

NASA Satellites to Study California Drought

SCOTT SMITH, Associated Press

FRESNO, California (AP) — NASA scientists have begun deploying satellites and other advanced technology to help California water officials assess the [state's record drought](#) [1] and better manage it, officials said Tuesday.

The California Department of Water Resources has partnered with NASA to use the space agency's satellite data and other airborne technology to better measure the snowpack, groundwater levels and predict storms.

"It sounds like a cliché, but if they could put a man on the moon, why can't we get better seasonal forecasting?" Jeanine Jones of the state's Department of Water Resources said in an interview following the Sacramento announcement of the partnership.

Now they will. NASA scientists said they are also embarking on projects that use satellite images to help more accurately measure the number of fields farmers have chosen not to plant and where land is sinking because of excessive ground-water pumping.

Gov. Jerry Brown directed state officials to form such partnerships as part of his drought emergency declaration last month.

California's relationship with NASA began shortly after the dry year of 2009, when officials sought answers to problems exacerbated by the lack of rain and snow, such as the sinking land. This year's drought has made that research all more important, Jones said, adding that the preliminary findings proved that there's plenty more to learn.

NASA geologist Tom Farr said that bringing together all types of research and modern technology like pieces of a puzzle may help those in charge of managing the state's water supply avoid deficit water years like this.

"We're on the verge of being able to put all these measurements together and start looking at the concept of closing the water budget of California," he said.

Lawrence Friedl, director of NASA's Applied Sciences Program, said that 13 of the agency's satellites are focused on water. Three more water research projects are scheduled by NASA, including a satellite to be launched Feb. 27 with the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency.

Projects NASA is advancing include measuring so-called "atmospheric rivers" to better predict global storm systems farther in advance so rain can be captured in California reservoirs. Satellite images that show the amount of land farmers have chosen not to plant in a drought will arm officials in Sacramento with information

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about where to open food banks for farm workers.

Satellites technology will help officials identify levees that are prone to break with high volumes of water, scientists said.

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