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# California's Precarious Water Supply

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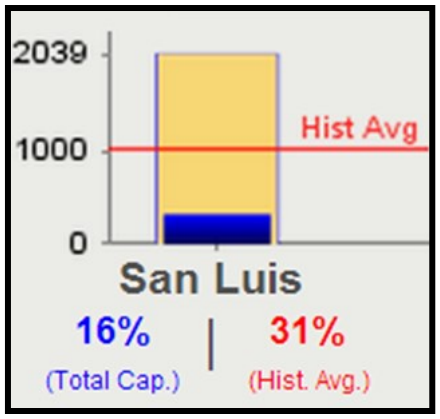
Between 2011 and 2013, the system of reservoirs that supply water to the vast majority of California's population has gone from full to historic low levels, which could be an omen of difficult times to come.

Lake Shasta's water levels fell from 122 percent of historical average in August of 2011 to nearly **30 percent BELOW historical average in August of this year**. Folsom Lake was in a similarly bad situation, at **29 percent BELOW historical average in August of 2013**.

Further south, San Luis Reservoir sits in a far more precarious situation and serves as a warning for next year unless weather patterns change dramatically. San Luis, the largest off-stream reservoir in the world, receives the bulk of its water supply from the Delta during high winter flows and is the main south of Delta storage facility for northern California's Silicon Valley, the San Joaquin Valley, and Southern California. In August of 2011, San Luis Reservoir held 166 percent of historical average. Two years later the situation has changed dramatically, **with San Luis holding only 31 percent of historical average and just 16 percent of capacity**. The San Jose Mercury News recently described the shoreline of San Luis as, "a vast expanse of dried, cracked mud." On August 1, the Reservoir was at its lowest level of any year on that date since 1989, the high point of California's last major drought.

**San Luis Reservoir was at only 16 percent of capacity as of August 1.**




If anyone is looking for evidence that it is critical to make changes to California's water supply system, look no further. This quick reversal from boom to bust underscores the dire need for the state to embark on a comprehensive water fix that includes significant investment in upgrading our water supply infrastructure. How can the world's eighth largest economy and the livelihoods of 42 million people be expected to survive without a reliable high-quality water supply? Bottom-line: it cannot.

The cause of the depletion of California's storage system has been part hydrology and part regulatory, consider the following:

- Major water supply reservoirs have been depleted in just two short years.
- Water conveyance systems are increasingly restricted in an effort to protect endangered species, leaving residents and businesses high and dry, even though these restrictions have not been shown to actually benefit species and are not scientifically justified (costing water users over 800,000 acre-feet of water in 2013 alone).
- Water that could be used to help ease the situation is being diverted instead to help struggling salmon also facing the impacts of two dry winters.

All indications are that we will face extended drought periods as a result of changing climate patterns. Without investments to update our water supply infrastructure, managing the state's water supply will become increasingly difficult and contentious. **We shouldn't find ourselves in a situation where we continue to have to make tradeoffs between fish and people. However, that is exactly where things are headed if policymakers don't act soon and provides a comprehensive solution that adequately provides for people, farms, businesses and the environment.**