

Drought Level Increases for Regions of Commonwealth, Other Areas Unchanged

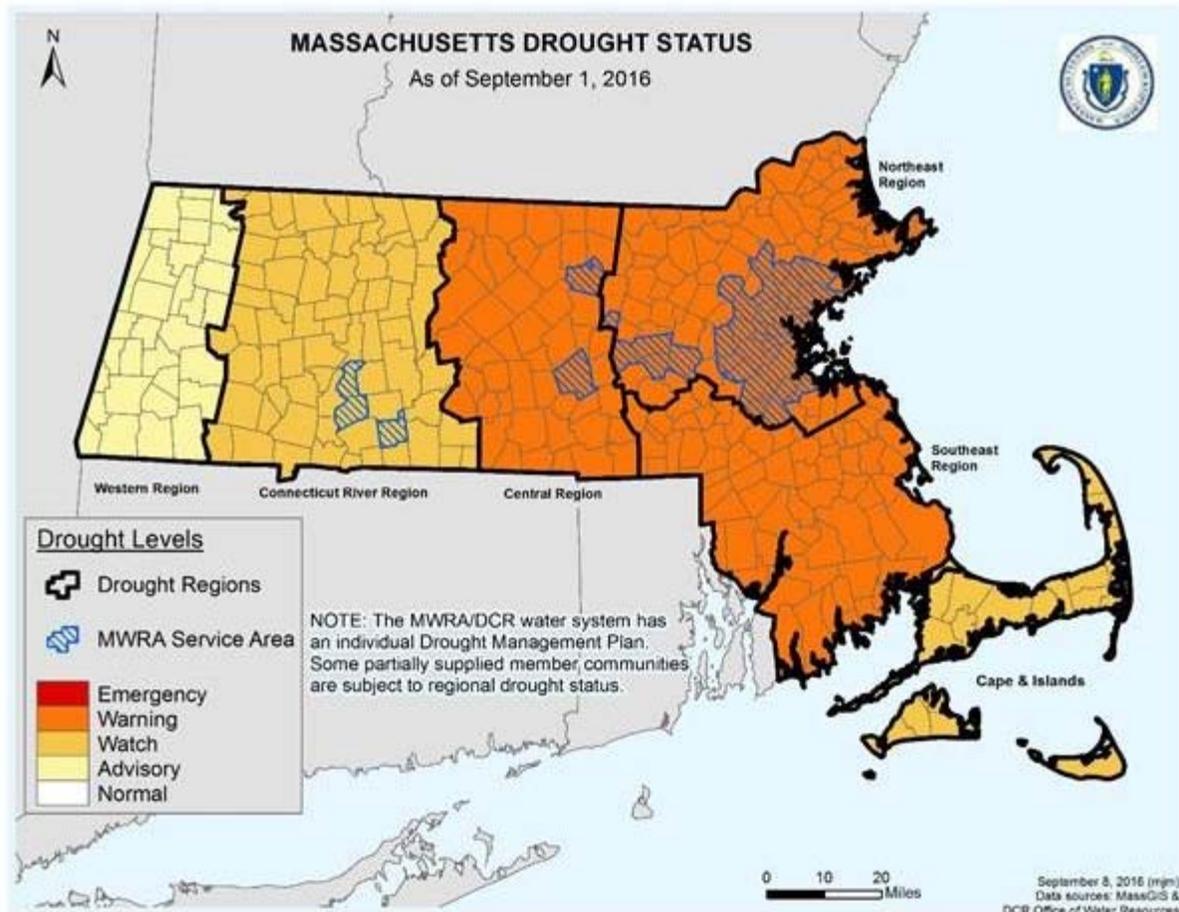
Monitoring of Water Resources to Continue, Water Conservation by Public Necessary

BOSTON – September 9, 2016 – With rainfall amounts remaining below average and warm weather continuing for a sixth straight month, Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) Secretary Matthew Beaton today declared the following drought levels throughout the Commonwealth: a Drought Warning for Central, Northeast, and Southeast Massachusetts, unchanged for the Central and Northeast Regions, and up from a Drought Watch for the Southeast Region in August; a Drought Watch for the Connecticut River Valley and the Cape and Islands, unchanged for the Connecticut River Valley and up from a Drought Advisory for the Cape and Islands in August; and a Drought Advisory for Western Massachusetts, unchanged from August. The declaration was the result of a recommendation issued from a recent meeting of the [Drought Management Task Force](#), comprised of state, federal and local officials, and will remain in effect until water levels return to normal in the affected regions.

