

Sandoval kicks off Nevada drought summit

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CARSON CITY — Gov. Brian Sandoval opened a [three-day water summit Monday](#) with his own observations of a drought-stricken landscape of depleted reservoirs, rivers reduced to trickles and mountaintops no longer capped with snow.

From Lake Mead to Lake Tahoe, water levels have dropped, leaving boat ramps high and dry; farmers and ranchers have left fields fallow. Last winter, snow-skiing shops closed in mid-winter because of the lack of snow.

"The subject of drought could not be more serious," Sandoval told more than 200 participants gathered in the state Assembly chambers. "This is not a problem we can leave for future generations. It's going to come back."

Sandoval said he was "horrified" by how little water was in Rye Patch Reservoir on a recent trip to eastern Nevada, and the white "bathtub" ring around Lake Mead — the primary water source for the Las Vegas Valley — is a constant reminder of how dry it is in the Silver State.

The drought summit brings together water experts, ranchers, farmers, tourism representatives, casino and mining executives, and municipal water managers to talk about water challenges. The gathering follows three previous workshops held around the state.

The summit also precedes a final, Sept. 28 meeting of the Drought Forum, a panel appointed in April by the governor to discuss and recommend changes in water practices.

"We are the best in the nation and maybe the world in water conservation," Sandoval said. On a trip to Israel, another arid region, Sandoval said he was amazed by the innovation used to manage water.

"It made me wonder, are we doing all we can?" he asked.

Like many Nevadans, Sandoval said he now watches weather reports every day for short- and long-range forecasts.

"I don't know what an El Niño is and I don't know what a weather blob is. But I do know that I hope that it's going to bring us a lot of snow and rain in the very near future," he said.

El Niño is a phenomenon associated with warming waters in the central Pacific Ocean. El Niño years often bring higher precipitation to southern parts of the United States, but can mean drier winters in parts of the north. While scientists say there is greater than a 90 percent chance of a strong El Niño this year, northern Nevada is in the zone separating the higher-than-average wet from dry, meaning it can go either way. Also complicating the long-range forecast are a new element, warm "blobs" in the northern Pacific, which some researchers say may be exacerbating the Western drought. What scientists don't know is, if El Niño and the blobs collide, which will win out and what will be the weather consequences.



Talking to reporters after his opening remarks, Sandoval emphasized Nevada's advances in water conservation and said the Southern Nevada Water Authority in Las Vegas is a prime example.

The authority board last week approved leasing 150,000 acre-feet of water to drought-parched Southern California for \$44 million, and a new resource report said the water purveyor has enough water to support 1 million new residents in coming years.

"That is a compliment to Southern Nevada Water Authority," the governor said. "It is one of the most efficient water systems in the world. That is a good problem to have."

Sandoval said the leased water is a resource that likely would have been lost to evaporation, so it is a financial benefit to Southern Nevada ratepayers to make use of it.

John Entsminger, SNWA general manager, will be part of a panel Tuesday on the topic of municipal and public water providers.

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