



**Monthly Drought Update**  
**January 12, 2016**  
**San Luis Obispo County**

Note: Information provided in this update varies by date.

**CURRENT CONDITIONS**

**U.S. Drought Monitor Status:**

The latest U.S. Drought Monitor report released December 31, 2015, indicates San Luis Obispo County remains at the **D4 – Exceptional Drought intensity rating**. Approximately 88% of the state remains at a level D2 – Severe Drought or worse with 45% of the state in a D4 – Exceptional Drought intensity rating.

**San Luis Obispo County Precipitation Totals (in inches):**

Sub-Region	Area / Rain Station	Average Annual Rainfall	2015-16 Water Year (July 2015-June 2016)	
			Cumulative Total	% of Total Average
North Coast	Cambria (ALERT #717)	22.0	4.45	20%
	Whale Rock Reservoir (County Site #166.1)	16.0	6.85	43%
Inland	Paso Robles (County Site #10.0)	14.1	5.28	37%
	NE Atascadero (ALERT #711)	17.0	2.81	17%
	Atascadero MWC (County Site #34.0)	17.5	4.14	24%
	Santa Margarita (ALERT #723)	24.0	4.22	18%
	Salinas Dam (County Site #94)	20.9	4.12	20%
South Coast	SLO Reservoir (ALERT #749)	24.0	5.79	24%
	Lopez Recreation Area (ALERT #707)	23.0	5.90	26%
	West of Nipomo (CIMIS #202)	14.8	3.36	23%
	Nipomo East (ALERT #728)	18.0	3.58	20%

Note: This table contains provisional data from automated gauges and has not been verified. All units reported in inches. Report generated at 11:00am on 12/28/2015.

**Near-term Outlook:**

An El Niño (ENSO) Advisory continues in effect. Most models indicate that a strong El Niño will continue through the Northern Hemisphere winter 2015-16, followed by weakening and a transition to ENSO-neutral during the late spring or early summer. The forecaster consensus remains nearly unchanged from last month, with the expectation that this El Niño will rank among the three strongest episodes.

Although the southern jetstream and associated storm track that are characteristic of El Niño winters are expected to bring some improvement of drought conditions to California, given the severity and longevity of the drought, it is unlikely to completely alleviate precipitation deficits and replenish reservoirs in just one season. The U.S. Seasonal Drought Outlook is calling for the drought to remain but improve throughout California if El Niño delivers rain as predicted.

**Reservoir Levels (% of capacity):**

Reservoir	% of Capacity	Current Acre Feet Storage
Nacimiento	17%	64,050
Whale Rock	35%	13,746
Lopez	28%	13,929
Salinas	13%	2,982

Source: www.slocountywater.org County of San Luis Obispo

**STATE WATER**

**Status:** On December 1, the Department of Water Resources (DWR) announced the initial 2016 State Water Project (SWP) allocation at 10% and indicated that the actual allocation could rise or fall depending on the amount of rain and snow California receives this winter. As of December 28, 2015, San Luis Reservoir was at 20% capacity and 29% of average.

**VULNERABLE WATER SYSTEMS****County Service Areas (CSA's)****Santa Margarita (CSA 23)**

- Drought response level remains at ALERT status.
- Primary pumping is from shallow well No. 4; water is also being pumped from deep well No. 3 to reduce needs from well No. 4. State officials have also authorized the use of shallow wells 1 & 2 should the need arise.
- An emergency ordinance was adopted limiting outdoor watering. An informational mailer was sent to customers and signs in the community have been installed.
- Staff is monitoring conditions for a potential status change to CRITICAL.
- The intertie with Atascadero Mutual Water Company (AMWC) is complete and ready for operation.

**Shandon (CSA 16)**

- Two wells currently provide all water to the Shandon community and continued to be monitored.
- Connection to the State Water Project is out to bid.
- An emergency ordinance was adopted limiting outdoor watering. An informational mailer was sent to customers and signs in the community have been installed.

**Cayucos (CSA 10A)**

- Supply is available from Whale Rock and one on-site well. Staff has given a presentation to the Advisory Committee and business groups regarding conserving this supply.
- An emergency ordinance was adopted limiting outdoor watering. An informational mailer was sent to customers and signs in the community have been installed.