“While regions within Massachusetts have experienced intermittent rainfall, it will take several precipitation events before the Commonwealth will fully rebound from the effects caused by this year’s drought,” said Energy and Environmental Affairs Secretary Matthew Beaton. “With today’s drought declaration, the elimination of outdoor watering by residents and businesses around the state is needed to avoid stressing drinking water reservoirs, which will ultimately exacerbate the situation. Additionally, as drought conditions have been particularly difficult on the state’s agricultural sector, we ask the public to buy produce from local farms within the state to support this vital industry.”

“With widespread drought conditions continuing into September, the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency is asking the public, including households and businesses that draw water from private wells, to conserve water by reducing indoor and outdoor water usage. Immediate action by the public is necessary to help address the falling 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](#)  1MB, 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 5 to 8 inches below normal over past four 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. Additionally, a Drought Advisory indicates a level of dry conditions that warrants closer tracking by government agencies.



The state continues to intensely monitor and assess the drought situation, and environmental and agricultural impacts, and 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).

Certain water uses are not subject to mandatory restrictions, those include: for health or safety reasons; the production of food and fiber; the maintenance of livestock; and to meet the core functions of a business. The Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) is providing 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 continues to work with water suppliers and local communities to implement water use restrictions that will

protect precious water resources,” said Commissioner Martin Suuberg of the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection. “Until the situation improves, we encourage suppliers to ban all outdoor watering in the hardest-hit areas, and strongly recommend that individuals on private wells implement similar controls.”

Crop moisture measurements of soil from across the Commonwealth shows Severely Dry conditions across Cape Cod, Southeast and far Northeast Massachusetts, and other parts of the state are in either Excessively Dry or Abnormally Dry conditions. To aid farmers and other small businesses, the Baker-Polito Administration [launched](#) the Massachusetts Drought Emergency Loan Fund, and continues to work closely with the United States Department of Agriculture, Farm Service Agency. Additionally, as a result of a federal primary agricultural disaster designation for counties in Rhode Island and New Hampshire, producers in six contiguous Massachusetts counties - Bristol, Essex, Franklin, Middlesex, Norfolk and Worcester - are automatically eligible for federal emergency loans through the Farm Service Agency to help recover from crop losses.

“The drought continues to affect the Commonwealth’s farms in a variety of ways,” said Department of Agricultural Resources Commissioner John Lebeaux. “As farmers and their families work tirelessly to ensure that dinner tables and farm stands across Massachusetts are stocked with wholesome products, I strongly encourage residents in all corners of the state to support the agricultural community by shopping local for food products, and help provide relief for farmers who have faced negative impacts associated with ongoing drought conditions.” ?

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.

“While the MWRA’s source reservoirs remain at normal levels, we strongly encourage residents and businesses within our service area to adopt measures into their daily routine to reduce water use – both indoors and outdoors,” said MWRA Executive Director Fred Laskey.

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 October. For further information on water conservation and what you can do, visit the Department of Conservation and Recreation’s drought management [page](#) and the MassDEP Water Conservation [page](#).

###

Follow EEA Secretary Beaton on Twitter:..... www.twitter.com/masseea

View downloadable photographs on Flickr:..... www.flickr.com/photos/masseea/sets/

Visit the Energy Smarts blog:..... www.mass.gov/blog/energy

Visit The Great Outdoors blog:..... www.mass.gov/blog/environment

Visit our website:..... www.mass.gov/eea

100 Cambridge Street, Suite 900, Boston, MA 02114-2119 — (617) 626-1000 office / (617) 626 1181 (fax)