

DENVER BOARD OF WATER COMMISSIONERS

Meeting Date: March 25, 2026

Board item: II-B-1

Board Resolution for Stage 1 Drought Declaration

Action by Consent

Individual Action

Purpose and Background:

The purpose of this Board item is to seek approval for adoption of the 2026 Board Resolution to implement a Stage 1 drought response pursuant to Chapter 15 of the Operating Rules.

Staff continuously monitor a variety of drought indicators, including snowpack levels, watershed conditions, and both current and projected reservoir storage. At present, the South Platte Basin snowpack is at a 40-year record low. Snowpack in the Colorado River Basin is similarly concerning, ranking among the lowest five years on record.

Streamflows from snowmelt are forecasted to be significantly below average and insufficient to fill Denver Water's reservoirs. Additionally, the current water year, which began in October, is the warmest on record by a substantial margin, and long-term weather forecasts do not indicate relief. On March 17, Governor Polis activated the state's Drought Task Force and Phase 2 of Colorado's Drought Response Plan.

The goal of Denver Water's drought response is to protect the community's investment in landscapes and preserve water for health, safety, and economic vitality to the greatest extent possible. Given the severity of current drought conditions and the uncertainty surrounding future weather and snowfall, a 20% water use reduction target has been established for 2026 to help preserve water supplies. Measures to achieve water use reduction targets include limiting lawn watering to two days per week, reducing contract deliveries, and conducting extensive public outreach to promote the drought restrictions and steps customers can take to save water. Our customers have become more efficient in the last two decades, and we need their continued cooperation to save even more water this year. Water supplies will be augmented through the Shoshone Relaxation Agreement and recovery of minimum flows in Waterton Canyon. Further supply enhancements will be investigated.

Budget and Schedule:

Water use reductions, which are necessary to preserve reservoir storage, result in lower water sales revenue. While variable operating costs decrease with reduced consumption, we may experience increased drought-related operating and capital costs. Denver Water has taken proactive steps to reduce its operating costs. Additional changes may be necessary as we gain more understanding of both our water supply and associated financial impacts.

Recommendation:

Staff recommend the Board adopt Resolution 002-2026 for Stage 1 Drought Declaration effective March 25, 2026 through April 30, 2027.

Approvals

Alan Salazar, CEO/Manager

Julie Anderson, Chief of Staff

Jessica R. Brody, General Counsel

Angela C. Bricmont, Chief Finance Officer

Brian D. Good, Chief Administrative Officer

Richard B. Marsicek, Chief Water Resource Strategy Officer

Robert J. Mahoney, Chief Engineering Officer

Thomas J. Roode, Chief Operations Officer

TITLE: Board Resolution for Stage 1 Drought Declaration

ADOPTED AND APPROVED ON MARCH 25, 2026 BY THE CITY AND COUNTY OF DENVER ACTING BY AND THROUGH ITS BOARD OF WATER COMMISSIONERS

Tyrone Gant, Board President

Alan Salazar, CEO/Manager

The Board of Water Commissioners finds that:

- A. As of March 19, 2026, storage in Denver Water's supply reservoirs is currently at 80% of full, which is lower than the historic median for storage at this time of year.
- B. Denver Water's supply system depends primarily on snowmelt in the South Platte and Colorado River watersheds. As of March 19, 2026, snowpack is 53% of normal for this date in the South Platte Basin, which is at a 40-year low, and 69% of normal for this date in the Colorado River Basin, which ranks as the second lowest snowpack on record.
- C. The U.S. Drought Monitor for Colorado categorizes Denver Water's water collection system watersheds as being in a Severe to Exceptional Drought and the Denver Water service area as being in a Severe Drought.
- D. The National Weather Service's long-range temperature outlooks forecast above normal temperatures and below normal precipitation for Denver Water's service area and water collection system watersheds.
- E. Stream flow, soil moisture, and precipitation are projected to be below normal.
- F. Denver Water staff project that supply reservoirs will not fill this year.
- G. Governor Jared Polis activated Colorado's Drought Task Force and Phase 2 of Colorado's Drought Response on March 17, 2026.
- H. Implementation of a drought response plan will conserve and manage water resources and protect public health and safety in the event of a prolonged drought.
- I. The goal of the drought response measures is to reduce total water demand by 20% from March 25, 2026 through April 30, 2027.

- J. In order for Denver Water to meet its obligation to continually provide an adequate supply of water inside Denver as required by the Charter, a drought response must be implemented requiring everyone who receives the Board's water (inside and outside Denver, inside and outside the Combined Service Area, and lessees who receive nonpotable water and potable water under fixed-amount contracts) to participate in water conservation measures designed to achieve a system-wide reduction of 20% in water consumption.
- K. The source of water for recycled water deliveries is primarily reusable effluent, which has different supply characteristics and may be more abundant during drought years.