**Avila Valley (CSA 12)**

- Adequate supply is available from Lopez and State water "carryover" water sources for this year and next.
- The Low Reservoir Response Plan for Zone 3 (the Lopez system) is in effect; municipal deliveries have been cut 10%, however, CSA12 continues to use than its full allocation and "bank" water for subsequent years.
- Evaluation of emergency drought mitigation options for all of Zone 3 (including CSA12) is underway, including use of PG&E Diablo Desalination.

**Chorro Valley Institutions (CMC, Animal Services, Sheriff, County Operations, Camp San Luis, Cuesta College, County Office of Education)**

- 2015 State water carryover water is available and being provided.
- The existing distribution system is being evaluated to assure water losses are minimized.
- CMC has completed their water treatment plant upgrade project.
- Discussions with City of San Luis Obispo to exchange Nacimiento for Whale Rock are being initiated if State Water is insufficient in 2016.

**San Luis Obispo County Flood Control and Water Conservation District Systems**

**Zone 3 – Lopez Water Project (CSA12, Pismo Beach, Grover Beach, Arroyo Grande, Oceano)**

- The Low Reservoir Response Plan for Zone 3 is in effect; municipal deliveries have been cut 10%.
- Downstream environmental and agricultural releases have been cut 9.5%.

**Salinas Water Project – Salinas Reservoir (Santa Margarita Lake)**

- The reservoir is at 12.6% capacity; City of San Luis Obispo is reliant on the Nacimiento and Whale Rock Reservoirs.

**Nacimiento Water Project**

- The Project operating at full annual allocation levels.

**Non-County Operated**

**Cambria Community Services District**

- Emergency San Simeon Creek Brackish Water Supply Project went online on January 20, 2015. The district is now seeking a permit to operate it permanently.

**San Simeon Community Services District**

- The CSD has a new well head salinity project to increase supplies in the current prop 84 grant round. DWR released draft funding recommendations and the San Luis Obispo IRWM region is recommended for 75% of grant request.

**Heritage Ranch Community Services District**

- The Nacimiento River is the only available water source for the community of Heritage Ranch. An emergency inter-tie will be funded with emergency grant funds and construction on the inter-tie is underway.

**Rural Paso Robles residents**

- Continuing to identify water-trucking options and examine outreach efforts. See County Drought Conditions and Water Conservation Website for drought relief update information.

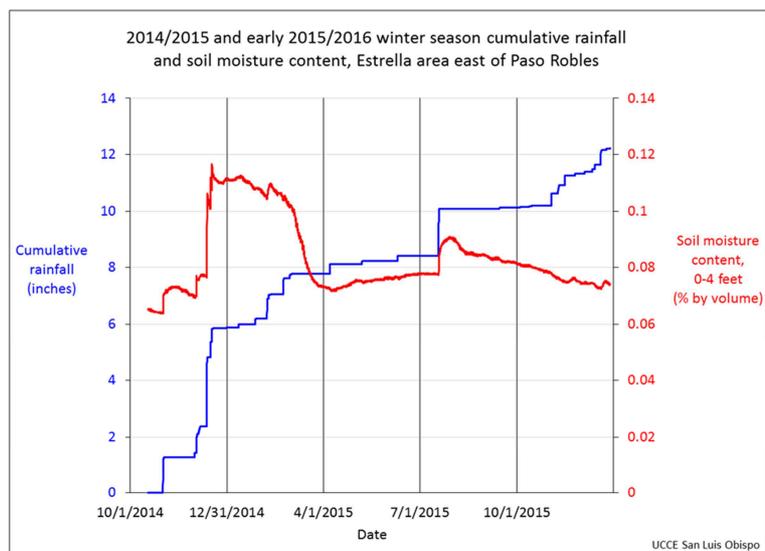
**IMPACTS**

**Agricultural Impacts:**

Conditions within the agriculture industry fundamentally remain unchanged. Many producers are concerned with potential impacts from either a continuation of the drought or conversely, above average rainfall. Efforts to capture and store precipitation as well as to protect soils from potential erosion are being encouraged by University of California Farm Advisors as well as local Resource Conservation Districts.

UC Cooperative Extension is continuing to monitor both precipitation and soil moisture at sites across San Luis Obispo County, in cooperation with county and local agencies. We will continue to supply a summary of information on both rainfall amounts and soil moisture status through the winter and spring months.

