquifers created a new problem: Many local officials just weren't sure how to do it.

But this winter's abundant rains are triggering a flood of experiments that have turned the state's agricultural regions into aquifer-recharge laboratories.

Farmers in Modesto inundated an almond orchard with the city's stormwater. Water managers in and around Fresno have more than 20 new groundwater recharge projects in the works. On the Central Coast, researchers in the Pajaro Valley are carefully designing percolation basins to capture rainfall before it gushes out into the Pacific.

For decades, water has been sucked from aquifers faster than nature can replenish it – and the drought has only intensified the thirst for groundwater. Scientists agree that it will be decades before a future governor can declare California's groundwater problems solved.

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