Based on the foregoing findings and pursuant to Article X of the Charter of the City and County of Denver and Denver Water Operating Rules, the Board declares a Stage 1 Drought and takes the following actions, effective March 25, 2026 through April 30, 2027, or until further notice:

- 1. Water Use Restrictions: The Board implements the following water use restrictions, except as permitted by a Denver Water approved water budget or variance:
 - a. Irrigation.
 - i. Grass Watering Restrictions.
 - a) Watering of grass shall be limited to two days per week in accordance with a watering schedule developed and published by Denver Water staff.
 - b) Watering of grass is prohibited between the hours of 10:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m.
 - ii. Irrigation of Trees, Shrubs and Perennials. Trees, shrubs, and perennials may be watered any day by means of a hand-held hose or low-volume non-spray irrigation, but not between 10:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m.
 - iii. Irrigation of Annuals and Vegetables. Annuals and vegetables may be watered any day by means of a hand-held hose or low-volume non-spray irrigation, but not between 10:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m.
 - iv. Irrigation System Installation, Operation, and Repair. An irrigation system may be operated outside the watering schedule for installation, repair, or reasonable maintenance, so long as the system is attended throughout the period of operation and water waste does not occur. All irrigation control systems must be reprogrammed for operation in compliance with the schedule provided by the Board or must be operated manually.

b. Washing of Vehicles.

- i. Personal Vehicles. At locations other than commercial car washes, washing of personal vehicles shall be done using a bucket or a hand-held hose equipped with an automatic shut-off nozzle.
- ii. Fleet Vehicles. Vehicles in commercial operations or fleets may be washed no more than once per week, unless public health or safety requires more frequent washing.
- iii. Commercial Car Washes. Commercial car washes shall practice efficient use of water.

c. Washing of Impervious Surfaces.

- i. Power Washing by Individuals. Power washing may occur only on the assigned watering days pursuant to the day-of-the-week watering schedule, except for immediate health or safety reasons. Cleaning without water should be done prior to power washing.
- ii. Commercial Power Washing. Commercial enterprises for whom cleaning with water is an essential element of their business are not subject to day-of-the-week restrictions, but they must clean without water prior to power washing, use only high-efficiency equipment, and assure that water waste does not occur.

d. Food and Lodging Establishments.

- i. Restaurants and Food Service Operations. Restaurants and catering businesses shall serve water only upon request.
- ii. Lodging. Lodging establishments shall not change sheets more often than every four days for guests staying more than one night, except for health or safety reasons or upon express request of guests.

2. Fixed-Amount Contracts: The Board directs the following for water deliveries to lessees who receive nonpotable water or potable water under fixed-amount contracts:

- a. Delivery Reduction Agreements. For agreements with provisions for reduction in deliveries under drought conditions, the amount delivered shall be reduced by 20%.
- b. Curtailment and Use Restriction Agreements. For agreements with provisions requiring progressive curtailment or the adoption of the same or similar water use restrictions as the Board during drought conditions, the lessee shall implement the restrictions contained in Section 1 (Water Use Restrictions) of this Board Resolution.

c. Recycled Water Agreements. For agreements involving recycled water deliveries, the Board is not reducing recycled water deliveries at this time to the extent that reusable return flows are available for treatment at the Recycle Plant. (Operating Rule 15.01.2.) Licensees are allowed to water under the conditions imposed in Denver Water Operating Rule 4.04. If only water from storage is available for treatment at the Recycling Plant, recycled water Licensees are to implement the restrictions contained in Section 1 of this Board Resolution and/or additional restrictions as determined by the Board.

d. Time of Day Restrictions. For all fixed-amount contracts, water delivered by Denver Water shall not be used for outdoor watering between the hours of 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. during all months of the year.

3. Operating Rules Remain in Effect: The Board directs that all provisions of the Operating Rules, including but not limited to rules regarding water conservation and prohibiting water waste, remain in full force and effect to the extent not superseded by this resolution.

4. Further Monitoring and Action: The Board directs the Manager and staff to:

a. Implementation. Take all necessary actions to implement the provisions, restrictions, and conservation measures adopted in this Resolution.

b. Continued Monitoring. Continue to monitor current and projected water use, current and projected water supply reservoir contents, Colorado and South Platte basin water supply indicators such as temperature, precipitation, snowpack, stream flow, and soil moisture and to recommend to the Board any changes or further action as may be necessary or prudent based on changes in conditions.