

**Current Monterey County Drought Status**

**Precipitation:** According to the National Weather Service's Climate Prediction Center the precipitation outlook is below normal for the remainder of spring, and temperatures are forecasted to be above normal. The rainy season ends this month, and drought conditions are expected to continue throughout the summer and fall. It is too early to forecast winter conditions but there is a chance of an El Nino event beginning in the Pacific. If this El Nino continues to strengthen it could bring winter rains. However a weak El Nino would not impact our drought conditions.

**Fire Danger:** CalFire reports that since January 1<sup>st</sup>, 890 fires have been reported across the state, burning 2,354 acres. In the week ending April 5<sup>th</sup>, there were 16 new fires even after a week of persistent rain. County fuel conditions are at dangerous levels and continue to worsen with warmer and drier conditions. Extreme fire behavior was experienced with the Pfeiffer Fire in December 2013, and the more recent Encinal Ranch Fire southeast of Salinas. CalFire is currently staffed up for fire season, well ahead of normal staffing for this time of year.

**Reservoir Levels:** The Monterey County Water Resources Agency (WRA) owns and operates Nacimiento and San Antonio reservoirs, which provide flood control and water conservation benefits to the Salinas Valley, as well as recreational opportunities. Traditionally WRA begins releasing water in March/April to replenish underground aquifers, and deliver surface water to areas with seawater intrusion. Currently Nacimiento is at 23% and San Antonio is at 5% of capacity, which does not allow for these releases. Monterey County does not receive water from any sources outside the County. WRA is assessing options for alternative water sources to reduce pumping in the seawater intruded areas. WRA is also working with state and federal agencies in an effort to temporarily reduce the minimum fisheries release requirements from the reservoirs in order to conserve our limited water supplies.

**Agricultural and Ranching Impacts:** The Agricultural Commission reports that current ground water resources appear sufficient to support relatively normal planting schedules. Any land taken out of production will likely be due to circumstances related to individual wells. The agricultural economy/jobs are vulnerable, and the lack/cost of housing and transportation in the area present challenges. It is anticipated that agricultural workers will come to Monterey County for work from areas where agricultural jobs are scarce. The cattle industry has been severely impacted by the lack of forage, which has impacted feed costs and forced the early sale of stock

**Parks and Recreation Impacts:** The County Parks Department reports that the drought has had a significant financial effect on the Parks Department, particularly at the lake resorts. At Lake San Antonio, all boat launch ramps are closed and it is anticipated that the lake will be completely closed this summer and remain closed until the lake levels recover. Lake Nacimiento is currently open to the public. Low lake levels are projected to exacerbate an existing shortfall within the lakes budget. The Parks Department is currently assessing possible measures to address the budget shortfall as part of the FY 2014-15 budget process. -- The effects of the drought in the North County Parks (Laguna Seca Recreational Area, Toro Park, Jacks Peak, Manzanita Park and Royal Oaks Park) have been minimal thus far; however the Parks Department is developing a plan to reduce lawn areas at Toro and Royal Oaks Parks to reduce water usage as well as mowing and fertilizing costs.

**Drinking Water Impacts:** The Department of Health is concerned that drought conditions may adversely impact water quality and quantity in Monterey County. Water systems with levels of nitrates or arsenic above or approaching the Maximum Contaminant Levels (MCLs) may see increases in these contaminants requiring systems to be placed on bottled water orders until treatment systems can be put in place. Loss of water quantity would severely impact a water systems' ability to provide sufficient water to households and in certain instances result in lack of water to households. Emergency measures for supplying water to these households may need to be considered. Both of these conditions would lead to increased applications for new wells or treatment system installation. Funding these projects would require water systems to apply for state funding and would likely result in higher customer service rates.

**Social and Community Impacts:** Social Services reports that on March 28, 2014 a Drought Information Gathering workshop was held in Salinas for Non-Profit and community based organizations to hear about their concerns and potential impacts related to drought issues locally. Issues identified were impacts on and increased demands on food banks, health services, transportation, housing, and education and daycare services.

### **Current and Planned County Conservation Measures**

**Irrigation:** RMA has turned automatic irrigation systems off and watering is now done by hand and monitored to avoid excessive run-off. Direction has been given to reduce watering by 50%, with variable watering as required. Crews will apply mulch to all areas where possible to conserve moisture. Parks has reduced water usage on irrigated park lands. In addition, the department will be looking at updating the water distribution systems (sprinklers, urinals and toilets, etc.) within all the County parks to convert to low water usage facilities.

**Facilities:** Baseline water usage data has been compiled by the Resources Management Agency/Facilities and is being used to track conservation efforts. Half of County restrooms have low flow devices and employee outreach materials have been provided to encourage conservation in all County facilities and at home. There is the potential to retrofit bathroom, kitchen and break room facilities that are currently not low flow, which would require capital costs and take time for the retrofit to occur. A cost analysis is currently being prepared. Currently RMA/Facilities is tracking water usage at seven facilities to provide a baseline for potential reduction efforts

**Public Outreach:** A drought website has been created and linked to the County homepage ([www.co.monterey.ca.us/drought](http://www.co.monterey.ca.us/drought)) providing water conservation tips, links to helpful sites, and information on the current drought status. The drought website "Making conservation a Monterey County way of life" was developed and is managed by the County Office of Emergency Services.

**Legislative Efforts:** The CAO-Intergovernmental and Legislative Affairs Division is closely monitoring legislative and possible funding opportunities related to the drought. Reports on state and federal drought relief efforts are included in Exhibits B & C to this report.