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MWDOC BOARD DECLARES DROUGHT EMERGENCY OVER IN ORANGE COUNTY CALLS ON STATE TO FOLLOW SUIT

Fountain Valley, CA (February 6, 2017) – Citing record precipitation and overflowing reservoirs, the Municipal Water District of Orange County (MWDOC) Board of Directors on Monday unanimously declared an end to the emergency drought conditions and urged the state to halt the emergency regulations currently in place. The announcement comes as the State Water Resources Control Board ponders extending special regulations under the Drought State of Emergency, while 50 of the state’s 58 counties – including Orange – have also been under “flood emergency.”

Governor Jerry Brown declared the drought emergency in 2014 and ordered plans to reduce California’s water use by 25 percent. Orange County water agencies exceeded the conservation mandates set by the State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB). Following tremendous storms in December and January, only a fraction of the state remains in extreme drought.

On Wednesday, the SWRCB is scheduled to consider whether to keep emergency regulations in place. The staff report recommends a continued emergency status for another 270 days, even as the Sierra Nevada snowpack measured at 173 percent of normal with an accumulated precipitation of 53.2 inches in Northern California, or 198 percent of normal.

“It defies logic to tell the public – to force water agencies to tell the public – that we are still in a drought emergency,” said Wayne Osborne, president of the MWDOC Board of Directors. “We remain in a drought, but it is no longer an emergency. Not only is it unnecessary, continuing the ‘emergency’ will destroy local leaders’ credibility with their stakeholders.”

MWDOC is Orange County’s wholesale water supplier, serving more than 2.2 million people through 28 retail agencies. The agency also administers countywide water use efficiency and outreach programs.

MWDOC Directors on Monday cautioned residents to continue being water efficient, even as the emergency has passed. OC residents continue to use about the same amount of water as they did two decades ago, although the population has increased by more than 1 million people.

Maintaining the public trust is critical, MWDOC leaders say, because conservation measures will be required again when California returns to drought. Periods of prolonged drought interrupted by heavy rains has become the new normal for California. Representatives from the Orange County Association of REALTORS and South Orange County Economic Coalition spoke in support of the resolution.

Additionally, that credibility is key as the state moves forward with California WaterFix and EcoRestore, two projects that will protect the California Delta and enhance the state’s ability to move storm water from the Sacramento and San Joaquin Rivers to Southern California. A MWDOC study determined the WaterFix is the single most cost effective large-scale project to ensure long term water reliability for Orange County and the region. MWDOC Directors passed a resolution of support for the WaterFix in December. About a half-dozen Orange County water agencies have followed suit, with many others planning similar actions.

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