

# Mountain Democrat

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## My turn: Water conservation target framework flawed

By [John Kingsbury](#)

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On Tuesday, April 7, the State Water Resources Control Board released a proposed framework for meeting the statewide 25 percent water conservation target announced by Gov. Jerry Brown on April 1. The state board identified specific reduction standards for water agencies across California.

Under the proposal, water purveyor members in the 15 counties represented by Mountain Counties Water Resources Association were given water-use reduction targets of 25 percent or 35 percent without consideration for past conservation efforts or the significant financial and economic consequences of this action. This homogeneous treatment throughout the state will undermine, not foster, state-wide unity as disparate regions of the state work to achieve the 25 percent conservation goal.

MCWRA supports permanent water use efficiency practices to reduce water use, but the state's goals have not been translated yet into proposed regulations that are equitable, protect our already stressed local economies, our fragile environment, or advance sensible long-term water policies. Under the current proposal, SWRCB has hurriedly developed a one-size-fits-all methodology (gallons per day per capita) for all California water agencies and districts.

Gallons per day per capita (GPCD) is a basis for regulators to make water use comparisons of water agencies throughout the state. While it is data, the data should not be used to compare water suppliers, or even hydrologic regions, unless relevant factors are taken into account. If the state is to use GPCD as a basis to determine how much water is needed to exist, it must take in account population density, population growth, temperature, rainfall, evaporation rates, topography and socio-economic measures, such as lot size and income, land use and past conservation efforts.

MCWRA recognizes the continuing drought severity and the prospect of a fifth consecutive dry year in 2016. Certainly, stringent measures are called for, but moving forward we must acknowledge that one region's water reliability should not be sacrificed for that of other regions.

The water conservation framework, if adopted, will be extremely challenging for both local water agencies and their customers, not only in the mountain region but everywhere in California. Since in the late 1970s, regions around the state have been significantly improving water use efficiency practices. In the course of implementing the latest technologies to reduce water use, the margin for further reductions has contracted significantly. Those districts and agencies that have made the strongest efforts to conserve are being punished for their good stewardship.

California spends a millions of dollars working to restore and protect threatened and endangered plants and animals, including fish, after we have almost completely changed their ability to survive. Now, we stand to sacrifice California residents' ability to thrive by ignoring the requirements and distinctions of their habitats, whether they are rural or urban, small town or metropolis, coastal or valley, foothill or mountain.

Rather than respond to the current water crisis with a blunt draconian framework, the State Water Resources Control Board should make its best efforts to create the most equitable policies to get through this drought and position California to be in the best possible condition for the future.

*John Kingsbury is the executive director of the Mountain Counties Water Resources Association.*