Disposition of California’s Average Annual Precipitation

- Captured Runoff, 25%
- Lost Runoff, 11%
- Evap. & Plant Losses, 65%

Pristine Waterscape Central Valley

Largest lake in state was Tulare Lake
Other large lakes Buena Vista and Kern—and overflow lands
California contained over 5 million acres of wetlands—mainly in the Central Valley.

Tule Marsh
This artesian well, advertised as flowing “a million gallons a day” was drilled on the Smith ranch 15 miles south of Hanford and had a measured flow of 1200 gallons a minute (Brown & Richmond, 1940, p. 98). That flow was the largest in California at the time but, like all the artesian wells in the valley, decreased as the underground aquifer was depleted.
California Wild & Scenic Rivers

Deciduous Riparian Forest
The Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta is the largest estuary on the West coast of North America.

San Joaquin River flows reduced by irrigation diversions.
Lack of flushing by flood waters leads to saline soils

Bay Area and Delta

200,000 acres of coastal marshes along SF bay—only 35,000 left now
Southern California

Coastal Salt Marsh
Los Angeles ca. 1850

Pristine Waterscape
Southern California

Today, the largest lake in California is the Salton Sea. It existed as the dry Salton Sink prior to 1906.

New River Cutting its Channel, Calexico 1906.
Owens Lake was a saline lake east of the Sierra Nevada mountains.
Ships crossed the lake carrying gold ore to the railroads.
Owens Lake, California, U.S.A.

Owens River in 1906
Pristine Waterscape
Northern California
Missions were located near water and an abundant supply of native “heathen” who would work on canals and irrigation.

Four presidios were expected to grow own food and clothing as well as carry out military duties.
Three pueblos were established and expected to provide provisions for the presidios as well as themselves in 1850.

Crumbling Mission San Juan Capistrano in 1880.
US invasion of Mexico at San Pascual (1846)