



Department of
Environmental
Conservation

Drought Management and Contingency Planning

DRBC Water Management Advisory Council June Meeting

June 3, 2026

Presented to an advisory committee of the DRBC on June 3, 2026. Contents should not be published or re-posted in whole or in part without the permission of the presenter and DRBC.

NYS Drought Background

Governing Documents

- **Executive Order #116** signed in 2002 by Governor Pataki and continued in 2021 by Governor Hochul established the State Drought Management Task Force (DMTF).
- **Drought Management Coordination Annex** (Revised March 2026)
 - Part of Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services (DHSES) Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan
 - Details agency roles and responsibilities
 - Task Force Members:
 - State Emergency Management Office (Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services)
 - Department of Environmental Conservation
 - Department of Health
 - Department of Agriculture and Markets
 - Thruway Authority (now including Canal Corp and NY Power Authority)
- **DEC Internal Drought Coordination Process**

DEC Drought “Forecasting” Plan

- Establishes process for calculating drought index scores for each region (drought stage).
- Indices consist of:
 - Precipitation
 - Lake / Reservoir Storage
 - Streamflow
 - Groundwater levels
- Combined score equates to drought stages.
- Scores are not absolute! Discussion among Task Force members (e.g., short term forecasts and outlooks), local reports, and trends may affect declarations.

Table 2. State Drought Index

Drought Stage	Drought Index Range*
Normal	100 - 150
Watch	75 - 100
Warning	50 - 75
Emergency	0 - 50

Note – Despite the plan name, DEC does not include forecasts in drought index calculations.

Drought Stages

Watch

First stage of a developing drought event, declared by DEC. Intended to give advanced notice of a developing drought. At this stage, the general public is urged to conserve water. All measures voluntary.

Warning

Second stage of a drought event declared by DEC. Intended to be notice of impending and imminent severe drought conditions. Includes increasing public awareness and voluntary water conservation.

Emergency

Third stage of a drought declared by the New York State Disaster Preparedness Commission (DPC) upon recommendation of the DMTF. It is a notice of existing severe and persistent drought conditions. Local water resources agencies to mandate conservation and implement other emergency response measures. DEC advises, supports, and issues emergency permits as needed.

Disaster

Fourth and most severe stage of persistent drought conditions is declared by the Governor when a significant proportion of communities in the impacted area are unable to address local needs adequately. DEC takes actions as directed.

Does your state require drought planning during the permitting process?

- **[NYSDEC]** ECL Article 15 Title 15 (Water Supply Statute)
 - For a public water supply system, the water conservation program may include but need not be limited to:
 - i. the identification of and cost effectiveness of distribution system rehabilitation to correct sources of lost water;
 - ii. measures which encourage proper maintenance and water conservation;
 - iii. a public information program to promote water conservation, including industrial and commercial recycling and reuse;
 - iv. household conservation measures;
 - v. and contingency measures for limiting water use during seasonal or drought shortages.
- **[NYSDEC]** 6 NYCRR Part 601 (Water Withdrawal Permitting Regulations)
 - Water Conservation Program Form
 - Annual Water Withdrawal Reporting Form
- **[DOH]** Public Health Law (PHL) §1125
 - Requires water supply emergency plan for systems serving > 3,300 people
 - Plans to include both vulnerability assessment and emergency response plan
 - Drought – Immediate actions to be taken + tools/equipment available

Do the requirements include development of a plan?

a. How frequently are plans required to be updated?

- Updated water conservation programs to be provided during all Water Withdrawal permitting actions (renewals, transfers, mods, etc.).
- Updates on water conservation practices and drought planning provided on annual reporting forms.
- NYSDOH requires that emergency plans are updated every **5 years** for PWS serving > 3,300 customers.

b. Do the regulations specify what should be contained within the plan?

- Yes

c. What does compliance look like for plan development (are people doing what they are supposed to)?

- Enforcement action for planning related violations is rare.
- Customer water use restrictions can only be enforced at local level.
- Water use restrictions for water works corps require coordination with local gov.

What are the requirements for effectuating conservation measures (e.g. declared drought status)?

- Basic water conservation measures to be taken at all times or in accordance with permit conditions (e.g., leak detection and repair, source and customer metering, conduct annual water system audits, etc.).
- During Drought:
 - **Watch** – Voluntary conservation measures.
 - **Warning** – Voluntary conservation measures.
 - DOH request that PWS in Drought Warning areas adopt further measures to conserve water (e.g., outdoor water use restrictions, public messaging, etc.).
 - **Emergency** – Mandatory conservation measures.
 - DEC has authority to issue emergency permits.
 - DOH send letters to PWS requesting them to adopt further measures to conserve water (e.g., outdoor water use restrictions, public messaging, etc.).
 - Local agencies restrict water use in stages, banning non-essential use first and then reducing water for essential use
- **Disaster**
 - Actions taken as directed by Governor.

Do the regulations target some overarching volume reduction in water withdrawals or consumptive use?

- No

Do the regulations apply to all sectors, or just some (e.g. public water supply)?

- Statute and regulations related to drought preparedness are *primarily* focused on public water supply.
- Non-public supplies are also required to maintain a water conservation program.
 - Non-public Water Withdrawal permit applicants are required to generally describe actions that can be taken to reduce water usage under drought conditions as well as future goals for water use reduction.
- Certain permits contain special conditions (e.g., passby flow, safe yield, etc.) that may naturally restrict the amount of water that can be withdrawn as water availability lessens.

Within sectors, are there specific end-uses of water targeted?

- No, however ECL Article 15 requires that “The acquisition, storage, diversion and use of water for domestic and municipal purposes shall have priority over all other purposes”.

Water Conservation Activities

- Water Withdrawal permitting.
 - Program by its nature supports and requires water conservation.
 - Mitigating drought impacts through source reliability application and permitting requirements e.g., pumping tests, safe yield study, passby flow conditions, etc.
 - Limiting withdrawals to reasonable quantities.
 - Analyze withdrawals under all conditions.
 - Water conservation plans required as part of water withdrawal permit applications.
- Water conservation manuals available for public and non-public water supplies.
- Water conservation tips + tips for private well owners.
- Water efficient fixtures – fixture flow rates written into Environmental Conservation Law + New York State Energy Research and Development Authority Final Rule.

Questions?

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