

Floating Solar Panels Are A Perfect Fit for Drought-Stricken States

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A small solar array on a lake in Thailand. Uwe Schwarzbach

With drought becoming the new normal in some parts of the country, an emerging technology brings an unexpected ray of hope: floatovoltaics.

Solar panels floating on ponds and other bodies of water are getting praise in California, New Jersey and far-flung countries such as England, India and Japan, which are all investing in such projects.

But these panels also reduce evaporation, a key concern in areas suffering from water shortages. In return, the water keeps the panels cool, which makes them more efficient.

That makes floating solar arrays an energy-water win-win – and we could use more of those nowadays.

Wine growers: Panels must fit in

California wine counties Napa and Sonoma both have floatovoltaic systems underway – one of which will be the second largest in the world so far.

The region's rolling hills and famous historic sites attract tourists from around the world. California grapevines also sit on some of the most expensive land in the United States, so the idea of clearing out fields for large solar arrays didn't excite local growers.

In 2011, the [Far Niente winery](#) in Napa instead installed a solar energy system on its pond. The panels have reduced evaporation from this pond by 70 percent, while generating enough power to completely offset the winery's annual use.

Meanwhile, [Sonoma County's](#) installation of floating panels on a series of wastewater treatment ponds is due to come online this year. It will have the capacity to power 3,000 homes.
