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### **Long-term conservation still needed to protect state from impacts of drought**

The historic, five-year drought that ended in 2017 provided Southern Californians with lasting lessons about the limitations of our water supply, most importantly that we can thrive on much less water than we thought.

During the drought emergency, residents and businesses responded to calls for conservation, cutting water use by billions of gallons each month. Between June 2015 and February 2017, Californians reduced their consumption by a cumulative 22.5% – enough to provide more than a third of the state’s population with water for a year.

At Rowland Water District, where we rely nearly entirely on imported water, conservation has always been a vital part of our water supply philosophy. The purchased water we receive from the Colorado River and State Water Project is more expensive than local sources and more vulnerable to drought, so efficient use has always been imperative for our customers.

Much of the region is in a similar situation. Even those suppliers who have access to groundwater have experienced overdraft conditions and treatment requirements that have spurred the call for resource protection.

From the drought came the state’s new rallying call, “Conservation is a California way of life,” and a permanent ban on water waste. Our mantra became no runoff, no hosing off sidewalks or driveways, swap grass for water-wise plants.

Before leaving office last year, Governor Jerry Brown signed Senate Bill 606 and Assembly Bill 1668, establishing new water use standards aimed at long-term conservation and drought preparedness. Under the new laws, state water officials are working to establish standards for indoor and outdoor water use and leaks which must be in place by 2022.

The legislation sets a per-person indoor water use goal of 55 gallons per day through January 2025. As we become more efficient, the state’s indoor standard will move to 50 gallons per person per day by January 2030. We learned during the drought emergency that these levels are more than adequate for washing, cleaning and drinking, particularly as we curb water waste and homes move to ever-more efficient appliances.

Southern California accomplished this level of wise water use during the drought and we can do it again.

In three years, the state will set an outdoor water use standard based on land cover, climate, and other factors. This is an area ripe for conservation improvements since up to 70% of residential water is used outdoors.

SB 606 and AB 1668 also call on suppliers to calculate total water use goals for their agencies based on the unique needs of their service area. Targets for the San Gabriel Valley will differ from those for the coast, which will differ from those in the desert.

It's important for the public to understand that the water use standards that will be developed will apply to the overall customer base of a retail water agency, not to individual customers or households. It is the agencies like Rowland Water District – not their customers – that will be subject to enforcement action by the state beginning in 2023. But it is up to all of us to do our part.

Water agencies are also required to update their water supply plans to ensure service even in a five-year drought. This is a practice at which we are already familiar and accomplished due to the continued unpredictability of Southern California's water supply.

While water districts will control implementation of the new laws, manage resources and develop alternative supplies, all residents will be asked to cut back on their water use indoors and out.

As Southern Californians, we must all play a role in protecting our water supply and ensuring we have the resources needed to endure longer and more intense droughts that will accompany climate change. Our future depends on it.