

## What A Drought Declaration in Oregon Means

A drought declaration in Oregon serves as a formal recognition of significant water shortages, authorizing quick action to manage scarce water supplies for critical needs. It's typically issued county by county, not statewide, because conditions can vary widely.

Drought declarations typically go through a four-part process before securing a state drought declaration.

1. County request – Local officials (usually the county commission) formally ask the state for a declaration based on observed impacts (low streamflow, dry wells, crop stress).
2. Scientific review – The Water Supply Availability Committee analyzes data like snowpack, precipitation, soil moisture, and forecasts.
3. State coordination – The Drought Readiness Council reviews the situation and recommends action.
4. Governor's order – The Governor issues an Executive Order declaring drought for specific counties.

### What a declaration does and doesn't do.

Once a declaration is declared by the Governor for a County it unlocks state resources from the Oregon Water Resources Department (OWRD) including:

- Faster approval of emergency water use permits
- Temporary water transfers between users
- Assistance for farmers, ranchers, and rural communities
- Coordination across agencies like the Oregon Water Resources Department
- Support for drinking water systems at risk

At the local level, counties and cities may increase public messaging about water use, implement voluntary water conservation measures or activate their water curtailment plans requiring mandatory water reductions.

What it does *not* do is automatically impose statewide water restrictions, guarantee financial relief by itself (though it can help enable it), or override all existing water rights—but it allows more flexibility in managing them.

As of March 2026, Governor Kotek issued the first drought declarations of the year for Baker, Deschutes, and Umatilla counties due to record-low snowpack and warm temperatures. Jefferson and Wallowa counties have also requested declarations as conditions persist.