The figure to the right illustrated the impacts of cumulative rainfall on changes in soil moisture at one of the monitoring sites in the Estrella area east of Paso Robles. Soil moisture content in the 0 to 4 foot root zone (% by volume) shows little impact from recent rainfall events.



Agricultural Assistance - Update from the USDA Farm Service Agency

According to staff at the USDA Farm Service Agency, the following programs are active in providing assistance. The programs are briefly summarized as follows:

*SWEEP – State Water Efficiency Enhancement Program:* California Department of Food and Agriculture has released their 2016 SWEEP Round I. The SWEEP helps to implement on-farm irrigation systems that reduce energy use resulting in greenhouse gas (GHGs) emission reductions and water savings. SWEEP Applications must be submitted through the State Water Resources Control Board's (SWRCB) Financial Application Assistance Submittal Tool (FAAST) by Friday, January 8, 2016 at 5 pm PST. Late applications cannot be accepted. More information is available at [https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/environmentalstewardship/pdfs/2016SWEEP\\_FAQs.pdf](https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/environmentalstewardship/pdfs/2016SWEEP_FAQs.pdf)

*LFP – Livestock Forage Disaster Program:* provides payments for grazing losses. Because San Luis Obispo County continues in the D4 drought category, current eligibility is for 5 months of payments. Deadline to file is January 30, 2016 for 2015 payments.

*EQIP – Environmental Quality Incentives Program (NRCS):* provides funds for land conservation planning and implementation of conservation practices. This program provides cost-share funding through USDA – NRCS. Applications and approvals are ongoing.

*NAP – Non-insured Crop Disaster Assistance Program:* provides cash payments to producers of noninsurable crops when low yields, loss of inventory, or planting did not occur due to natural disasters. Producers who are insured through this program should file a notice of loss as soon as possible and are required to file within 15 days of the loss being apparent to be eligible for benefits.

*Tree Assistance Program –* covering Red Blotch Disease in vineyards and losses due to drought conditions if growers rehabilitate or replant orchards.

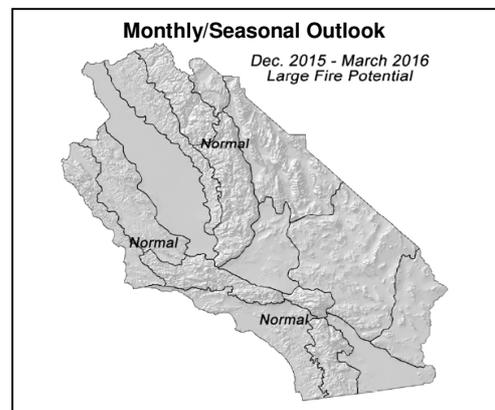
For information about the assistance programs, contact the USDA Farm Service Agency:

Templeton: (805) 434-0398 Ext 2.  
Santa Maria: (805) 928-9269

**Fire Danger:**

Fire Danger

In 2015, CAL FIRE and the US Forest Service have responded to over 8,227 fires across the state, burning 825,717 acres. Although large fire potential has been reduced significantly by fall weather and precipitation in most areas, wildfires are still occurring and there have been over 234 fires in just the past two weeks. Along the Central Coast, Santa Barbara and Ventura Counties have received very little rainfall and are still vulnerable to wildfire as evidenced by the 1,388-acre Solimar Fire which ignited on Christmas Day and was driven by Santa Ana wind conditions. The monthly/seasonal outlook from Predictive Services, shown on the right, calls for normal large fire potential through March 2016.



CAL FIRE is currently staffing seven wildland engines with more focus being placed on a number of fire prevention projects throughout the County. This is the first phase of the transition to "winter preparedness" staffing levels. Paso Robles Air Attack Base remains staffed with two tankers and one air attack. Two federal air tankers and one heli-tanker are no longer staffed.

With the transition to winter preparedness season, the annual backyard burn season began on December 7, 2015, indicating that burning may be conducted according to the Air Pollution Control District (APCD) burn program with no requirement for CAL FIRE burn permits.

### Live Fuel Moisture (LFM)

*(LFM is the moisture content of live vegetation expressed as a percentage of the oven-dry weight.)*

LFM values in the County have risen slightly in the past month but in most areas are still just above the critical level of 60 and below critical in others. Due to a number of small but spaced-out rains, there is a green grass crop beginning to grow in most areas, which will significantly reduce or prevent the spread of wildfire. The Ventura County Fire LFM Table indicates an average LFM value of 56%, which is a slight decrease from the previous value and still below critical and the historic average 73%.

