



Staff Report

TO: Water Resources Commission

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DATE: June 11, 2026

SUBJECT: Agenda Item D

DROUGHT UPDATE

I. Introduction

Staff will provide an overview of current drought conditions, drought impacts, and Oregon's drought response, including drought declarations.

II. Integrated Water Resources Strategy Recommended Action

- Action 5.A Plan and Prepare for Drought and Wildfire Resiliency

III. Conditions Update

As of May 26, 82% of Oregon is in moderate to extreme drought, with severe and extreme drought conditions covering 36% of the state. This winter was tied for the second warmest on record, driving record-low snowpack. Precipitation over the water year to date has been just below normal, at about 84% of average, while the past 12 months rank as the 13th driest period on record, reflecting longer-term precipitation deficits that exceed current water year conditions, and streamflows are below normal across most basins. Updated conditions will be presented at the meeting.

IV. Drought Impacts

Current impacts of note from state agencies include:

- Increase in domestic wells going dry. Between October 2025 and April 2026, 12 domestic wells have reported as going dry, compared to 11 wells going dry from October 2024 – April 2025.
- Decreased water availability for some public drinking water systems, compounded by warmer temperatures, may require the implementation of local conservation measures and the potential need for temporary emergency water distribution.
- There may be a decrease in water availability for hydropower operations, leading to an increase in consumption of electricity generated from other sources.

V. State Response – Emergency Declarations

There are two primary tools in statute for responding to emergencies that arise from drought.

ORS 536 Drought Declarations - ORS 536 drought declarations provide targeted, time-limited tools within the water rights system. Counties or Tribes request a state drought declaration through the Drought Readiness Council, which evaluates conditions using technical input from the Water Supply Availability Committee. The Drought Readiness Council makes a recommendation to the Governor, who may issue a declaration if severe and persistent drought conditions are present. As of May 7th, the Governor has declared a drought in nine counties, with four additional declarations requested.

ORS 401 State of Emergency Declarations - ORS 401 declarations are not drought specific and are intended to address emergency-related impacts to health, safety, and economic impacts. Jurisdictions declare an emergency and submit a request to the Oregon Department of Emergency Management (OEM). When declared by the Governor, ORS 401 provides the Governor authority to direct state agencies to take specific actions, waive or modify administrative rules, and streamline processes that may otherwise slow emergency response. A declaration under ORS 401 does not provide financial assistance. There are currently no ORS 401 emergency declarations for drought.

VI. State Response - Discussion

OWRD plays a key role in facilitating ORS 536 Drought Declarations, chairing the Drought Readiness Council and Water Supply Availability Committee. OEM facilitates a bi-weekly drought impacts tracking meetings to identify concerns and risks early, and coordinate state agency responses. OWRD has developed a Drought Communications Plan which includes high-level key messaging for all state agencies, informational sheets, and emails to make distribution simple. Additionally, OWRD will share several press releases through the summer on water conservation and continue to offer media interviews on drought conditions. OWRD is also working in coordination to clarify and improve tribal drought communications and to publish the drought vulnerability assessment. Staff will share other key state response actions as it pertains to drought.

VII. Conclusion

Given the severity of drought conditions, state agencies are supporting drought response efforts; however, improving resiliency to drought across the state through long-term water resiliency efforts outlined in the Integrated Water Resources Strategy and other documents are essential to reduce the impacts of drought and increase preparedness for such events.

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