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Court Ruling Taps Zone 7 Water Agency's Drought Supplies *Valley's Groundwater Basin Reserves at Risk*

Livermore -- Friday's court-ordered reduction in State Water Project deliveries for 2008 will force the Livermore-Amador Valley's Zone 7 Water Agency to rely more heavily on reserves intended for drought protection and other emergencies.

Zone 7, which wholesales water to about 200,000 people in Livermore, Pleasanton, Dublin and Dougherty Valley, normally gets 80 percent of its water supply conveyed through the Delta by the State Water Project.

But those supplies will be sharply reduced under Friday's court ruling that cuts back up to 30 percent of combined State Water Project and Central Valley Project water deliveries for a year while state and federal agencies complete a long-term plan to protect endangered Delta smelt. The ruling is the largest court-ordered cutback in water supplies in the history of the state and affects drinking-water supplies for 25 million Californians, as well as irrigation water for agriculture.

Zone 7 General Manager Jill Duerig said that while Zone 7 has been diligent in planning for droughts and other emergencies through groundwater banking, conservation programs and other means, the reduction of Delta-conveyed imported water through regulatory limitations deals a big blow to the agency's water-supply planning.

Zone 7 currently has enough stored groundwater and other emergency supplies to meet projected demands during 2008. However, Duerig warned that drawing down on those reserves in light of Friday's court ruling could put the Valley in a seriously vulnerable position if, in addition, dry-weather conditions experienced in 2007 continue and turn into a prolonged drought.

“We really could be in a bind if we're entering a drought or experience an earthquake that disrupts future water delivery,” she said.

Over the past decade, Zone 7's constituents have made substantial investments in emergency and drought protection by acquiring entitlements to water supply for local and offsite groundwater banking. Under Zone 7's Urban Water Management Plan, existing groundwater supplies augmenting a reduced level of state imports are enough to get the Valley through a six-year drought.

Zone 7 continues to urge its customers to voluntarily reduce water consumption through such actions as reduced outdoor watering, reduced car washing, and repair of leaking sprinkler heads and household plumbing. Conservation tips are available on Zone 7's web site at www.zone7water.com, and through local retailers – the cities of Livermore and Dublin, the California Water Service Company and the Dublin San Ramon Services District.

“We may ask people to do more with less in order to protect our drought supplies, and will be looking at additional tools and programs to help people do that,” Duerig said. “However, we've already implemented substantial indoor water conservation measures. In the long-run, conservation will only be a part of our answer.

“We rely on continuous supplies from the northern Sierra to be conveyed through the Delta, and that conveyance no longer meets the water-supply needs of our communities,” she said.

Friday's court ruling also will force Zone 7 to consider again reducing artificial recharge of Arroyo Mocho through Livermore, and possibly reducing recharge on Arroyo Del Valle through the Valley. Normally, Zone 7 releases surplus imported Delta water from the South Bay Aqueduct down Arroyo Mocho and Arroyo Del Valle to augment natural flow that seeps into the groundwater basin, which helps replenish the groundwater basin. This year, the agency was forced to shut off the spigot on Arroyo Mocho due to extremely dry weather. Next year, although the agency attempts to manage its recharge program in an environmentally sensitive way, it may be forced to shut it off both arroyos due to the reduction in supplies of water from the court's decision.