### Dead Fuel Moisture

*(The moisture content of dead organic fuels is another important component of the relative fire danger. As with LFM above, dead fuel moisture levels are a good indicator of how likely fuels are to ignite and how intensely they will burn. 100-hr fuel refers to vegetation between 1 and 3 inches in diameter and 1000-hr fuel is 3-6 inches. When the fuel moisture content is low, fires start easily and will spread rapidly.)*

Many fuel beds in the County, particularly coastal sage scrub, have seen a dramatic increase in the percentage of dead fuel as a result of the prolonged drought. In many areas, the volume of dead vegetation exceeds the volume of live vegetation. The current values are indicated as below average for both 100-hour and 1000-hour fuels, but well above record lows.

### Temperatures/Relative Humidity (RH)

*(When combined with other factors influencing the fire environment such as wind, steep topography, and low fuel moisture levels, hot temperatures and low RH can significantly increase the fire danger by increasing fire initiation, spread rates, burning intensity, and difficulty of control.)*

Along with the precipitation received, cold temperatures have reduced the fire threat, despite record low live fuel moistures.

### Energy Release Component (ERC)

*(ERC is an index related to how hot a fire could burn. It is directly related to the 24-hour, potential worst case, total available energy (BTUs) at the head of a fire. The ERC can serve as a good characterization of fire season as it tracks seasonal fire danger trends well. ERC has low variability, and is the best fire danger component for indicating the effects of intermediate to long-term drying on fire behavior.)*

Cooler, shorter days have resulted in slight decreases in ERC values that are above average, but below record highs.

### Forest and Range Impacts

Widespread tree mortality is plainly evident throughout the County. All tree species have been adversely affected by the drought. Thousands of coast live oaks of all sizes in all areas and at all elevations have died. The eucalyptus stands on the Nipomo mesa are showing a sharp increase in the number of dead trees and also in the number of live trees with dead crowns which substantially increases the amount of dead fuel loading available for fire.

The area most severely impacted is the Cambria Monterey Pine Forest (CMPF). Already one of the most endangered native forests in the world, the CMPF has been further devastated by the drought. The poor condition of the CMPF resulting from the decades-long problems of senescence, over-crowding, fire exclusion, development, pitch canker, bark beetles, and many other fungal and parasitic pathogens has been severely amplified by the drought. These cumulative impacts have created the current situation where approximately 40-50% of the overstory trees are dead or dying. In certain areas, mortality exceeds 90%. In addition to the major impacts to forest health, the resulting fire hazard has increased to the point where catastrophic stand-replacing fire is very likely. Hundreds of large dead hazard trees are poised to fall on homes, vehicles, and vital infrastructure.

CAL FIRE has created a web-based map viewer to allow Californians to participate in understanding and identifying the areas most impacted with tree mortality as a threat to life and property. This viewer shows areas of tree mortality mapped from 2012 through 2015 as well as assets important to life and property, such as roads, water supply infrastructure, and communications facilities. Where the tree mortality intersect an asset will be categorized as high priority. The viewer can be accessed at the following link: <http://frap.fire.ca.gov/projects/DroughtViewer>.

Grants:

The SLO Fire Safe Council (FSC) completed work in October on a grant awarded by PG&E to assist with hazard tree abatement work in Cambria. The work included the felling of over 400 hazard trees and the chipping of several hundred tons of slash. The FSC was also awarded a \$498,000 grant from the CAL FIRE Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund (GGRF) to help improve forest health in Cambria. Another \$300,000 grant has been selected as the number one proposal from the State of California through the Western Forestry Leadership Coalition (WFLC WUI grants). The focus of this WFLC WUI grant will be to augment and improve fuelbreaks on the east side of Cambria.

Emergency Permits

The County is continuing to work to provide relief from hazard tree permitting requirements in Cambria to facilitate tree removal on the high number of affected parcels. The County Planning and Building Department approved an emergency hazard tree removal permit allowing Cambria residents to remove dead hazardous trees with a non-cost permit. The County Planning Director sent a letter to residents authorizing them to remove hazard trees under certain conditions which include contacting the Fire Department and having an inspection done and their trees marked by CAL FIRE. The Cambria Community Services District was also issued an Emergency Permit for removal of up to 300 dead trees on District property.

