



SPENCER J. COX  
GOVERNOR

STATE OF UTAH  
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR  
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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### Gov. Cox Issues Drought Executive Order

*Water conservation critical as Utah's water supply dwindles*

**Salt Lake City** (March 17, 2021) – With 100% in the moderate drought category and 90% of the state experiencing extreme drought, today Gov. Spencer J. Cox issued an Executive Order declaring a state of emergency due to drought conditions. This declaration allows drought-affected communities, agricultural producers and others to officially begin the process that may provide access to state or federal emergency resources.

At its March 15 meeting, the [Drought Review and Reporting Committee](#) recommended the governor issue a drought declaration, which activates the [Drought Response Committee](#). Brian Steed, executive director of the Utah Department of Natural Resources, chairs both committees.

"We've been monitoring drought conditions carefully and had hoped to see significant improvement from winter storms," said Gov. Cox. "Unfortunately, we have not received enough snow to offset the dry conditions. I ask Utahns to evaluate their water use and find ways to save not only because of current drought conditions but also because we live in one of the driest states in the nation."

Following a record dry summer and fall, this winter's snowpack is about 70% of average for the year. For snowpack to reach average, Utah's mountains would need to receive the remaining 30% before it starts to melt significantly, typically the first week in April. There is around a 10% chance of this occurring.

Current soil moisture is also at the lowest levels since monitoring began in 2006.

“Extremely dry soils mean that when we do receive precipitation, the ground will soak it up first and reduce the runoff that typically fills reservoirs, lakes and streams,” said Steed. “We urge people to consider ways they can save water and help be part of the solution. The state also offers water-saving and money-saving [rebates](#) to help with both indoor and outdoor conservation.”

The last time conditions warranted a drought declaration was when former Gov. Gary Herbert issued an executive order on Oct. 15, 2018. At that time, 99% of the state was in a moderate drought, with over 76% of Utah experiencing at least severe drought conditions.

[Learn more](#) about current drought conditions and impacts in Utah.

## **Additional Background**

### **Water-saving Recommendations**

Gov. Cox asks Utahns to use water wisely year-round. Find water-saving tips at [SlowTheFlow.org](#).

- Fix leaks
- Run full loads (dishwashers and washing machines)
- Turn off the water while brushing teeth, shaving, soaping up, doing dishes or rinsing vegetables
- Reduce showers by at least one minute
- Wait to water
- Plan now for the irrigation season and consider implementing water-wise landscaping or purchasing a [smart irrigation controller](#)

### **Committees recommend drought action**

The Division of Water Resources is tasked with monitoring the state’s water supply availability. This is done through regular drought webinars and monitoring conditions throughout the state. As conditions failed to improve, the division recommended the Drought Review and Reporting Committee consider additional actions, including recommending an official drought declaration, which activates the Drought Response Committee. The [Utah Drought Response Plan](#) outlines the process.

###



Spencer J. Cox

Governor

## EXECUTIVE ORDER

2021-7

*Declaring a State of Emergency Due to Drought Conditions*

**WHEREAS**, the state of Utah experienced a record dry and near record hot calendar year in 2020;

**WHEREAS**, the statewide current snowpack is approximately 70% of normal April peak;

**WHEREAS**, current soil moisture is exceptionally low and at levels not previously seen since soil moisture monitoring began in 2006;

**WHEREAS**, low soil moisture will adversely affect the spring runoff;

**WHEREAS**, the state's reservoir storage has decreased 14% over the past year;

**WHEREAS**, all forecasts for spring runoff for the state are below 72% of the state seasonal average;

**WHEREAS**, the United States Department of Agriculture currently has listed 28 primary and one contiguous county in Utah under the Secretarial Disaster Designation for drought;

**WHEREAS**, these extreme drought conditions have adversely and significantly impacted agribusiness and livestock production, as well as wildlife and natural habitats;

**WHEREAS**, increased recreation in dry vegetative conditions has contributed to an increased and prolonged threat of wildfire across the state;

**WHEREAS**, drought conditions that require mitigation are expected to persist;

**WHEREAS**, these conditions create a state of emergency within the intent of the Disaster Response and Recovery Act found in Title 53, Chapter 2a of the Utah Code;

**WHEREAS**, Utah Code § 53-2a-204(1)(a) authorizes the governor to utilize all available resources of state government as reasonably necessary to cope with a state of emergency; and

**WHEREAS**, Utah Code § 53-2a-204(1)(b) authorizes the governor to employ measures and give direction to state and local officers and agencies that are reasonable and necessary for

the purpose of securing compliance with orders made pursuant to the Disaster Response and Recovery Act;

**NOW, THEREFORE**, I, Spencer J. Cox, Governor of the State of Utah, declare a state of emergency due to the aforesaid circumstances requiring aid, assistance, and relief available from State resources and hereby order:

1. The state Emergency Operations Plan is activated.
2. The state Drought Response Plan is activated.
3. The state Drought Response Committee is activated and shall:
  - a. review hardships and unmet needs caused by the drought;
  - b. identify and recommend action to meet those needs;
  - c. ensure inter-agency coordination in addressing those needs; and
  - d. recommend when deactivation of the state Drought Response should occur.

I further make the following recommendations:

1. Water suppliers and irrigation companies should:
  - a. where possible, delay the start of the irrigation season or end irrigation early;
  - b. encourage efficient landscape watering; and
  - c. as needed, contact the Division of Water Resources for assistance with developing a drought response plan.
2. Cities and counties should consider developing and implementing water restriction plans for the upcoming irrigation season.
3. Residents should:
  - a. reduce indoor water waste;
  - b. fix irrigation inefficiencies;
  - c. convert unnecessary turf areas to waterwise landscapes;
  - d. consider purchasing a smart-timer controller or low flow toilet (rebates are offered at [utahwatersavers.com](http://utahwatersavers.com)); and
  - e. reduce indoor water use by taking shorter showers, turning off water when not in use, and replacing appliances with water-efficient models where practical.

This Order is effective immediately and shall remain in effect for 30 days unless the Legislature extends the state of emergency.

**IN WITNESS, WHEREOF**, I have hereunto set my hand and caused to be affixed the Great Seal of the State of Utah. Done in Salt Lake City, Utah, on this, the 17th day of March, 2021.



Spencer J. Cox  
Governor

ATTEST:

Deidre M. Henderson  
Lieutenant Governor