AQUALLIANCE
DEFENDING NORTHERN CALIFORNIA WATERS

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Governor Announces End to 2021 Drought Emergency after AquAlliance and CSPA Sue

Chico, CA. Fouteen days after being sued by AquAlliance and the California Sportfishing Protection Alliance (CSPA) for unlawfully prolonging the 2021 Drought Emergency, Governor Newsom suddenly signed a proclamation on March 24, 2026,[1] officially ending the drought emergency he declared on May 10, 2021. The AquAlliance/CSPA lawsuit was filed in Alameda County on March 10, 2026, seeking an immediate end to the declared drought emergency. [2] The lawsuit also charged that the rules under the declared emergency weakened environmental protection.

In support of their petition, plaintiffs AquAlliance and CSPA submitted the February 24, 2026 U.S. Drought Monitor map showing that no counties in California were in a condition of drought (Figure 1). The plaintiffs also submitted a March 2, 2026 map of major California reservoirs published by the California Department of Water Resources showing all depicted reservoirs at or above average storage for the date (Figure 2).

AquAlliance's Executive Director, Barbara Vlamis, explained, "Maintaining drought emergency proclamations and orders enabled exemptions to other laws that are essential to protect communities, public health, the environment, and local economies. Our legal action was necessary since there was no meaningful process that allowed the plaintiffs to intercede on proposed recharge projects in Tehama County. Recharge projects have the potential to seriously damage other groundwater dependent farms and homes, streams, rivers, and communities (more below)."

"A declared drought after 3 plus wet years didn't pass the smell test," said Chris Shutes, Executive Director of CSPA. "The administration seemed content to indefinitely weaken rules that protect fish and promote responsible water management. We are happy we were able to hold the Governor accountable."

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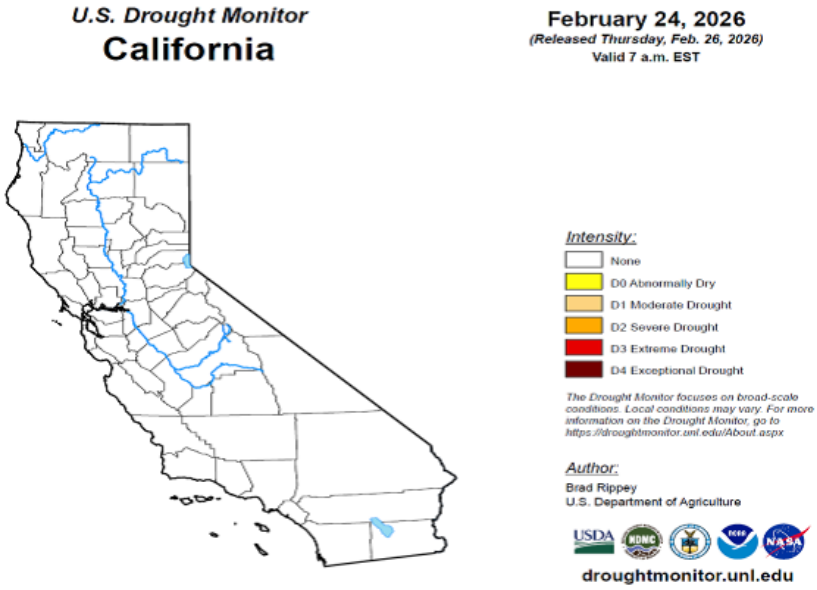
[1] www.gov.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/SOE-Termination-Proclamation_For-Print.-FORMATTED-3-23-26.pdf
[2] https://aqualliance.net/water/latest-news/petition-filed-to-end-drought-state-of-emergency/

Background

Significant Problems with Groundwater Recharge Projects

Creating the space for groundwater recharge requires depleting groundwater supplies, which harms groundwater dependent farms and residential property, as well as streams and habitat for myriad species. Recharge projects also alter the rights to groundwater[3] and may not be a solution acceptable to users in a project area. In the Sacramento Valley, water transfers and recharge have long been the plan of Glenn Colusa Irrigation District and the Bureau of Reclamation – to take over the basin and manipulate it for the benefit of moneyed interests, not the local people or environment.[4] [5] Sadly, this interest is spreading. Legal analysis of conjunctive use with recharge clarified that "So long as the water was diverted pursuant to a valid water right prior to recharge, the recharged water would be owned by the diverter… The legal right to surface water that is imported and recharged into an aquifer is held by the project proponent… Depending upon the project scope, it could intend to export recharge water out-of-basin."[6] Repeating the mistakes of the Owens, San Fernando, and San Joaquin valleys is not in the best interests of Sacramento Valley communities, businesses, groundwater dependent farms, and the environment – or, in the long run, the entire state of California.

Figure 1.



