



STATE OF WASHINGTON
DEPARTMENT OF ECOLOGY

PO Box 47600, Olympia, WA 98504-7600 • 360-407-6000

ORDER AND DETERMINATION BY THE DIRECTOR

A healthy Washington State economy, environment, and community, rely on plentiful water supplies. The Washington State Legislature recognized the significant hardship that drought and water shortages can create for our state and provided tools and processes to provide relief. [Chapter 43.83B RCW, Drought Conditions](#), allows a drought emergency to be declared if: (1) water supply is below seventy-five percent of normal and (2) the water shortage will likely create undue hardships for water users or the environment. This order summarizes water supply conditions and anticipated hardship to support the declaration of drought emergency.

Water Supply Conditions

The Washington State Water Supply Availability Committee (WSAC) reviewed water supply forecasts for the months of April through September and determined that projected runoff would represent an extreme departure from normal (e.g., below 75 percent of normal) in watersheds across the state (WAC 172-166-030(6)). Washington started the water year with a snowpack deficit following the drought declared in July 2023. The eighth hottest winter on record since 1895 has led to early snowmelt. Forecasts predict continued warm temperatures in spring and summer, with a low likelihood that conditions will improve during that period.

Based on this information, WSAC determined that the statutory hydrologic drought threshold was met.

Hardship Due to Drought Conditions

Information on drought-related hardship was provided to the Department of Ecology (Ecology) and the state Executive Water Emergency Committee (EWEC), as summarized below.

1. Drinking Water Supplies: In continuation with conditions observed in summer and fall 2023, small and more vulnerable public water systems may require water trucking and well deepening and rehabilitation to support domestic water use. This is due to reduced water supplies in wells, streams, and impoundments.
2. Agricultural Sector: Agricultural producers anticipate the need to fallow land and cease irrigation, leading to crop stress and reduced yields. This is due to inadequate water availability. Farmers with junior water rights are expected to be interrupted earlier this year due to low snowpack and reduced streamflows. Pro-ratable water users in the

Yakima Basin (i.e., water users with 1905 water rights), are forecasted to receive 61 percent of their water supply.

3. Fisheries and Instream Resources: River flows are projected to decline to levels in which fish will not be able to migrate later this summer, resulting in stranding and increased fish mortality of critical anadromous and resident fishes. Fish hatchery operations may be disrupted due to inadequate river flows. Many tribes and the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife are planning for low stream flows and are taking proactive actions to respond early to these projected impacts.

Expanding the drought declaration in April provides early information to water users about state water supplies and activates tools to provide drought relief.

Based upon the recommendations of EWEC, I find that drought conditions exist in the State of Washington, with a limited exclusion to include areas served by the Cities of Seattle, Tacoma, and Everett.

Therefore, in accordance with the provisions of RCW 43.83B.405, **IT IS ORDERED that the State of Washington, with limited exclusion of areas served by the Cities of Seattle, Tacoma, and Everett, is hereby under a drought emergency.**

This order is effective immediately and shall remain in effect through April 15, 2025, unless terminated prior to that date.

In accordance with the provisions of chapter 43.83B RCW, Ecology may, under the terms of this order, take the following emergency actions:

1. Issue emergency permits for water.
2. Approve temporary transfers of water rights.
3. Provide funding assistance to public entities to help alleviate drought hardship (to the extent that funds are available).
4. Take other actions depending on future developments in drought conditions.

Other state and local agencies with authority to issue permits or authorizations related to the drought emergency actions must provide a decision to an applicant within 15 calendar days of the date of application.

In accordance with the proclamation of the Washington State Governor, dated January 3, 1989, (Centennial Accord), nothing herein shall impair or infringe upon the treaty reserved rights or governmental authority of any federally recognized Indian tribe nor shall this order be deemed an assertion of state authority over Indian reservation lands. Ecology intends to work cooperatively, on a government-to-government basis, with all affected tribes.

Further details about this order or the actions available under it, may be obtained by contacting:

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PO Box 47600
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360-791-6665
Caroline.Mellor@ecy.wa.gov

Applications for emergency water permits or temporary transfers of water rights are available by contacting one of the Department of Ecology's regional offices:

Contact Information

Central Region (Benton, Chelan, Douglas, Kittitas, Klickitat, Okanogan, and Yakima counties) Help desk: 509-575-2597
Easter Region (Adams, Asotin, Columbia, Ferry, Franklin, Garfield, Grant, Lincoln, Pend Oreille, Spokane, Stevens, Walla Walla, and Whitman counties) Help desk: 509-329-3400
Northwest Region (Island, King, Kitsap, San Juan, Skagit, Snohomish, and Whatcom counties) Help desk: 206-594-0193
Southwest Region (Clallam, Clark, Cowlitz, Grays Harbor, Jefferson, Mason, Lewis, Pacific, Pierce, Skamania, Thurston, and Wahkiakum counties) Help desk: 360-407-0278

DATED this 16th of April, 2024



Laura Watson, Director