

MASSACHUSETTS EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY

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As a result of the October 5th meeting of the state's Drought Management Task Force, the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs released the following statement on Friday, October 7th, concerning the ongoing drought in the Commonwealth. Please contact your regional MEMA office if you have questions or need planning support or resources to deal with local drought conditions.

Subject: FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Drought Conditions Continue for Large Portions of Commonwealth, Western Region Increased to Drought Watch

Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs

Governor Charles D. Baker
Lt. Governor Karyn E. Polito
Secretary Matthew A. Beaton

Press Release

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Drought Conditions Continue for Large Portions of Commonwealth, Western Region Increased to Drought Watch Monitoring of Water Resources to Continue, Water Conservation by Public Necessary

BOSTON - October 7, 2016 - With large portions of Massachusetts continuing to experience rainfall amounts remaining below average for a seventh straight month, Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) Secretary Matthew Beaton today declared the following drought levels throughout the Commonwealth: a Drought Warning for the Connecticut River Valley, Central, Northeast, and Southeast Massachusetts, unchanged for the Central, Northeast and Southeast Regions, and up from a Drought Watch for the Connecticut River Valley in September; and a Drought Watch for the Cape and Islands and Western Massachusetts, up from a Drought Advisory for Western Massachusetts and unchanged for the Cape and Islands in September. The declaration was the result of a recommendation issued from a recent meeting of the Drought Management Task Force . . .

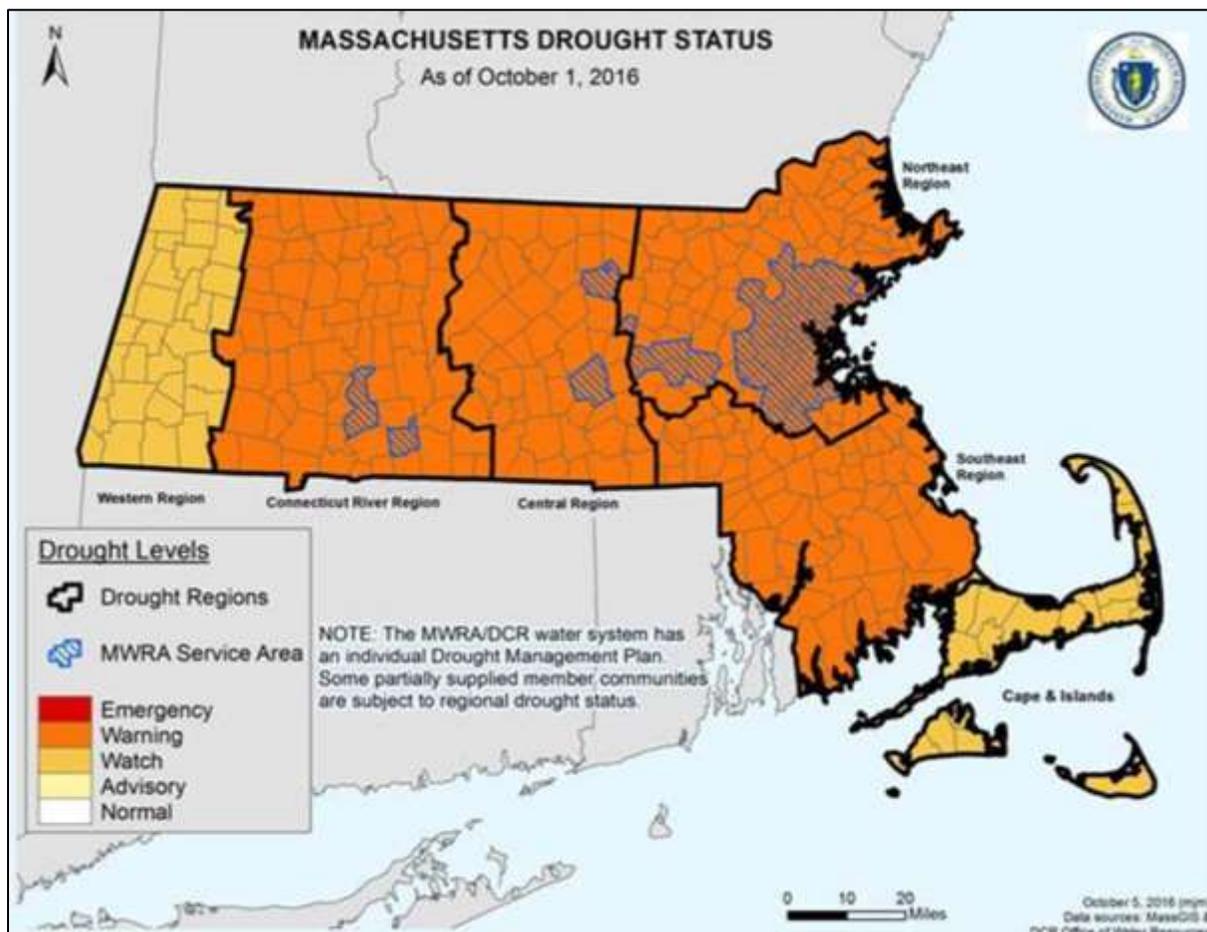
<http://www.mass.gov/eea/waste-mgmt-recycling/water-resources/preserving-water-resources/partners-and-agencies/water-resources-commission/drought-management-task-force.html>,

. . . comprised of state, federal and local officials, and will remain in effect until water levels return to normal in the affected regions.

