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## Farms, cities to get water increase

By Jason Dearen Associated Press

Posted February 27, 2010 at midnight , updated February 27, 2010 at 2:26 a.m.

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SAN FRANCISCO - More water will be allocated to California's drought-stricken farms and cities this year, thanks to improved rain and snow levels, federal and state regulators said Friday.

Water officials said they were hopeful about the situation but cautioned that California was not yet past its water crisis, and allotments will remain much lower than requested.

"For the first time in three years, we hope some relief is on the way for drought-stricken farmers in the delta," said Interior Secretary Ken Salazar.

Ted Thomas, a state water department spokesman, said the estimated allocations this year were kept conservative because officials do not want to later decrease the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta would receive 30 percent of the water requested if amounts. He said there was a 95 percent chance the allotments would increase this rainfall continues as forecast - an improvement on the 10 percent they got in 2009 spring.

However, that allocation could fall to 5 percent if the rest of the year is dry, leaving farmers served by federal allocations complaining that they cannot plan for the larger amount of water and we have to reduce it, then they have big problems."

Meanwhile, the state Department of Water Resources said it will send 15 percent of the water sought - up from 5 percent last year. Customers could get as much as 45 percent allocation would be a big help but complained about the 5 percent guarantee if it stops raining.

Both agencies run the pumps that send water to more than 25 million Californians and the farms that produce half the nation's fruits and vegetables, said Dan Errotabere, a farmer and president of the Fresno County Farm Bureau.

Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., who had proposed legislation to force diversion of "In a real wet year like this, 5 percent is disheartening to see," said Errotabere, who followed 1,200 of his 3,500 acres last year due to lack of water. bill on hold but reserving the right to bring it back if necessary.

Laura King Moon, assistant general manager of State Water Contractors, which represents districts that provide water to Los Angeles and Alameda counties, said she was frustrated that allotments were so low despite improved rainfall. Three years of drought have led to below average reservoir levels. Additionally, pumping restrictions meant to protect threatened fish have contributed to the reduced flow of water to parched farms and thirsty cities.

She blamed restrictions brought about by federal protections for tiny threatened delta Two of the state's key reservoirs are still below normal levels for this time of year. smelt and chinook salmon. Lake Oroville was at 54 percent and the San Luis Reservoir at 80 percent.



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Environmentalists, who have fought for the fish protections, said the conservative allocations were a step forward in the complicated process of balancing the state's water demand, business and conservation concerns.

"That's been the goal all along," said Doug Obegi, a staff attorney with Natural Resources Defense Council. "You can do this in a way that protects the environment and provides more reliable water supplies."

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