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UCLA continues water conservation despite end of drought

As the second-largest user of water in L.A., the university hopes to further minimize wastefulness

By **ANDREW ZAKI**

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After a state-wide drought declaration in 2008, UCLA was technically exempt from water use restrictions by the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power.

But the university decided to join the conservation effort anyway, said Rich Ohara, UCLA senior grounds superintendent.

That push toward water conservation will continue despite last week's announcement by Gov. Jerry Brown that the drought in California is over, at least for now.

The declaration came after hydrologists from the state Department of Water Resources announced that water content in California's mountain snowpack is far above normal for this time of year.

That makes this winter one of the wettest since 1970, according to the California Department of Water Resources. The increase in snow will bring relief to California's households, industry and farms, which depend on snowmelt for approximately one-third of their water supply, according to a statement from the Department of Water Resources.

"We are having a good year for water compared to other years, but that doesn't mean we are out of the woods," said UCLA sustainability coordinator Nurit Katz said.

Droughts are a result of weather patterns that can come and go, but there is an overall issue of water supply in the Los Angeles region, Katz added.

The city will continue to conserve water, and restrictions imposed by the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power will not be lifted.

Easing up on the city's water use policies would be irresponsible and leave L.A. vulnerable to future droughts, said Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa in a statement regarding Brown's announcement.

UCLA, which is the second largest user of water in the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power system, has played a role in the city's conservation efforts.

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The university has been practicing water conservation since well before restrictions were put in place in 2009. For more than 20 years, UCLA's irrigation has employed a computerized central control system that runs off of information from a weather station.

"We let the weather station tell us when to water and when not to water," Ohara said. "That way we are watering at the perfect times."

Water is also being captured and reused from lab and cooling equipment as well as from under the Ronald Reagan UCLA Medical Center. This water is used to generate power, Katz said.

Urinals were also replaced across campus to reduce the amount of water per flush from three gallons to two cups, Katz said.

The residence halls have installed water efficient fixtures and piloted new technology to save water, said Robert Gilbert, UCLA sustainability manager for housing and hospitality services.

Students have joined in the effort as well. A program in the residence halls called Team Green has student ambassadors from each residence hall meet to discuss sustainability on a bi-weekly basis.

The water task force created in 2009 – which is made up of staff, faculty and students – is also working on a comprehensive plan to conserve water on campus.

Since 2000, these measures have reduced UCLA's water use by 70 million gallons, Katz said. That is equivalent to the amount of water used by 1,000 households per year.

"We hope to inspire people throughout Los Angeles to conserve water," Katz said. "We have definitely done a lot but we have a long way to go."

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