



## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Water Resources Commission

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**SUBJECT:** Agenda Item F, August 25, 2021  
Water Resources Commission Meeting

### Drought Update

#### I. Introduction

During this informational report, staff will be joined by Larry O'Neill, State Climatologist, Oregon State University, to provide an update on current drought conditions, state and federal drought actions, and coordination efforts.

#### II. Drought Conditions

According to the US Drought Monitor, 100% of Oregon is experiencing drought conditions, with roughly 75 percent of the state classified as D3 (extreme drought) or D4 (exceptional drought) on a scale of D0 to D4 as of August 3, 2021. Spring and early summer brought a near-historic low in terms of precipitation total and soil moisture conditions, leading to record low streamflows on many streams and reduced reservoir storage and groundwater recharge. Extreme temperatures during the late June heat wave and record high average temperatures have exacerbated drought conditions. Additional information on conditions will be provided during the presentation.

#### III. Drought Related Impacts

The Department has been encouraging use of the Drought Impacts Reporter <https://droughtreporter.unl.edu/map/> as a way for citizen scientists, irrigators, and agricultural producers to share drought-related impacts. In addition, Department staff continue to compile and internally share public reports, as well as on-the-ground impacts.

#### IV. Drought Response and Coordination Efforts

Oregon's Water Supply Availability Committee and Drought Readiness Council continue to meet regularly to track water conditions and process requests for Governor's drought declarations.

As of August 5, 2021, 22 counties have requested and received state drought emergency declarations. Drought declarations provide water users with additional tools such as access to apply for emergency drought permits and temporary drought transfers. As of early August, the Department had more than 50 drought permit applications and more than 15 drought temporary transfer applications. Visit [www.drought.oregon.gov](http://www.drought.oregon.gov) for the latest numbers and information.

Department staff have briefed local governments and other entities about the severity of drought conditions. The Department continues to provide a bi-weekly report on water conditions (go to [www.drought.oregon.gov](http://www.drought.oregon.gov) and click on “Water Conditions” and then “[Water Conditions Report](#)”). The Department is also collaborating with other state and federal agencies to develop informational reports on drought conditions and impacts (see <https://www.drought.gov/drought-status-updates/drought-status-update-pacific-northwest-1>).

In June, the Department held a meeting with public information officers and technical experts of state and federal agencies to coordinate activities, discuss current drought response actions, and discuss strategies for coordinated communications. The Department also worked with federal agencies to develop a drought federal funding resources handout (go to [www.drought.oregon.gov](http://www.drought.oregon.gov) and click on [Federal Drought Assistance](#)).

The Governor issued Executive Order 21-20 on July 4, 2021, requiring state agencies owning or managing facilities or land to curtail nonessential water use, institute a moratorium on projects requiring new irrigated landscaping, and encourage staff to conserve water within state owned buildings.

In July, the Department, in cooperation with state and federal partners, held a briefing for stakeholders, which included an update on drought conditions, resources available to water users, and an opportunity to ask questions.

Department staff continue to work locally to address water challenges and drought-related questions with the public. Local staff have assisted water users with emergency drought water use authorizations and transfers, and on informal rotation agreements to share the limited supply. Some basins have seen a significant increase in the number of complaints of illegal use and water theft, largely focused around the cannabis industry. Watermaster staff are working more closely and in cooperation with local law enforcement and state police to address the complaints and stop the illegal use of water.

## **V. Dry Domestic Wells or Reductions in Yield**

The Klamath Basin is experiencing exceptional drought conditions according to the U.S. Drought Monitor. As a result of these drought conditions, aquifers that support many domestic wells in the Klamath Project area have received less recharge than normal. This circumstance, combined with the significant use of groundwater for irrigation this year, has resulted in an unprecedented number of domestic wells going dry or producing less water than is needed.

To assist, Klamath County, with assistance from partners including the Department, has arranged for a free potable water filling station, free water storage tanks, and free water delivery to assist households whose well is dry or producing less water than needed for household purposes.

To assist with this effort and due to the increase in domestic “dry” well reports this year, the Department has launched an electronic Dry Well Reporting Form, where individuals from anywhere in the state who believe their well is dry or producing less water can report the issue to the Department at <https://go.usa.gov/xFbW3>. Reporting the dry well helps scientists and water managers better understand changes in groundwater supplies and how those changes may be impacting people that rely on those supplies. The Department may notify individuals of funding and other assistance, if the Department is made aware of any available for the area.

## **VI. Conclusion**

State and federal agencies are continuing to assess and respond to drought conditions. The severity of this drought highlights the need to invest in local and state planning, as well as implementation of solutions that will help Oregonians meet their water needs into the future with a changing climate.

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