



Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Energy & Environmental Affairs

Department of Environmental Protection

One Winter Street Boston, MA 02108 • 617-292-5500

Charles D. Baker
Governor

Karyn E. Polito
Lieutenant Governor

Kathleen A. Theoharides
Secretary

Martin Suuberg
Commissioner

October 13, 2020

Subject: Massachusetts Drought Advisory Status

Dear Registered and Permitted Users Under the Water Management Act:

On October 9, 2020, Secretary of Energy and Environmental Affairs Kathleen Theoharides maintained the Level 2 - Significant Drought declaration for most of the drought regions in the Commonwealth based on advice from the Massachusetts Drought Management Task Force. The drought has worsened in some areas, so the Southeast Drought Region as well as the Charles River and Millers River watersheds were identified as being in the more severe Level 3 - Critical Drought. The Western, Connecticut River Valley, Northeast, Cape Cod, Islands, and most of the Central and Northeast Drought Regions remain in Level 2 – Significant Drought. The map below summarizes Massachusetts' current drought status.

The extended drought conditions this summer have left grasses, shrubs and forests very dry across most of the state, and extremely dry in the southeastern and north-central parts of the Commonwealth, resulting in increased wildfire risk and added challenges for firefighting agencies. Limiting nonessential outdoor use, as outlined in Water Management permits and in the guidance below, is one of the most effective ways to minimize the impacts of drought on water supply and the environment, and ensure there is enough water for fire protection. All these steps will help reduce water use to ensure essential needs such as drinking water and fire protection are being met, and habitats have enough water to recover.

Drought Declaration and Water Management Act Permits

A Drought declaration triggers the following activities by the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP or Department) and other applicable agencies:

- closer detailed monitoring of developing conditions;
- close coordination among state and federal agencies;
- and technical outreach and assistance for the affected municipalities.

The non-essential outdoor water use restrictions included in many of the public water supply and golf course Water Management Act (WMA) permits formally ended on September 30th. However, with shorter days and cooler temperatures, irrigation is even less appropriate this time of year under drought conditions. So, MassDEP strongly encourages towns, water suppliers, and consumers to cease irrigation for the remainder of the fall season unless specific circumstances require otherwise. This is especially important in those areas identified as Level 3 - Critical Drought to further reduce stress on drinking water resources and water-dependent habitats.

Although it is past September 30 and therefore, the WMA permits' limits on non-essential water use are no longer in effect, to conserve water, please continue to abide by the water use

This information is available in alternate format. Contact Michelle Waters-Ekanem, Director of Diversity/Civil Rights at 617-292-5751.

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restriction associated with the drought level in your area. The guidance below outlines measures for public water suppliers to follow during Level 2 and Level 3 Droughts. This guidance goes beyond the measures in WMA permits, but is recommended in order to address current conditions. Water suppliers and other WMA permittees are welcome to implement other, more stringent, water use restrictions if needed to address local circumstances.

Other WMA permit holders such as industrial, commercial, or agricultural users, should also review their permits for water use restriction requirements. MassDEP recommends that all water users, consider instituting non-essential outdoor water use restrictions following the guidance provided below.

Any public water system having difficulty meeting demands, drought-related or not, may want to request a Declaration of Water Supply Emergency (“Emergency Declaration”) from the Department. The provisions of the Emergency Declaration process are outlined in regulations at 310 CMR 36.40. Suppliers should contact their MassDEP Regional Drinking Water Program Chief (see contact information below), or Duane LeVangie of the WMA Program at (617) 292-5706, to discuss concerns or begin the Emergency Declaration process.

The Emergency Declaration will require the public water suppliers to submit a plan for Departmental review and approval that includes provisions to remedy the emergency. Such a plan could include measures to purchase water from another supplier, use emergency sources, implement aggressive conservation measures, and provide a mechanism to restrict outside water use for those public water systems that do not currently have the ability to implement such measures.

