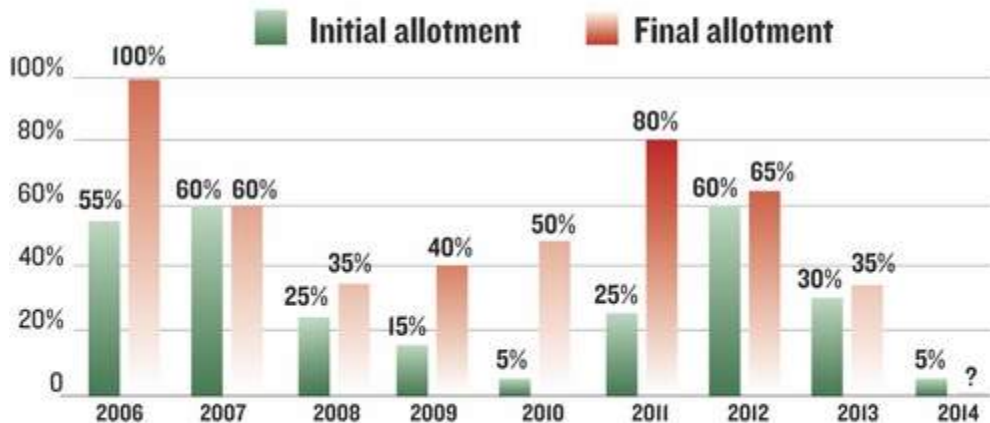


CITIES MAY GET JUST 5% OF DELTA WATER REQUESTS NEXT YEAR

Going down

State officials announced Wednesday that cities from the Bay Area to San Diego may receive only 5 percent of the water they have requested from the Delta next year. This ties a record low. However, allocations often increase later in the year after storms dump snow in the Sierra Nevada.



Source: Department of Water Resources

KORY HANSEN/The Record

By **Alex Breitler**
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Record Staff Writer

On what happened to be the wettest day of the year, state water officials announced Wednesday that some cities from the Bay Area to San Diego may receive just 5 percent of the water they have requested next year.

The conservative estimate is likely to improve if winter storms drop sufficient snow in the Sierra Nevada.

Still, the initial estimate of 5 percent is tied for the lowest on record. The last time the estimate was that low was 2010, at the tail end of a three-year drought, although storms later that winter pushed the amount of water actually delivered to about 50 percent.

"We hope things improve with this winter's storms, but there is no guarantee that 2014 won't be our third consecutive dry year," state Department of Water Resources Director Mark Cowin said in a statement.

He called the news a stark reminder that California's "fickle" weather demands year-round water conservation efforts.

The State Water Project sends Delta water to portions of the Bay Area, including Silicon Valley, the Central Coast and to urban Southern California. Two-thirds of Californians get at least some of their water from the project.

Another 750,000 acres of farmland in the south San Joaquin Valley also depend on the state project.

Communities in San Joaquin County pull their water from other sources and are not directly affected by the 5 percent allocation. Local water managers said the water-supply picture for next year is still uncertain.

Stockton does receive some of its water from the federal Central Valley Project, delivered from New Melones Lake, but the availability of that water will not be announced until the end of February, a spokesman with the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation said Wednesday.

Those who do rely on water from the state project said Wednesday's low allocation was a concern. The Kern County Water Agency called the 5 percent number "alarming and woefully inadequate."

And the State Water Contractors - a coalition of urban water users - used the opportunity to champion the governor's twin tunnels plan, arguing that if the tunnels had been in place last year, more water could have been taken during the wet fall months.

Instead, restrictions to protect Delta fish forced officials to reduce water deliveries during those wet months, and then in January the storms stopped coming.

Stockton remains on track for the driest calendar year on record, even after Wednesday's weather.

Bill Jennings, a Delta watchdog, said the state should have been more conservative pumping water out of the estuary last spring once it became apparent conditions were drying out.

"They exported water with no thought of tomorrow," he said. "They prayed for rain, and when it didn't come they blamed the fish."

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Rain report

Just how hard did it rain Wednesday? Stockton got more rain between 1 p.m. and 2 p.m. than it received during the entire month of February.

Localized flooding was reported on streets and highways, and the National Weather Service issued an urban small-stream flood advisory for the area.

In just three hours Wednesday afternoon, Stockton boosted its 2013 rainfall total by more than 23 percent. And Wednesday was the city's single-wettest day since Dec. 2, 2012.

But, yes, even after all that rain, we remain on track for the driest calendar year on record. And after a chance of showers this morning, sunny skies are expected well into next week.

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