

Significant Drought Conditions Declared Across Massachusetts

Above Normal Temperatures, Below Normal Rainfall Lead to Level 2 Drought Throughout Commonwealth

BOSTON — *Due to above normal temperatures throughout July and early August and more than three months of below normal rainfall, Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) Secretary Kathleen Theoharides today declared a Level 2 – Significant Drought in all seven regions of the Commonwealth – the Western, Connecticut River Valley, Central, Northeast, Southeast, Cape Cod, and Islands regions. At a Level 2 – Significant Drought, as outlined in the [Massachusetts Drought Management Plan](#), conditions are becoming significantly dry and warrant detailed monitoring of drought conditions, close coordination among state and federal agencies, emphasis on water conservation, more stringent watering restrictions, and technical outreach and assistance for the affected municipalities.*

*“The combination of three months of limited rainfall and well above normal temperatures through July and early August have led to very dry conditions in every region of Massachusetts,” said **Energy and Environmental Affairs Secretary Kathleen Theoharides**. “All levels of government are coordinating to address these critical drought conditions, and it is essential that residents and businesses across the Commonwealth take extra care to conserve water both indoors and outdoors and be mindful of the increased risk of wildlife when using any fire or smoking materials.”*

*“Because the Commonwealth continues to experience drought conditions across the state, the public is urged to continue conserving water in order to reduce the demand on water supplies,” said **Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) Director Samantha Phillips**. “Dry conditions increase the threat of brush and wildland fires, so we urge residents to exercise caution when using charcoal grills, matches, and other open flames during outdoor activities and to call 911 immediately if there is a fire to prevent the fire from spreading.”*

The declaration was informed by recommendations and discussions from a recent meeting of the [Drought Management Task Force](#) (DMTF), composed of state and federal officials and other entities, and will remain in effect until water levels return to normal in the affected regions.

Temperatures remain well above normal, as the Commonwealth recorded the second hottest July on record last month. Rainfall was scattered across the state with only a few areas receiving above normal precipitation; most areas were in a deficit by 1 to 3 inches. Meanwhile, temperatures throughout the first two weeks of August are 2 to 4 degrees above normal throughout Massachusetts, with warmer than normal temperatures predicted in the coming weeks and months. While most regions of the Commonwealth are experiencing a classic long-term drought, the Southeast, Cape Cod, and Islands regions are experiencing conditions akin to a ‘flash drought’ which is a rapid onset drought with decreased precipitation, above normal temperatures, and incoming radiation resulting in abnormally high evapotranspiration all combining to increase fire danger and decrease crop moisture levels.

Additionally, wildland fire risk continues across the state. Extended drought conditions have rendered grasses, shrubs and forest fuels very dry across most of the state, and extremely dry in areas of the Southeast, resulting in increased wildfire risk and added challenges for firefighting agencies. Long term precipitation deficits have also led to extremely dry soil conditions, which results in fires burning deep into the ground, and taking multiple days to extinguish. These conditions exhaust local resources and increase risk to firefighter safety. Fire officials remind the public to be very aware of this situation, and to be careful with all open burning and disposal of combustible materials.

The state continues to intensely monitor and assess the drought situation, and any associated environmental and agricultural impacts. Task Force officials also noted that the state’s streamflow saw overall improvement in July because of scattered rainfall. However, within the first two weeks of August, conditions seem to have worsened, with well below normal streamflow observed in most regions. The

state asks residents in every region across the Commonwealth to be very mindful of the amount of water they are using, to be proactive in reducing or eliminating outdoor water use, to reduce indoor water use, and to address plumbing leaks as soon as possible. Limiting nonessential outdoor watering is one of the most effective ways to minimize the impacts of drought on water supply and the environment, and ensure there is enough water for fire protection. All these steps will help reduce water use to ensure essential needs such as drinking water and fire protection are being met, and habitats have enough water to recover.

For Regions in Level 2 – Significant Drought

Residents and Businesses:

- Minimize overall water use;
- Limit outdoor watering to hand-held hoses or watering cans, to be used only after 5 p.m. or before 9 a.m. one day a week.

Immediate Steps for Communities:

- Adopt and implement the state's nonessential outdoor water use restrictions for drought; Level 2 restriction calls for limiting outdoor watering to hand-held hoses or watering cans, to be used only after 5 p.m. or before 9 a.m.
- Limit or prohibit installation of new sod, seeding, and/or landscaping; watering during or within 48 hours after measurable rainfall; washing of hard surfaces (sidewalks, patios, driveways, siding); personal vehicle or boat washing; operation of non-recirculating fountains; filling of swimming pools, hot tubs, and backyard informal rinks.
- Implement drought surcharge or seasonal water rates.
- Establish water-use reduction targets for all water users and identify top water users and conduct targeted outreach to help curb their use.

Short- and Medium-Term Steps for Communities:

- Establish a year-round water conservation program that includes public education and communication;
- Provide timely information to local residents and businesses;
- Check emergency inter-connections for water supply; and
- Develop a local drought management plan using guidance outlined in the state [Drought Management Plan](#).

The Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) continues to provide technical assistance to communities on managing systems, including assistance on use of emergency connections and water supplies, as well as assisting towns on how to request a declaration of drought emergency.

“Water suppliers should continue to work with their customers and educate them on strategies to manage demand during this time period,” **said MassDEP Commissioner Martin Suuberg.** “It is essential that regions across Massachusetts embrace conservation practices to avoid added stress on drinking water resources and other water-dependent habitats.”

The Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA) water supply system is not currently experiencing drought conditions, as defined within its individual plan.

The declaration of a Level 2 – Significant Drought requires the Drought Management Task Force to meet on a regular basis to more closely assess conditions across the state, coordinate dissemination of

information to the public, and help state, federal and local agencies prepare any responses that may be needed in the future. The Task Force will meet on a monthly basis or more frequently as conditions warrant; the next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, September 3, 2020 at 1:00 pm and will be held virtually [via Zoom](#).

Last year, EEA completed a two-year process and updated the [Massachusetts Drought Management Plan](#) to better assess drought conditions across the state and maximize the state's ability to prepare for and respond to a drought. The Plan also provides guidance to communities on drought preparedness and outlines response actions that can be taken at the local level.

For further information on water conservation and what residents and communities can do, visit the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs' [drought page](#).