STATE NEWS

California Governor Signs Bills to Help Water Crisis

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California Governor Jerry Brown on Tuesday signed more than a dozen bills aimed at improving access to water in the state, where drought is common and tension is high over the competing needs of residents, agriculture and the environment.

The new laws attempt to address some of the most immediate concerns, including the difficulty faced by small communities when local groundwater becomes polluted or is over-pumped. The measures also reflect growing interest in California in finding ways to safely recycle wastewater so that it can be used again for drinking and cooking.

“California needs more high quality water, and recycling is key to getting there,” Brown, a Democrat, said in his signing message. To speed the effort, Brown also proposed consolidating the responsibility for all water-quality programs under a single agency, the state Water Resources Board.

Water has long been a sore point in California, where the precious resource has been diverted from mountain lakes and streams to irrigate farms and slake the thirst of metropolitan areas around Los Angeles and San Francisco.

Many of the state’s initiatives to deal with the problem, including a long-awaited effort to preserve access to water while addressing environmental problems in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, are highly controversial. They face criticism from all sides and often lead to political stalemates.

But the bills signed Tuesday chip away at individual problems bit by bit, many of them meeting little opposition.

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