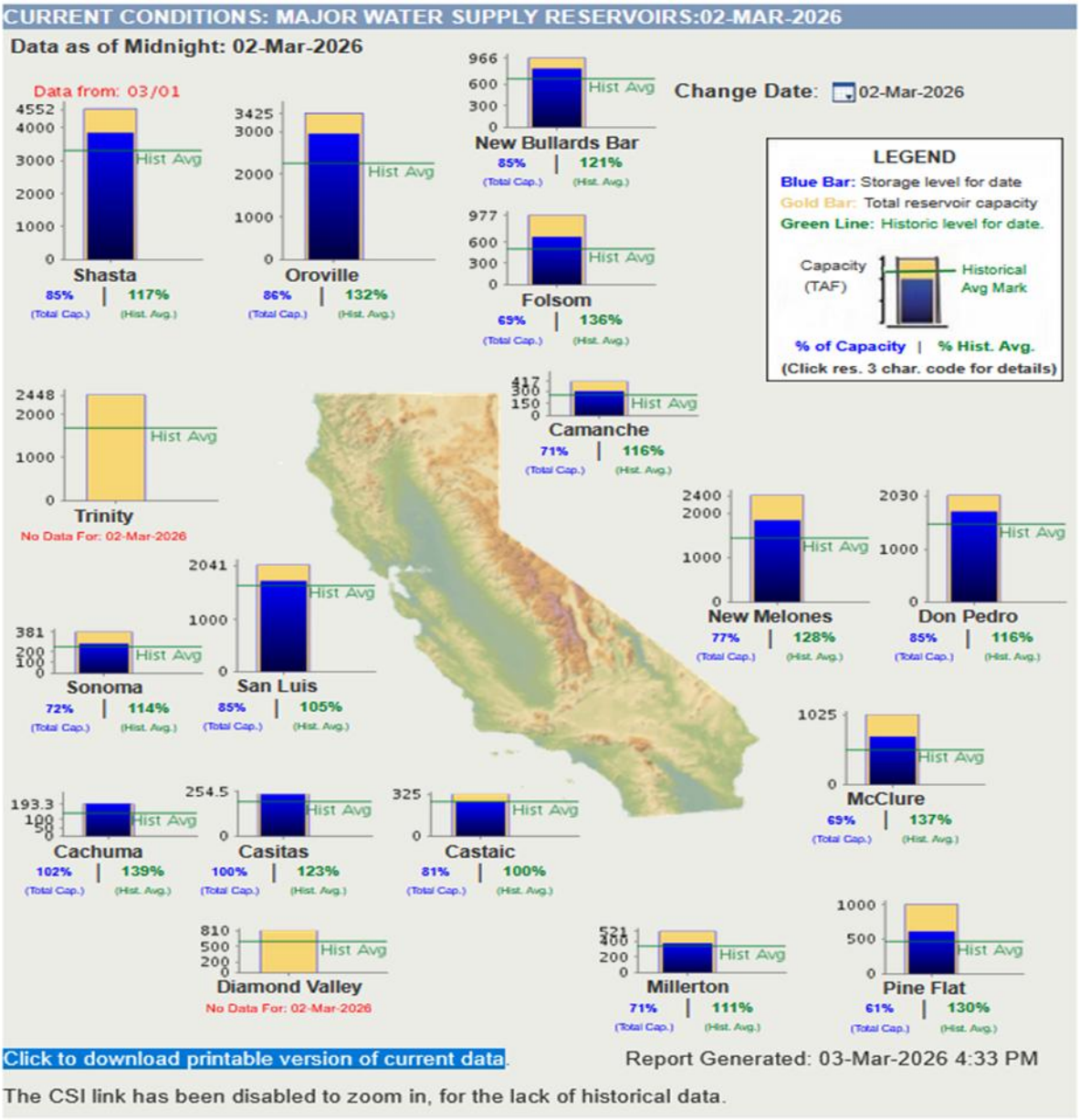
[3] Los Angeles v. Glendale (1943) 23 Cal.2d 68, 76-78; Los Angeles v. San Fernando (1975) 14 Cal.3d 199, 258-60; Stevens v. Oakdale Irrigation District (1939) 13 Cal.2d 343, 352-43; Crane v. Stevinson (1936) 5 Cal. 2d 387, 398.

[4] U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, September 2006. Grant Assistance Agreement. "GCID shall define three hypothetical water delivery systems from the State Water Project (Oroville), the Central Valley Project (Shasta) and the Orland Project reservoirs sufficient to provide full and reliable surface water delivery to parties now pumping from the Lower Tuscan Formation. The purpose of this activity is to describe and compare the performance of three alternative ways of furnishing a substitute surface water supply to the current Lower Tuscan Formation groundwater users to eliminate
the risks to them of more aggressive pumping from the Formation and to optimize conjunctive management of the Sacramento Valley water resources." (p. 5)

[5] *Id*. GCID's actual purpose is best expressed using their own words: to "…improve Central Valley system-wide water supply reliability through participation in the emerging water transfer markets…" (p. 2) that would "…integrate the Lower Tuscan Formation into the local water supply system and into the Central Valley wide water supply system;…" (p. 6)

[6] Gosselin, Paul and Valerie Kincaid, 2020. Memo to the Vina Stakeholder Advisory Committee. Re: Legal Implications of Potential Projects and Management Actions. p.3.

Figure 2.


CURRENT CONDITIONS: MAJOR WATER SUPPLY RESERVOIRS:02-MAR-2026
Data as of Midnight: 02-Mar-2026
Data from: 03/01
Change Date: 02-Mar-2026
Shasta
85% | 117%
Oroville
86% | 132%
New Bullards Bar
85% | 121%
Folsom
69% | 136%
LEGEND
Blue Bar: Storage level for date
Gold Bar: Total reservoir capacity
Green Line: Historic level for date.
Capacity (TAF)
Historical Avg Mark
% of Capacity | % Hist. Avg.
(Click res. 3 char. code for details)
Trinity
No Data For: 02-Mar-2026
Camanche
71% | 116%
New Melones
77% | 128%
Don Pedro
85% | 116%
Sonoma
72% | 114%
San Luis
85% | 105%
McClure
69% | 137%
Cachuma
102% | 139%
Casitas
100% | 123%
Castaic
81% | 100%
Diamond Valley
No Data For: 02-Mar-2026
Millerton
71% | 111%
Pine Flat
61% | 130%
Click to download printable version of current data.
Report Generated: 03-Mar-2026 4:33 PM
The CSI link has been disabled to zoom in, for the lack of historical data.