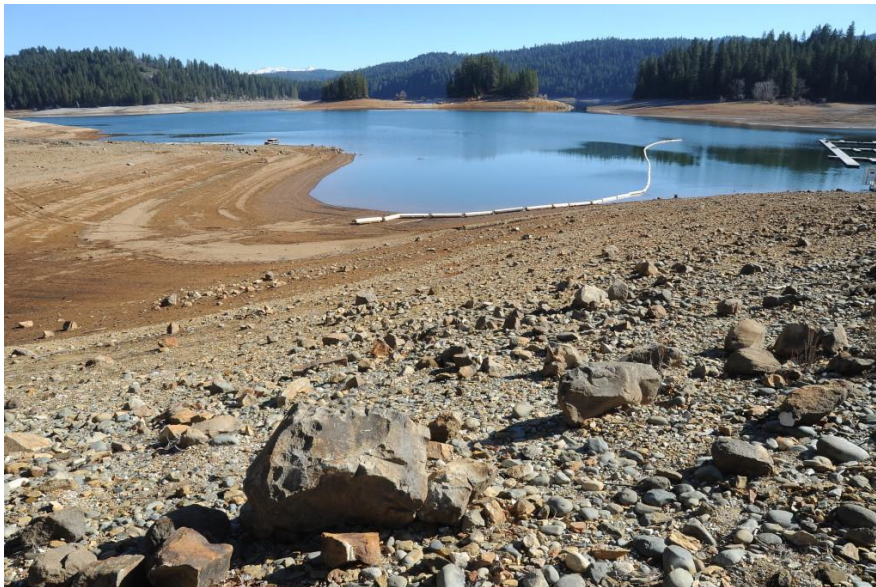


# Mountain Democrat

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## EID declares Stage 2 drought emergency



JENKINSON LAKE at Sly Park is 64 percent of capacity as of Feb. 6. Had EID not imported water from the El Dorado Canal via Hazel Creek Tunnel it would have been at 54 percent, below what it was in 1976, the last drought year. Democrat photos by Pat Dollins

By [Michael Raffety](#)  
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The El Dorado Irrigation District Board of Directors Tuesday skipped right over Stage 1 and unanimously went to a Stage 2 Water Supply Warning and asked customers to voluntarily reduce water consumption 30 percent.

The water savings also applies to recycled water customers because recycled water is often supplemented with potable water.

The resolution declaring “the existence of an emergency” will enable the district to reduce fish flows from its Kyburz Diversion Dam and from its four alpine reservoirs as well as Jenkinson Lake in Sly Park.

The resolution took effect immediately, said General Counsel Tom Cumpston at Tuesday night’s meeting.

“This is serious. Everybody needs to pitch in,” said Board President Alan Day.

“I encourage those (farmers) not on the Irrigation Management System to get on it,” said Director George Osborne. “All we’re really doing is planning for next year. If the good Lord doesn’t bring us rain, we’ve got something to live on next year.”

Jenkinson Lake at Sly Park is currently at 63 percent of its 41,000 acre-foot capacity, which is what the lake level was at in the drought year of 1976. However, last year EID shifted 3,390 acre-feet of water from the El Dorado Canal into Jenkinson Lake via the Hazel Creek Tunnel. Were it not for that, the lake would be at 54 percent of capacity or 22,400 acre feet — below where it was in 1976.

During the rainfall event Jan. 29-30 EID was able to transfer 120 acre-feet of water to Sly Park and run its powerhouse, which otherwise has been shut down to conserve water in the alpine reservoirs.

The rain year 1976-77 recorded 15.86 inches, setting the record for the lowest season rain total (July 1-June 30) in 139 years. Second lowest was 1975-76 at 15.9 inches.

The board did not enact a drought surcharge, a worry that brought an audience of 69 to EID’s larger meeting room in the rear of its Mosquito Road headquarters.

The board put off discussion of drought surcharges until the March 10 board meeting, though there was little enthusiasm on the board at the Feb. 4 meeting for a surcharge.

“March 10 is a little early for my comfort zone,” said Director Greg Prada, referring to discussion of drought surcharges.

Also on the agenda will be discussion of whether to switch from voluntary to mandatory water savings. The principal result of mandatory savings would be to prevent planting of row crops and any new plantings.

That potential restriction worried wine grape and blueberry growers, who said they had put in their orders for new plantings two years ago. A row crop ban would affect strawberry growers in particular.

