



STATE OF WASHINGTON
DEPARTMENT OF ECOLOGY

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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 this declaration of drought emergency.

Water Supply Conditions

The Washington State Water Supply Availability Committee (WSAC) met March 12 to review water supply forecasts for the critical April through September 2026 period. At that meeting, WSAC determined that projected water supply represents an extreme departure from normal (e.g., below 75 percent of normal) statewide ([WAC 173-166-030\(6\)](#)).

Compounding low snowpack and early melt-off in snowpack dominant basins, and precipitation deficits from three conservative droughts in 2023, 2024 and 2025 in rain dominant basins, have led to water shortages. Further, the Bureau of Reclamation released an initial April-September 2026 Total Water Supply Available (TWSA) estimate, projecting 44% water allocation for pro-ratable water right holders in the Yakima Basin. TWSA affects the amount of water pro-ratable water users are entitled (i.e., water right holders with 1905 priority dates).

Forecasts predict warmer than normal temperatures and lower than normal precipitation in spring and summer 2026, lowering the likelihood that conditions will improve during that period.

Based on this information, WSAC determined that the statutory hydrologic drought threshold of less than 75% of normal water supply was met statewide ([WAC 173-166-030\(2\)](#)).

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.

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 and lower than normal precipitation forecasted for spring and summer. Farmers with junior water rights are expected to be interrupted earlier this year due to compounding snowpack deficits and reduced streamflows. Pro-ratable water users in the Yakima Basin (i.e., water users with 1905 water rights), are projected to receive 44 percent of their water supply allotment.

3. Drinking Water Supplies: Small and more vulnerable public water systems may require water trucking and well deepening and rehabilitation to support domestic water use. These impacts are often observed later in the season.
4. 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. Low streamflow leads to higher stream temperatures that are dangerous for fish.

Extending the drought declaration in April provides early information to water users on water supplies and activates tools to provide drought relief.

Based upon the recommendations of Executive Water Emergency Committee, I find that drought conditions exist statewide.

Therefore, in accordance with the provisions of RCW 43.83B.405, **IT IS ORDERED that all watersheds in the State of Washington are hereby under a drought emergency.**

This order is effective immediately and shall remain in effect through April 7, 2027, 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.

RCW 43.83B.410 specifically requires Ecology and other state and local agencies to expedite drought-related permitting decisions.

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, can be obtained by at the [Ecology Drought Response website](#) or by contacting:

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

Central Region (Benton, Chelan, Douglas, Kittitas, Klickitat, Okanogan, and Yakima counties) Help desk: 509-575-2597
Eastern 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 8th of April, 2026



Casey D. Sixkiller, Director