

As water managers warn of ‘worst on record’ drought, what do people think should be done to save water?

By Amy Joi O'Donoghue@Amyjoi16 May 8, 2021, 10:01pm MDT



Low water levels are pictured in Echo Reservoir north of Coalville on Thursday, May 6, 2021. Utah and the rest of the West are headed into the summer facing extreme drought conditions and calls for water conservation are only going to heat up as temperatures climb. *Kristin Murphy, Deseret News*

Utah and the rest of the West are headed into the summer facing extreme drought conditions and calls for water conservation are only going to heat up as temperatures climb.

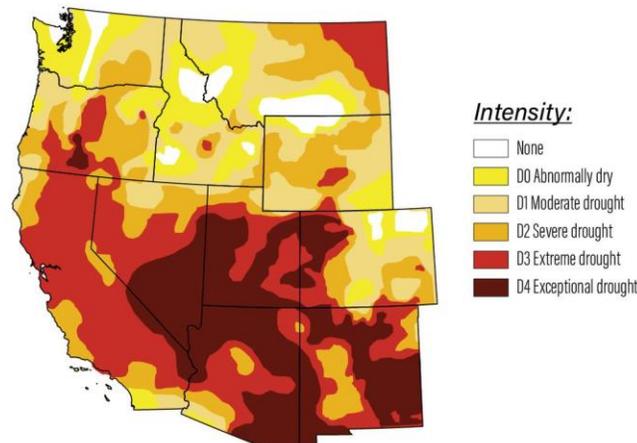
This week, Utah Gov. Spencer Cox issued an executive order prohibiting state agencies from watering during the hottest times of the day — between 10 a.m. and 6 p.m. — and encouraged other water providers to follow suit.

“Last year, Utah experienced one of the driest and hottest years on record, and we anticipate another tough drought year ahead,” Cox said. “State government is committed to doing its part to conserve water and we encourage all Utahns to use this most precious resource wisely and sparingly.”

<https://www.deseret.com/utah/2021/5/8/22425090/west-girds-for-exceptional-drought-as-summer-nears-water-environment-colorado-river-dry?fbclid=IwAR2UhoYXyFUB0PoVxrpUjCwF4xyeOmTIQu7ltFDIQojWd9dl4Hn60XAMJwQ>

Drought conditions in the West

(as of May 4, 2021)



SOURCE: U.S. Drought Monitor, <https://droughtmonitor.unl.edu>

Citing past abuses, some irrigation companies are taking punitive measures a step further, warning of penalties as high as \$5,000 and a loss of 10 water turns if shareholders or users flagrantly break the rules and are using water outside their allotted time slot.

Some users have already been reduced to half turns as providers try to stretch water resources to last late into the irrigation season.

Jordan Clayton, supervisor of the U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service's Utah Snow Survey, issued a dire report Thursday warning that a significant amount of Utah's snowpack will not make it to downstream reservoirs.

Reservoir storage is down 15% from where it was last year, and multiple southern Utah watersheds are sitting at just 20% of normal snowpack.

“Water managers should prepare for exceptionally poor to (potentially) worst-on-record water supply conditions for this summer, depending on which region

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of the state they manage,” Clayton said. “Furthermore, soil temperature conditions are quite high in many locations across the state — including several that are record highs — which underscores the potential for a severe fire season in addition to other natural resource concerns.”

Across the West, Utah and other Colorado River Basin states are now pinning their hopes on an active monsoon season this summer to tamp temperatures and provide much needed moisture. Last year’s monsoon season never effectively materialized.

To address concerns over Utah’s current drought, leaders have proposed several measures to reduce water use in our state. In your opinion, what is the best way to get Utahns to use less water?



The Utah Division of Water Resources has a website, slowtheflow.org, that advises people on when it is appropriate to irrigate and also provides information on how homeowners can reduce their water usage.

Impose restrictions, with penalties, for lawn or other cosmetic water usage



Provide incentives for water-wise landscaping



Require water companies to impose higher rates for usage above a minimum threshold



Utahns don’t need to use less water



Not sure



Are incentives key to conservation?

A new poll indicates there is appetite in Utah for water users to curtail their consumption, with just shy of half of the respondents — 49% — indicating they believe providing incentives for water wise landscaping is the most effective tool to slow the flow.

The Deseret News/Hinckley Institute survey tapped 1,000 registered voters between April 30-May 6 and has a margin of error of plus or minus 3 percentage points.

The next most popular choice picked by survey participants to conserve water — at 20% — is to impose restrictions with penalties for water used on lawns or any other cosmetic purpose.

Deseret News/
Hinckley Institute poll

SOURCE: Poll conducted by Scott Rasmussen April 30-May 6, 2021, of 1,000 registered Utah voters and has a margin of error of +/- 3.1 percentage points.



Sprinklers water a lawn in Salt Lake City on Friday, May 7, 2021. *Spenser Heaps, Deseret News*

Tage Flint, general manager of the Weber Basin Water Conservancy District, said it is good news people are thinking of ways to cut back on water consumption whether it be through incentives or their willingness to be subject to penalties.

“I think there has been an increased public consciousness over water use than say 20 years ago with the education of the adult population and the next generation who are becoming adults who have a different ethic about natural resources,” Flint said.

He said the district has seen a fairly dramatic uptick in complaint calls from neighbors upset about their neighbors’ water use — and water shaming that has unfolded in other states like California is likely to make greater inroads in states like Utah suffering the effects of the drought.

“It is being noticed and reported a lot more frequently,” he said.

The survey did reveal that 6% of respondents don’t believe that Utah residents need to cut their consumption, but that small minority gives water managers some hope.

Multiple water conservancy districts across the state provide useful information and tips on how homeowners can incorporate water wise landscaping at their residence.

In addition to classes and water audits conducted at homes free of charge, districts offer rebates for low flow toilets and for larger properties, rebates for commercial-grade “smart” irrigation controllers.

Weber Basin, Jordan Valley, and Washington County districts all have conservation “demonstration” gardens people can tour to get ideas on landscaping options for their own homes.

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