Forest Assessments

Forest assessments under the direction of Cal Poly forestry faculty have been initiated to quantify the extent of this issue and the results will be made known as soon as they become available. This research work will continue and will provide the foundation for all the work that will occur under the grants described above.

**Economic:**

In an effort to coordinate local and state response to drought impacts the following surveys are being utilized by the County:

Drought Business Impact Survey

The Labor and Workforce Development Agency (LWDA) and the Employment Development Department (EDD) developed a streamlined survey to report drought-related job impacts. Collecting "real-time" drought-related information is essential for the LWDA and the Governor's Drought Relief Task Force to identify the drought's impact on California's industries, employers, and workers. The survey, which collects information on drought impacts for employers allows the affected employer to report directly to the State, thereby, providing a level of confidentiality that business and industry need. A link to the new survey is available on the San Luis Obispo Workforce Development Board's website: [www.SLOworkforce.com](http://www.SLOworkforce.com).

Though the WIB is hearing that there are impacts, the county does not have any "reportable" impacts due to the State's requirements for reporting (i.e. specific business name, address, etc.).

Domestic Water Issues-Intake Form

The Governor's Drought Task Force created an online intake form for local, state, or tribal and federal agencies to document domestic water issues. The information is intended to inform and coordinate state response and mitigate drought impacts. Both agencies and individuals can complete the reporting form. Individuals with domestic water issues are encouraged to contact County Environmental Health at (805) 781-5544 or visit the state online reporting website at <https://mydrywatersupply.water.ca.gov/report/>.

**STATE & FEDERAL KEY ACTION ITEMS FROM LAST MONTH**

**State Water Board Authorizes \$5 Million to Help Private Well Owners and Small Water Systems:**

On December 15, the State Water Board adopted a resolution authorizing the allocation of \$5 million in funds to help residents on private wells and small water systems who are facing water emergencies. The funds, which will be administered by nonprofit organizations, will help individuals that have an immediate drought-related water shortage or outage, and assist in permanent solutions such as new wells, well rehabilitation, and consolidation into new or existing public water systems.

**State Water Board Workshop Examines Conservation Regulation:**

On December 7, the State Water Board held a public workshop to discuss concepts and examine ways to potentially alter the state's emergency water conservation regulation to make it more equitable if it is extended beyond February 2016. Earlier this year, Governor Brown mandated Californians to cut water usage by 25 percent over 2013 levels from June through February 2016. Last month, the Governor issued an additional Executive Order giving the State Water Board authority to extend and revise the emergency water conservation regulations.

**COUNTY DROUGHT TASK FORCE KEY ACTION ITEMS FROM LAST MONTH**

**County Office of Emergency Services:**

San Luis Obispo County OES continues to coordinate with the Governor's Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES) to provide updates on the drought situation, respond to specific information requests to Cal OES, and coordinate local emergency needs. County OES continues to participate in the statewide drought conference calls hosted by Cal OES. These statewide conference calls are changing from every other week to once a month. No new information was received or reported during the December 7 call.

In addition, County OES continues to pursue information related to how the resulting Governor's orders related to tree mortality will be implemented. OES is exploring the feasibility of collecting and submitting cost information from local public agencies related to tree mortality costs. This relates to the Governor's recent tree mortality proclamation of emergency and the potential for public agencies to receive cost reimbursement for tree removal that meet State disaster recovery requirements. County OES has requested information from Cal OES about the cost reimbursement process as it relates to the Governor's orders. Once direction from Cal OES is received, County OES will share that information with other local agencies as appropriate.

**Emergency Actions:**

No new emergency actions have been taken specific to the drought in this reporting period.

**County Facilities Usage & Conservation Actions:**

The county has taken the following actions:

- Water Conservation: Water usage data for all facilities with water billing from a vendor has been entered into the Utility Manager system. Water usage status updates for the users in the Utility Manager system and the County Operations Center show a 31% reduction countywide in water usage in October 2015 from October 2013. Water usage data for November is not yet available.
- Fixture Replacement and Leak Repair: To date, staff has retrofitted 44 buildings with low-flow fixtures, saving an estimated 4,500 gallons per week. Staff continues to identify and repair leaks to minimize water loss.
- County Standards for Construction Contracts: Staff is reviewing and updating County standards for plumbing fixtures, to include more specific language for lower water usage fixtures in facility construction contracts and purchase orders.
- County Airport: As previously reported, County Airport fire hydrants must be flushed periodically to maintain safe water for drinking due to chlorine levels. The Airport is making the water from hydrant flushing available for agricultural operations, construction, or other purposes. Please contact the Airport at (805) 781-5205 if interested in using this free water.

