

In early December, the Stevens Creek Reservoir in Cupertino, California, was only 5 percent full.

Where's the Water?

A major drought in the western United States has left thousands of people in California without running water.

All Denica Beltran wants is a hot shower. The 10-year-old from East Porterville, California, hasn't been able to take a hot shower at home since March. A terrible drought has left her family without running water. To bathe, Denica uses cold water from a bucket.

"I miss washing my hair [in a shower]," she says. "It's really important to have running water."

Denica, her parents, and her younger sister are among at least 2,800 people in East Porterville and neighboring towns who don't have running water in their homes. Like nearly 16 million other Californians, most people in East Porterville get their water

from underground wells. But because of the drought, hundreds of wells have dried up.

"It's really stressful," says Denica's mother, Angelica Gallegos. "It gets to a point where you get sad and frustrated."

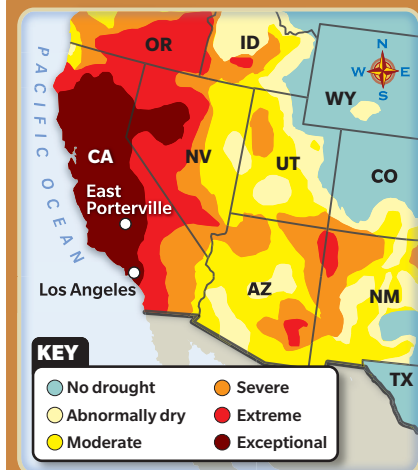
The situation in East Porterville is one of the most extreme effects of the drought. As the **prolonged** dry spell enters its fourth year, people across the western U.S. are asking: When will it end?

A Slow Disaster

A drought is a long period of little or no rainfall or snowfall, leading to a shortage of water. Droughts are natural disasters. Though they aren't violent like

Drought Watch

This map shows drought conditions in most of the western United States.



Source: U.S. Drought Monitor (as of 11/20/14)

tornadoes, hurricanes, and earthquakes, they can cause serious damage.

"Other disasters happen really suddenly," says David Miskus, a meteorologist at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric



Then: Lake Oroville in Northern California, in July 2011



Now: Lake Oroville in August 2014

Administration. “But droughts creep up on you.”

The drought has hit farmers especially hard. In California, about 428,000 acres of farmland—an area larger than 323,000 football fields—were left unplanted last year. Ranchers from California to Texas have had to sell their livestock because grass and feed for the animals are scarce. According to one study, the agricultural industry in California may have lost more than \$2 billion and 17,000 jobs in 2014 because of the drought.

It’s been almost a year since Governor Jerry Brown declared a drought emergency throughout California. Last July, the state passed new rules that ban people from using **excessive** amounts of water for things like

watering their lawns and washing their cars.

Life Without Water

Worrying about water is part of daily life for people in East Porterville. Three times a week, Denica’s parents drive to a fire station in the next town. There, county officials have set up a 5,000-gallon water tank. Residents fill up barrels, buckets, or anything else they can fit in their cars, and take them home.

Denica’s family stores the water in a tank in the yard. To do the dishes, take a bath, or even flush the toilet, someone first has to go outside, fill a bucket with water, and bring it inside.

The water in the tank is non-potable, meaning it’s not clean enough to drink. Denica’s family

gets most of its drinking water from volunteers who go door-to-door handing out cases of bottled water.

Hoping for Rain

Meteorologists aren’t sure when the drought will end. Miskus and other weather experts say getting a lot of snow in the Sierra Nevada mountains this winter will be crucial. Millions of Californians rely on the melted snow from the mountains to feed the rivers and reservoirs that supply their water.

Meanwhile, county officials are looking for ways to help the people of East Porterville. One idea is to hook up some of the affected homes to wells in a nearby city that haven’t dried up. But that could take years.

Denica says she is “hoping it rains a lot.” She also says that not having running water has taught her an important lesson.

“We have to take care of water and not be wasteful,” she says.

—by Joe Bubar



A man loads buckets of water onto his truck in Porterville, California.

Words to Know

prolonged (proh-LONGD) *adjective.* continuing for a long time; lengthy

excessive (ek-SEH-sihv) *adjective.* more than is necessary or normal

PAGE 4: MARCIO DISE/SANCHEZ/AP PHOTO (STONE CREEK RESERVOIR); JIM MCMAHON/“MAPMAN” (MAP); PAGE 5: PAUL HAMES/CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF WATER RESOURCES VIA GETTY IMAGES (LAKE OROVILLE FULL); JUSTIN SULLIVAN/GETTY IMAGES (LAKE OROVILLE DROUGHT, BUCKETS)