The relief from fish flow requirements by the U.S. Forest Service, the State Department of Fish and Wildlife and the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission is needed to save the water EID has in its four alpine reservoirs — Caples, Silver, Aloha and Echo lakes. Otherwise its FERC

license would require EID to release 20 cubic feet per second from its Kyburz Diversion Dam, escalating to 60 cfs through June and 40 cfs in July.

Instead, with the emergency declaration EID will release 15 cfs below the dam. The alpine reservoirs' release will be dropped from 5 cfs to 2 cfs. That would save 5,000 acre-feet, said General Manager Jim Abercrombie.

As of Jan. 30, Caples Lake held 56 percent of its 22,338 acre-foot capacity, Silver Lake held 15 percent of its 8,640 acre-foot capacity, Lakes Aloha and Echo were frozen in for the winter and their levels are sketchy.

Among additional emergency actions listed by Abercrombie are installing the flash boards at Echo Lake before April 1 to capture as much snow melt as possible and getting permission from the state Division of Safety of Dams to close the radial gates early on Silver Lake Dam for maximum runoff retention.

Without the outflow restrictions on the lakes and the diversion dam that shunts water from the South Fork of the American River into the 22-mile-long El Dorado Canal, Abercrombie and EID's engineering staff predict Silver Lake would become a dead pool by September, Caples Lake by July, Lake Aloha by June and Echo Lake by September. That would leave no carryover should 2014-2015 turn dry.

Doug Liesz, chairman of the Citizens for Water, urged EID to reclaim part of Echo Lake's water that is required to be sent into Lake Tahoe.

"You've got to take aggressive action on Echo Lake water taken from us for Lake Tahoe," Liesz said.

EID has an allocation of 7,550 acre-feet of water from Folsom Lake, plus 4,560 acre-feet from ditch water and Weber Dam water that is sent down Weber Creek and then pumped out of Folsom Lake. Indications from the Bureau of Reclamation are that EID will get 5,000 acre-feet from its allotment — a 60 percent reduction — and 3,000 acre-feet or less from its Weber Creek water rights. Folsom Lake's — at 17 percent of its 1 million acre-foot capacity — level is 357 feet, 10 feet above is historical low of 347.5 feet in 1977. Ominously, the bureau has also asked for data on a "health and safety" allotment.

An additional aspect of the resolution allows the district to take immediate advantage of any drought project funding that would become available from the state and federal governments by waving bidding requirements. That would allow design-build projects to be approved by the board.

Similar actions happened in the 1975-77 drought, where emergency funding became available to build the Sly Park Intertie and expand Bass Lake.

Three key differences from the 1975-77 drought are the timing of the emergency declaration and the fact that EID bought Project 184 — four alpine reservoirs, diversion dam, El Dorado Canal

and powerhouse — from PG&E in 1999 and it bought Jenkinson Lake and its water rights in 2003. Built in 1955 as part of the Central Valley Project, getting local control of that “was a big legal battle,” said Osborne. “The feds can’t take our water.”

Osborne pointed to other long-term efforts by the board and staff that have improved EID’s capacity to withstand a drought better than it could in 1975-77, including abandoning ditches, but retaining their water rights, constructing and repairing Hazel Creek Tunnel, covering small area reservoirs and the district counsel’s efforts to secure various water rights.

Abercrombie also noted that the board was acting much farther in advance than it did during the 1975-77 drought. That time the board didn’t declare a drought emergency until February of 1977, the last year of the two-year drought.

This time the board is acting at the beginning of what appears to be a record-setting dry year. Jan. 13 the board had asked customers to voluntarily save 15 percent, but this January saw water consumption rise 27 percent above the three-year average for January.

Day, who has a landscape maintenance business, said the reason consumption went higher was no rain, prompting a lot of irrigation, “and lots of kids home from college” taking long showers.



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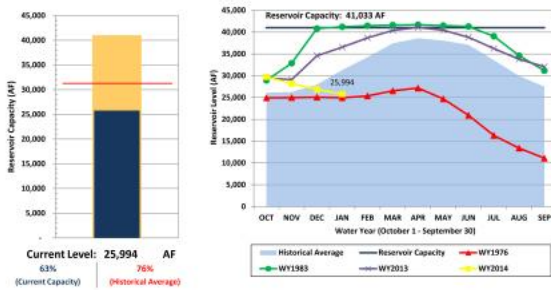


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### Jenkinson Lake at Sly Park Reservoir Conditions *(as of 12:00 AM on January 30, 2014)*



JenkinsonLakeGraph

**Michael Raffety**