**Drought Contingency Planning:**

The Public Health Department, the Public Works Department, and CAL FIRE/County Fire continue to develop plans to ensure there is adequate supply of water for firefighting and domestic water use in the event that a community does not have enough water.

Water Purveyors GIS

Water purveyors GIS data contains the new vulnerability level field that was determined after assessing the results of a one-time voluntary 2014 survey questionnaire that was sent to both large and small water purveyors. The mapping of this data has been categorized by the assessed vulnerability levels which are Watch (green), Vulnerable (orange), Critical (red) and Pending Survey Results (blue) and is available for CalFire in a web map viewer. The link is on the home page under the County Drought Task Force heading of the SLO Cal Fire website <http://www.calfireslo.org/>

#### Dry Well Replacements

Environmental Health has been tracking dry well replacement applications since 2013 and the mapping of the sites is updated on a weekly basis.

#### County Owned Water Wells

Environmental Health is actively working on compiling and site mapping of all county-owned well application documents to support county-wide projects.

#### Water Well Mapping

Environmental Health is actively working over the next year to map well construction and well destruction applications the department has on record.

#### **County Public Outreach Actions:**

Information regarding current and upcoming drought relief programs for rural homeowners has been placed on the County Drought Conditions and Water Conservation webpage. Rural Development, an agency of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), delivers a number of programs to help improve the quality of life in rural communities throughout the nation. These programs may also help rural communities, businesses and individuals impacted by California's ongoing drought conditions. For additional resources and information on applying for any of these programs, please visit <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/ca> or the County Drought Conditions and Water Conservation webpage at [http://www.slocounty.ca.gov/admin/Drought\\_Update.htm](http://www.slocounty.ca.gov/admin/Drought_Update.htm).

In an effort to raise awareness about water supply issues the County continues to examine multiple channels of communication for water conservation outreach efforts. Check out our water-saving tips, shareable water saving images, and customized Tweets and Facebook posts just for you to share and help us continue the SLO County culture of conservation at the following link: [http://www.slocounty.ca.gov/admin/Drought\\_Update/water-conservation.htm](http://www.slocounty.ca.gov/admin/Drought_Update/water-conservation.htm)

To report drought-related concerns or for water conservations questions, call the County Water Conservation and Drought Hotline at (805) 781-4466.

**DROUGHT RELATED WEBSITES FOR MORE INFORMATION**

**County of San Luis Obispo Drought Conditions and Water Conservation**  
([http://www.slocounty.ca.gov/admin/Drought\\_Update.htm](http://www.slocounty.ca.gov/admin/Drought_Update.htm))

**State's Water Conservation Campaign; Save our Water**  
([www.saveourh2o.org](http://www.saveourh2o.org))

**California's Drought Information Clearinghouse; Dought.CA.Gov**  
(<http://ca.gov/drought/>)

**California Department of Food and Agriculture; Drought information**  
([www.cdaf.ca.gov/drought/](http://www.cdaf.ca.gov/drought/))

**California Department of Water Resources; Current Water Conditions**  
([www.water.ca.gov/waterconditions/drought/](http://www.water.ca.gov/waterconditions/drought/))

**California State Water Resources Control Board; Water Rights, Drought Info and Actions**  
([www.swrcb.ca.gov/waterrights/water\\_issues/programs/drought/index.shtml](http://www.swrcb.ca.gov/waterrights/water_issues/programs/drought/index.shtml))

**California Department of Public Health; Drinking Water CDPH Drinking Water Program**  
([www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/pages/dwp.aspx](http://www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/pages/dwp.aspx))

**USDA Disaster and Drought Assistance Information; USDA Programs**  
([http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?navid=DISASTER\\_ASSISTANCE](http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?navid=DISASTER_ASSISTANCE))

**UC Cooperative Extension Drought Information Resources; Drought Information Resources**  
([http://cesanluisobispo.ucanr.edu/Drought\\_Information/](http://cesanluisobispo.ucanr.edu/Drought_Information/))

