

# California weighs next step for saving water in drought

May 18 2016, by By Scott Smith

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FILE In this May 6, 2015 file photo, local resident Martha Mattison, left, helps out her son Jacob, 14, with his dog walking business as they walk past recently installed synthetic grass, seen at right, in Garden Grove, Calif. California water officials say they will consider dropping a mandate requiring conservation in the state's fifth year of drought. The State Water Resources Control Board on Wednesday, May 18, 2016, will vote on whether to give local water districts control of setting their own conservation targets. (AP Photo/Damian Dovarganes, File)

Strict rules adopted at the height of California's drought leading many people to let their lawns turn brown may soon end as state regulators Wednesday consider letting local communities decide how to keep their own water use in check.

That's good news to Southern California landscaper Greg Gritters, who says local water officials are best suited to manage their supplies.

His clients have had to choose between keeping their lawns green at the expense of huge water bills or turning down their sprinklers and watch their yard turn brown.

"Either way they're unhappy," said Gritters, owner of Vintage Landscape in the Coachella Valley. "There's lots of unhappy people since the drought went into effect."

A proposal before the State Water Resources Control Board in Sacramento would allow local districts to compare their water supplies with how much they anticipate needing if drought continues for three more years.

Cities and water districts will set their conservation targets based on the difference between the anticipated supply and demand. The proposed regulation would extend to January.

The Irvine Ranch Water District in Orange County led the push for a regional approach. Fiona Sanchez, director of water resources for the district, said she is confident that districts statewide will carefully study their supply and demand ratio.



In this April 8, 2015 file photo, gardeners remove grass plants trimmed ahead of planned watering reductions at the Greystone Mansion and Park in Beverly Hills, Calif. California water officials say they will consider dropping a mandate requiring conservation in the state's fifth year of drought. The State Water Resources Control Board on Wednesday, May 18, 2016, will vote on whether to give local water districts control of setting their own conservation targets. (AP Photo/Damian Dovarganes, File)

"If agencies are not taking it seriously, it will be very evident they can't meet their customers' demands," she said.

Some districts may set strict conservation goals for residents and businesses, while others could determine it is time to lift conservation mandates.

California is in its fifth year of drought, but regulators are considering the new approach as El Nino storms delivered nearly average amounts of

rain and snow this winter in Northern California, filling key reservoirs.

Southern California, however, remains deep in drought, and it's unclear what the future will bring.

Bans on wasting water by washing sidewalks with a hose or washing cars without a shut-off nozzle would become permanent under the proposed regulation.



In this June 9, 2015 file photo, California Gov. Jerry Brown, sitting top far left, speaks with board members of the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California during their monthly meeting in Los Angeles. California water officials say they will consider dropping a mandate requiring conservation in the state's fifth year of drought. The State Water Resources Control Board on Wednesday, May 18, 2016, will vote on whether to give local water districts control of setting their own conservation targets. (AP Photo/Damian Dovarganes, File)



Max Gomberg, a senior climate scientist for the state water board, said Californians understand the drought remains critical. He doesn't expect people to suddenly begin wasting water with any changes.

"Californians have shown that when there's a serious drought and a need to conserve, people step up and pitch in," he said. "We're confident that people are going to continue practicing their conservation habits."

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