

Waterwise: State budget includes funds for water projects

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By: Visalia Times- Delta

California's 2017-2018 fiscal year budget includes \$17 million in allocations to tackle the Golden State's drinking water crisis' immediate needs, the Community Water Center reported.

The drinking water advocacy group also called for state officials to seek long-term, sustainable funding sources for the state's water systems.

In a separate announcement, the U.S. Department of the Interior Bureau of Reclamation announced seven grants for projects around California, including one in the Central Valley.

State budget

The funds from the state budget are separated into three portions, the Community Water Center said. The budget grants \$8 million to the State Water Board program for emergency replacement of domestic wells and emergency connections to community water systems.

Last week, Self-Help Enterprises officially took over the domestic water tank program, stepping up on the county's stead. A permanent solution for residents would be to connect to a municipal water system. Some of those funds may end up in Tulare County.

This is a critical step in maintaining a commitment to the vulnerable Californians most affected by the drought, and provides needed resources to continue work toward finding long-term sustainable water solutions for them," said Tom Collishaw, President and Chief Executive Officer of Self-Help Enterprises.

More: [Waterwise: Self-Help Enterprises to lead tank program](#)

More: [Waterwise: Loans offered for farmers hit by drought](#)

In addition, the state budget calls for earmarking \$4 to the Department of Water Resources for emergency relief. Lastly, \$5 million will be sent to the Department of Social Services for an Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) water benefit pilot program.

"The funds included in the state budget will ensure continued work to provide relief to the thousands of Californians still impacted by the worst drought in our state's history, and those facing other water emergencies," said Stanley Keasling, Rural Community Assistance Corporation's Chief Executive Officer.

Despite a wet winter in California, residents are still dealing with the effects of the drought. Other California residents are dealing with access to drinking water.

The Community Water Center said there are hundreds of California communities that are out of compliance with state and federal drinking water standards. In some instances, the access to drinking water of more acute in rural, low-income communities.

"This budget also invests in an initiative to bring short-term relief to residents in poverty who have been living for years without safe drinking water, with supplemental CalFresh assistance," said Tracey Patterson, director of legislation, California Food Policy Advocates. "Struggling Californians can't afford to wait for long-term solutions. As we work towards sustainable infrastructure, this budget works to help those most in need."

The Community Water Center said the budget shows progress to address access to drinking water. But there's more work to be done. The center said drinking water advocates will remain with their work to find a sustainable funding to pay for infrastructure improvements.

Federal grants

The Bureau of Reclamation announced last week \$4.24 million in grants for seven projects.

The lone grant for the Central Valley was to Merced Irrigation District's river instream and off-channel drought habitat project. The project received \$744,489.

As described by the Bureau of Reclamation, the project will help re-establish floodplain and main channel connectivity, reduce mined channel features that attract non-native predators, improve channel temperatures and increase native riparian vegetation.

In total, the project is valued at \$2.7 million. Around the United States, the Bureau of Reclamation handed out grants to projects in Colorado, Nevada, and Oklahoma.

Other grant recipients include City of Torrance's Van Ness Well Field, Alameda County Water District's Rubber Dam and the Coyote Valley Band of Pomo Indians in Northern California.