"Most of Massachusetts received very little precipitation during the month of September, preventing needed relief from the ongoing drought conditions currently being experienced throughout much of the state," said Energy and Environmental Affairs Secretary Matthew Beaton. "Water reservoirs, groundwater, streamflow, and soil moisture levels continue to decline, severely impacting the Commonwealth's riverine habitats and fisheries, agricultural sector, and elevating the risk of fire. Now more important than ever, we all must administer best water conservation practices to avoid additional stress on our drinking water sources and other water dependent habitats."

"As widespread drought conditions continue into October, the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency is asking the public, including those with private wells, to conserve water by reducing indoor and outdoor water usage. Water conservation is necessary to help address the reduced reservoir and ground water levels in many areas of the state," said Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) Director Kurt Schwartz. "In addition, because the extremely dry conditions have increased the threat of brush and wildland fires, the public is urged to exercise extreme caution when using matches, charcoal grills, and other open flames during outdoor activities."

A Drought Warning, as outlined in the Massachusetts Drought Management Plan, <http://www.mass.gov/eea/docs/eea/wrc/droughtplan.pdf>, indicates consecutive months of groundwater, stream flow, and reservoir levels being below normal, and initiates a much more concerted set of government responses including instating water restrictions, and more intensified monitoring and coordination between the agencies. Areas within the Drought Warning are currently experiencing precipitation levels below normal for six out of seven consecutive months. The declaration of a Drought Watch represents extremely low groundwater and streamflow levels resulting from prolonged periods of precipitation deficit, including a lack of snowfall in the winter months. The declaration of a Drought Watch warrants detailed monitoring of drought conditions, close coordination among state and federal agencies, and technical outreach and assistance for the affected municipalities.



While certain sub-regions within Northeast and Southeast Massachusetts are experiencing much more severe impacts, and areas within the Cape and Islands region

are experiencing more optimal conditions, the state continues to intensely monitor and assess the drought situation, and any associated environmental and agricultural impacts. Furthermore, the state asks the public to be mindful of the amount of water they are using, and to eliminate or greatly reduce outdoor water use to ensure essential needs such as drinking water, fire protection, and crop hydration are being met.

For Regions in Drought Warning:

- Outdoor water use should be eliminated.

For Regions in Drought Watch:

- Outdoor water use should be limited to "handheld watering" with a hose or a watering can after 5pm or before 9am (to avoid evaporative losses); and
- Filling swimming pools, washing cars and washing buildings should be prohibited.

For Regions in Drought Advisory:

- Outdoor watering with irrigation systems and sprinklers should be limited to no more than one day per week; and
- Watering with a handheld hose should be limited to after 5pm or before 9 am (to avoid evaporative losses).

The Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection's (MassDEP) permits exempt certain water uses from mandatory restrictions, including: for health or safety reasons; the production of food and fiber; the maintenance of livestock; and to meet the core functions of a business. MassDEP continues to provide technical assistance to communities on managing systems, including assistance on use of emergency connections and water supplies, as well as assisting towns on how to request a declaration of drought emergency.

"MassDEP strongly encourages suppliers to keep outdoor restrictions in place into October," said Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection Commissioner Martin Suuberg. "The prolonged drought created a significant water deficit that will need time and a return to normal precipitation patterns to replenish."

To aid farmers and other small businesses, the Baker-Polito Administration launched the Massachusetts Drought Emergency Loan Fund,

<http://www.mass.gov/governor/press-office/press-releases/fy2017/administration-launches-drought-emergency-loan-fund.html>

and continues to work closely with the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Farm Service Agency. As a result of USDA primary agricultural disaster designations . .

http://www.fsa.usda.gov/news-room/emergency-designations/2016/ed_2016_0922_rel_0120

. . . due to losses caused by drought, all Massachusetts counties are now eligible for federal emergency loans through the Farm Service Agency to help recover from crop

losses. Additionally, all Massachusetts counties are eligible for federal emergency loans as a result of a USDA primary agricultural disaster designation . . .

<http://www.mass.gov/eea/pr-2016/usda-designates-primary-natural-disaster-areas.html>
. . . due to crop losses of tree fruits like peaches that were caused by frost and freeze occurring between February and May.

"The ongoing drought conditions continue to adversely affect farmers across Massachusetts," said Department of Agricultural Resources Commissioner John Lebeaux. "We are committed to working with these farmers to connect them with the resources they need during this challenging time. Despite the difficult growing conditions, Massachusetts farms, nurseries and greenhouses continue to produce plenty of high-quality agricultural products, and we strongly encourage all residents to buy local this fall to support our hard-working farmers."

Task Force officials noted that while reservoir levels, especially smaller systems, are low for this time of year, the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA) water supply system is not currently experiencing drought conditions, as defined within its individual plan.

"The Massachusetts Water Resource Authority's source reservoirs are still within normal levels; however, the minimal rainfall we have had has not really added up to much," said MWRA Executive Director Fred Laskey. "We continue to encourage residents and businesses within our service area to conserve water in their daily routine."

The declaration of a Drought Warning, Drought Watch, and Drought Advisory requires the Drought Management Task Force to meet on a regular basis to more closely assess conditions across the state, coordinate dissemination of information to the public, and help state, federal and local agencies prepare any responses that may be needed in the future. The Task Force will next meet in November. For further information on water conservation and what you can do, visit the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs' drought page:

<http://www.mass.gov/eea/drought/>,

the Department of Conservation and Recreation's drought management page:

<http://www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/dcr/water-res-protection/water-data-tracking/drought-status.html>

and the MassDEP Water Conservation page:

<http://www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/massdep/water/watersheds/water-conservation.html>

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