MEMO

Date: April 22, 2026
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2026 Drought Assessment – Stage 1: Advisory.

Summary

This is the annual drought outlook assessment for the city. In this memo, spring environmental conditions and future outlooks for Tumwater are assessed to determine what actions should be taken prior to summer.

The Washington Department of Ecology (DOE) has announced a drought emergency declaration through April 7, 2027 for all of Washington state. The declaration was due to low snowpack and multiyear compounding deficits in precipitation, from the 2023, 2024, and 2025 droughts.

The winter snowpack was 48 to 57% below the normal peak median across Tumwater's two drainage basins. This is due to the warm temperatures experienced during the winter which as not contributing to snowpack. Regular precipitation is down over six inches from normal since the start of the calendar year. Rainfall was above average between October 1 and April 1. Precipitation outlook for the next three months is below normal with temperatures above normal.

Most monitoring and production well water levels had decreased from the previous year and the three-year average, except for the Palermo wellfield. Wells had deeper water levels as much as seven feet. All other wells showed little change from the year before. Water level stability is likely due to the above average precipitation.

Conditions for the 2026 summer demands are to be the same as 2025 based on review from spring demands.

Continued monitoring of water levels, production, and consumption will be necessary. Other stressors, such as a heat dome effect or mechanical failure in the system, will also need to be monitored to determine if any additional conservation measures are needed. Water Resources & Sustainability (WRS)

will implement voluntary reduction measures (stage 1 of the Water Shortage Response Plan) to conservatively meet summer demands and meet our water conservation goals.

Public outreach will be crucial so that peak demands on the water system can be controlled. Implementation of social media and e-newsletters should begin by mid-May and continue through the summer season. The focus may be on irrigation systems and how to properly set watering times. Additionally, more emphasis on rain sensors, so there is no watering while it is raining, could help reduce peak water use in summer.

Review and Analysis

Data from the start of the water year, October 1, 2025 through April 1, 2026 were reviewed for the following:

- Local rainfall – Olympia Airport
- Regional Rainfall – PRISM Climate Group
- Regional Snowpack – National Weather and Climate Center
- Groundwater Elevations – City of Tumwater monitoring network and production wells, Thurston County monitoring network, and USGS monitoring network
- Streamflow – USGS WaterWatch
- Water Consumption and Production – City of Tumwater
- Drought Monitoring and Forecast – DOE, NWS Climate Prediction Center, US Drought Monitor.

Conclusions

Full data assessment is here, 2026 Drought Assessment Full.

From review of the data above, the following conclusions were made:

- Winter and spring rainfall was above normal. Snowpack was substantially below the median by 53-61%. Even though Tumwater's drinking water sources are not directly dependent on snowfall, the lack of snowfall in the region could have some effect on the regional recharge of groundwater reserves.
- Groundwater levels observed in monitoring and production wells stayed about the same as last year, except for the Readiness well (shallower by 5.7 feet) and Well 17 (deeper by 7.2 feet. This indicates some groundwater storage recovery due to the above average rainfall since October.
- Spring consumption in 2026 was about the same as 2025. It is expected that summer demand may be about the same.

	March water consumption in gallons	% difference to previous year	June 1 - September 30 produced in gallons	% difference to previous year
2026	73,390,437	-0.3%	-	-

2025	73,634,000	7.3%	579,721,544	3%
2024	70,988,000	-6.9%	562,535,000	-10.3%
2023	76,244,000	9.6%	626,997,000	8.3%

- The drought outlook for Tumwater in the next six months is forecasting abnormally dry with below normal precipitation and above normal temperatures.
- Drought outlooks across various agencies are inconsistent. The US Drought Monitor is neutral for drought in the Tumwater area through June 30. However, the NWS Climate Prediction Center outlook is showing above average temperatures and below average precipitation for April through June. Modeling through September 2026 completed by the European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecast (ECMWF) predicts warmer and wetter weather. Temperature increase is consistent with all outlooks but differs on precipitation.
- The DOE has announced a drought emergency declaration as of April 8, 2026 and will extend until April 7, 2027. This declaration is statewide due to low snowpack and multiyear compounding deficits in precipitation, from the 2023, 2024, and 2025 droughts.

Water Shortage Response Plan Action Recommendations

The following are steps that will be taken:

- As we do every spring, the city will prepare to implement Stage 1 of the Water Shortage Response Plan. Stage 1 encourages voluntary conservation through public outreach and is the lowest level of drought concern. Focus should be on irrigation with the promotion of proper landscape watering practices and use of smart irrigation controllers with sensors either for soil moisture or rainfall.

  The city has already implemented Facebook posts of water conservation messaging including a link to the city conservation incentives and rebates page. Additionally, the quarterly One Water newsletter includes water conservation content, and utility bill inserts with messaging is sent at least once a year in the spring. The annual Water Quality Report will be printed and delivered to all customers in May and include water conservation messaging and incentives and rebates with webpage link.
- Additional avenues of outreach should be explored including possible face-to-face community opportunities, use of the Johnson box on electronic utility billing, and other electronic media.
- Requesting large users of irrigation water to decrease watering is suggested prior to increasing the water shortage stage. This includes city parks and facilities, schools, and other governmental agencies. This has been used in the past with success in reducing peak demands.
- Once the Port wells are online, or before June 1st, WRS staff will determine the present possible production (P3) value for our water system. This will determine the trigger stages for

our water shortage response plan and help us identify if there is a need to implement further water-saving measures.

- Between June 1 and September 30, WRS staff will track production water volumes and periodically review climatic conditions throughout the spring/summer so that we can stay informed about potential impacts to our water system.
- If production water volumes exceed P3 triggers, conservation stages will be increased accordingly.