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Aurora lawmakers pass water shortage declaration, restrictions

HOAs
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Aurora City Council members unanimously passed a Stage I Water Shortage declaration in Monday night's meeting, putting restrictions on outdoor water use starting immediately.

The shortage declaration imposes restrictions on outdoor watering for residents and businesses and reduces commercial user allocations, such as that for golf courses, by 20%, according to Aurora Water General Manager Marshall Brown.

With the passage of the shortage declaration Monday night, Aurora Water officials will also start to ramp up enforcement.

In the past, enforcement was gentle, water officials said.

This year, officials will issue one warning. The second violation will result in a \$250 fine for residential users and \$500 fine for commercial users, and a third violation will result in a \$1,000 fine for residential users and a \$2,000 fine for commercial users.

After that, Aurora Water can continue fining at the third level or shut water off for the user.

"We're really needing people to help us out and create the savings in our water supply, otherwise we're already borderline already heading toward a Stage II restriction, which would be even more dramatic,"

Brown said.

Water officials have also implemented a new metering system that allows both officials and water customers to identify large leaks in water systems and monitor usage.

"For the first time in a long time, the entire state is experiencing some level of drought," Brown said, adding that this is the warmest start to a water year in 131 years.

In mid-March, Gov. Jared Polis activated the state's Drought Task Force and Phase 2 of Colorado's Drought Response Plan. Brown said it is likely Polis will move Colorado into Stage 3 soon, which would enable to state to get federal drought funding.

Colorado is in its lowest snowpack year since 1981, Brown said. Snowpack in Aurora's water basins is at 36% of the median and its water storage is 57% full.

"Both of those numbers are really bad," Brown said Monday.

Aurora Water officials prefer people wait until May to start outdoor watering and turn off irrigation systems until then, Brown said.

If people still choose to irrigate before May, the restrictions begin immediately and people will be fined for not following them.

Under state law, HOAs can't fine people for dry landscapes, he clarified, and Aurora Water is ensuring HOAs know that.

"We should expect to see drier, browner landscapes," Brown said. "HOAs need to live with that, common areas are going to have to live with that, metro districts are going to have to live with that."

Aurora Water also has rebate programs for waterwise landscaping and other water conservation efforts, Brown said. They also offer free waterwise landscaping designs, he said.

The shortage declaration passed unanimously Monday night.

“We all need to recognize that we live in an increasingly arid climate,” Councilmember Curtis Gardner said Monday. “While this year might be worse than normal, that’s where we’re headed and it’s going to continue that way.”