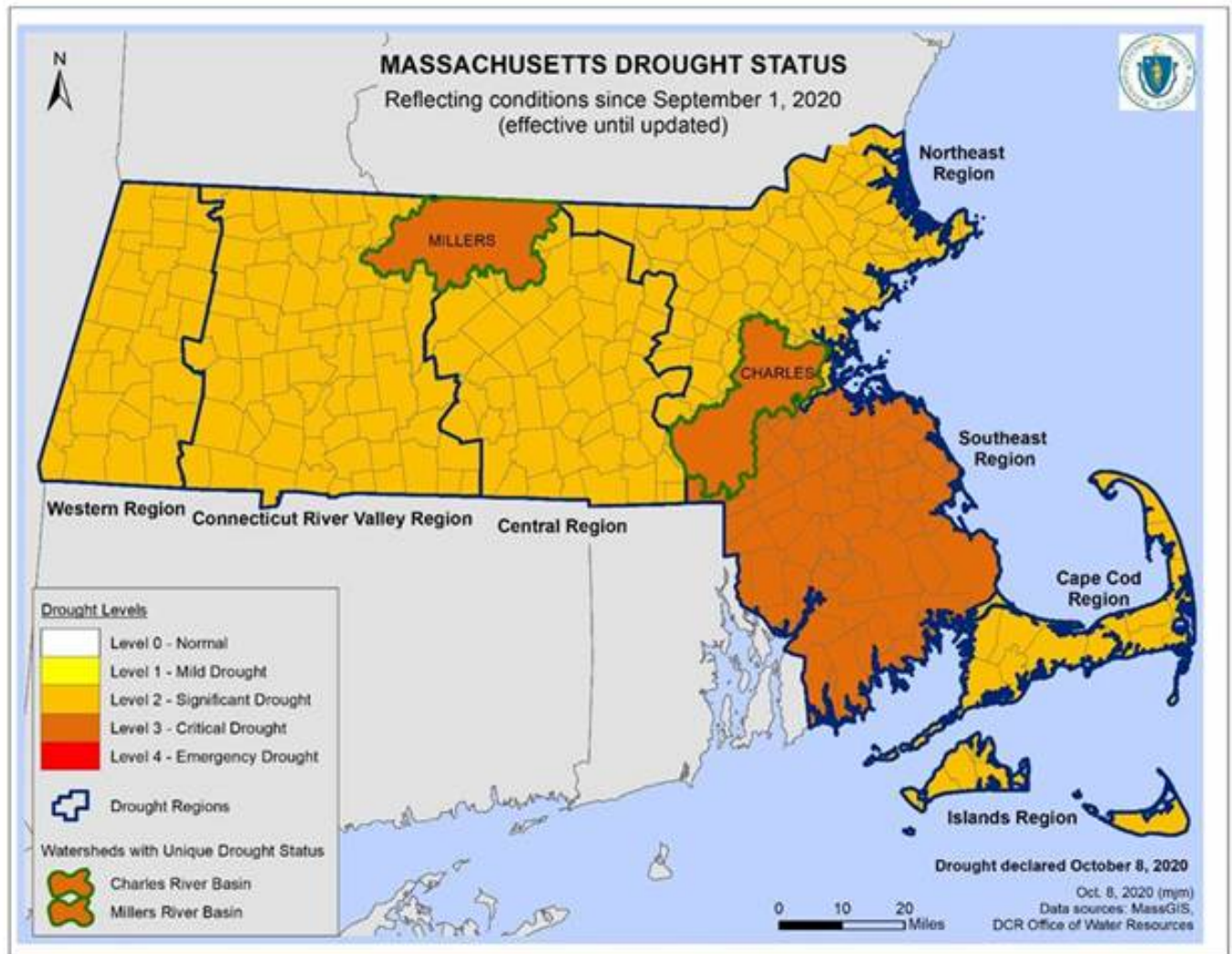
MassDEP appreciates your efforts to conserve water to minimize the impacts of this drought.

