

## California expects worst drought ever

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by Jeff McMahon, [Environmental News Examiner](#)

Anyone who took shelter from the heavy rains and snowfall that drenched the West Coast in December may be startled to learn that California is grappling with a drought officials fear will be the worst in memory.

Rains soaked most of the state and snow dusted the coastal mountains as far south as Monterey in mid-December, but a dry January means it wasn't enough, according to the state Department of Water Resources, which released its second snow survey of the winter on Thursday.

"We may be at the start of the worst California drought in modern history," said DWR Director Lester Snow. "It's imperative for Californians to conserve water immediately at home and in their businesses."

The state's snow pack is at 61 percent of normal, according to the survey. Last year at this time it stood at 111 percent, but in 2008 the state endured the driest spring on record. As a result, California has little water in reserve. Lake Oroville, the State Water Project's principal storage reservoir, is at 28 percent of capacity.

In times of drought, Californians are discouraged or prohibited from watering their lawns. Twenty-five local water agencies have mandated rationing already, according to the Reuters News Agency.

State officials expect climate change to speed California's natural cycle of droughts, causing them to arrive more often and with greater severity. California native John Steinbeck, whose novel *The Grapes of Wrath* chronicled the punishing 1930s Dust Bowl that drove many Oklahomans to the coast, cautioned Californians to remember that drought is always just around the corner:

"And it never failed that during the dry years the people forgot about the rich years, and during the wet years they lost all memory of the dry years," he wrote in *East of Eden*. "It was always that way."