

State cuts water predictions

SACRAMENTO (McClatchy) — The passing dry autumn is dashing hopes that this winter will slay the California drought.

State officials announced Thursday that unless steady rains set in, the State Water Project will be able to meet only 20 percent of the requests from Southern California, some San Francisco Bay Area cities and southern San Joaquin Valley farmers.

Next calendar year would bring the third consecutive year of cutbacks for some state customers.

"A lot of folks are starting to squirm,"

said George Baumli, who represents customers of the extensive system of dams and canals.

Federal officials, who normally don't make their first delivery projections until mid-February, said chances are the Central Valley Project also will have to ration water to customers next summer.

Even a return of normal rains would provide only enough runoff for about half of normal deliveries to Valley farms and communities, said Bureau of Reclamation spokesman Jeff McCracken.

So far this fall, less water has flowed into Shasta Dam, the state's largest, than during the same period of the wizened winter of 1976-77, CVP Operations Chief Donald Paff said.

"From an inflow perspective, we are at or below the driest year on record," Paff said.

The state's supply forecast is almost a worst-case scenario because it assumes that Northern California receives little more rain through the rest of the season, said John Silveira, deputy director of the state Department of Water Resources.

The 20 percent supply would amount to 720,000 acre-feet of water. The project last year delivered nearly 1 million acre-feet of water, about 30 percent of what was requested. Some of that water was purchased from north state farmers and essentially all of it went to cities.

The state received requests for 3.6 million acre-feet.

Some rain is expected this weekend and officials are quick to remind that 80 percent of the rainy season is yet to come. But each passing dry day means it will take a wetter pattern to provide significant relief.