Very truly yours,



Kathleen Baskin
Assistant Commissioner, Bureau of Water Resources

Cc: Duane LeVangie, WMA Program Chief, DEP Boston (617-292-5706)
Amy LaChance, Drinking Water Chief, DEP NERO (978-694-3226)
Robert Bostwick, Drinking Water Chief, DEP CERO (508-849-4036)
Richard Rondeau, Drinking Water Chief, DEP SERO (508-946-2816)
Deirdre Doherty, Drinking Water Chief, DEP WERO (413-755-2148)
Lealdon Langley, Director, BRP-DWM, DEP Boston
Stephen Estes-Smargiassi, Massachusetts Water Resources Authority
Jennifer Pedersen, Massachusetts Water Works Association
Julia Blatt, Massachusetts Rivers Alliance



The latest drought status update is published on the Web at <http://www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/dcr/water-res-protection/water-data-tracking/drought-status.html>. To confirm which drought region your town or city is in, go to the above website and in the “Drought Regions” section click on the link to “Maps of MA Drought Regions with Lists of Cities and Towns”. Your drought region may have changed when the “Massachusetts Drought Management Plan” was updated in September 2019.

Guidance for instituting non-essential outdoor water use restrictions at Level 2 – Significant Drought and Level 3 – Critical Drought

Flushing Programs

Suppliers may consider delaying routine pipe flushing until later in the fall, if such a delay will not adversely affect water quality. Suppliers with mandatory flushing schedules should contact your DEP Regional Drinking Water Program Chief to discuss concerns or to delay routinely scheduled pipe flushing.

PLEASE NOTE that any flushing needed to ensure that buildings are safe and ready for use this fall, particularly school buildings, should NOT be delayed. Many buildings have sat idle during the Covid-19 crisis, and pipe-flushing may be needed prior to reopening. Refer to “MassDEP building flushing information” available at <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/massdep-covid-19-resources-for-water-suppliers-and-wastewater-operators#water-supplier-resources->.

Recommended October Outdoor Water Use Restrictions for Specific Drought Levels

Limiting outdoor water use helps ensure that enough water is available for essential needs, including drinking water, fire protection, crop irrigation and harvesting and our natural resources. Towns may have particular circumstances that make limiting water use more urgent to ensure water in an emergency.

Nothing in a Water Management Permit or Registration prevents a water supplier from implementing water use restrictions that are more stringent than those set forth in their permit, registration or in this guidance.

Regions in Level 3 - Critical Drought

- Outdoor water use should be banned.

Regions in Level 2 – Significant Drought Watch

- Outdoor watering should be limited to “handheld” with a hose or a watering can after 5 p.m. or before 9 a.m. (to avoid evaporative losses).
- Outdoor watering with irrigation systems and sprinklers should be banned.
- Watering of municipal parks and recreation fields with irrigation systems and sprinklers may continue, at the water supplier’s discretion, before 9 a.m. and after 5 p.m.
- Filling swimming pools, washing cars and washing buildings should be banned.

Households and businesses that draw water from private wells should conserve water by reducing indoor and outdoor water usage, and by abiding by the water use restrictions in place in their community.

Certain water uses should not be subject to mandatory restrictions. The following water uses should be exempted from any water restrictions and water bans that suppliers continue to impose this fall:

- For health or safety reasons;
- For the production of food and fiber;
- For the maintenance of livestock;
- To meet the core functions of a business (for example, irrigation by plant nurseries as necessary to maintain stock).

Recommended Fire Prevention Measures for Residents

- Exercise caution when using charcoal grills, matches, and other open flames during outdoor activities.
- Before setting up a campfire or any other outdoor burning, be sure it is permitted and at least 25 feet away from any structure and anything that can burn.
- Clear away dry leaves and sticks, overhanging low branches and shrubs.
- Avoid burning on windy, dry days.
- Never use gasoline or other flammable or combustible liquids.
- Always have a hose, bucket of water, or shovel and dirt or sand nearby to put out the fire, and make sure to put it completely out before leaving the site.
- If there is a fire, call 911 immediately.

Emergency Response Plans

With drought conditions persisting throughout the Commonwealth, now is a good time to review your emergency response plan and assess your preparedness to deal with drought conditions (and other extreme weather conditions). For more information on emergency response planning, visit <https://www.mass.gov/lists/emergency-response-for-public-water-systems>.

For further information on water conservation and what residents and communities can do, visit the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs’ [drought page](#).