

DROUGHT: In 4 weeks, area expected to be in “extreme” drought

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Unless you are a farmer or rancher, your understanding of the drought is usually connected to the corresponding heat. For most of us, we turn on the water, and out it comes, with as much as we want. For boaters and lake fishers the drought is more obvious. Wickiup Reservoir, just south of Bend, is at its lowest level for this date in its 75-year history — just 14 percent of capacity.

Clear Lake, west of Sisters, is at 16 percent. Ochoco Reservoir is also at 14 percent. Prineville Reservoir by comparison looks healthy at 40 percent, but that is far less than its historical average for mid-July. By mid-August Madras and surrounds, the top crop-production area in Central Oregon, will be without water and losses to farmers and ranchers will be catastrophic, according to Deschutes Basin Watermaster Jeremy Griffin.

Ranchers are already selling off portions of their herds as they cannot afford rising hay prices caused by lack of water. Cattle prices are depressed as a result.

Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife instituted “Hoot Owl” regulations for parts of the Deschutes River and all of the John Day River in an effort to preserve fish taking a beating from the warm waters and low stream flows. That means no fishing from 2 p.m. to one hour before sunrise.

Whychus Creek is running

Governor Kate Brown signed an executive order declaring a state of drought emergency in Deschutes County due to lack of precipitation and unusually low snowpack and streamflow. City of Sisters Public Works Director Paul Bertagna stated that the City does not anticipate any shortages of water supply in this drought year. The City’s source of water supply from groundwater wells combined with an emphasis on water conservation have positioned the City well heading into the future. However, the City is encouraging water conservation through water-wise irrigation practices that includes irrigation restrictions between the hours of 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. and no use of hoses for irrigation unless under direct supervision.

We also want to ask during this time with the high fire activity for voluntary water conservation from our customers due to the large amount of water getting pulled from the system to support firefighting efforts.

The City itself has cut back the park and streetscape irrigation by 50% to help provide additional system capacity.



at around 26 cubic feet per second in keeping with its historical averages for mid-July. The Upper Deschutes water basin is at 81% of normal as a casual glance at our mountains show. Three Creeks Meadow has received 32 inches of precipitation year to date vs. its 40.1 average, although the lake is full, as is Suttle Lake and other popular nearby recreational pools that derive water from snow melt and/or ground water.

Groundwater tables are showing distress. One has to drill 301 feet on average to find water in Deschutes County today, approaching the 1994 maximum of 302.72 feet. We are in no danger of running out of water in Sisters, which is served by three deep wells and a 1.6-million-gallon reservoir. Roughly 2,900 of us use an average of 113 gallons per day. That doesn’t seem like much until you do the math. 327,700 gallons per day; 2,293,900 gallons per week; 9.8 to 10.2 million gallons per month.

Historical water abundance means taking water for granted which means less conservation efforts. Experts tell us the first place to start is with our lawns. Lawns don’t need to be watered every day, even during the summer. The fact is, if you water just once every three days, you promote deeper root growth, making your lawn healthier and more water-efficient.

Water evaporates quickly when the sun is out. So, if you water during the day, you’re not watering the lawn, you’re watering the sky. Instead, water in the early morning, evening or at night. It’ll keep the water where you want it: in your lawn.

Those whose full-time jobs are to track water are urging conservation at all levels. Hobby farmers and ranchers will be hurt the most — those with llamas, alpacas, goats, and pumpkins. Expect Halloween gourds to soar in price.

As of now, there is no relief in sight.



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