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Aurora Water officials paint picture of 'bleak' supply

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Aurora officials are considering starting normal summer water restrictions a month earlier than usual and imposing harsher penalties for not following restrictions as Aurora Water faces "bleak" water supply.



Note

With snowpack in the 2025-26 season well below average and temperatures reaching record highs, Aurora Water officials are recommending that the City Council declare a Stage I Water Shortage, usually enacted each year on May 1, water engineer John Murphy told officials in Wednesday's Water Policy Committee meeting.

"Stage I Water Shortage indicates that conditions are abnormally dry, the city's reservoirs are low and the anticipated runoff from snowpack will be insufficient to replenish the water supply," according to council documents.

Enacting the Stage I Water Shortage means the city will implement a mandatory two-day per week watering limitation and a reduction in watering variance allowances for irrigation.

Normal restrictions allow for three days each week of residential outdoor turf irrigation, according to the city's Water Shortage Response Plan.

Under Stage I, new turf installation and use of water features are not allowed, but water uses such as car washing and new tree installations are allowed.

The goal, Murphy said, is to decrease outdoor water use across the city by 20%.

Note

A City Council vote is required to enact the Stage I Water Shortage. Aurora Water officials plan to bring that proposal to the council in a study session March 23, then to a regular council meeting on April 6.

If it passes, restrictions on water use will go into effect the following day, April 7, Murphy said, adding that the urgency is because of "crazy temperatures."

“Ninety degrees in March is scary for our water supply and for the demand,” he said, adding that people will need to start irrigating their lawns earlier this year, which leads to more water use overall.

Aurora Water officials also plan to ramp up enforcement of those restrictions, Murphy said.

“Our water supply situation is actually bleak enough that, if things don’t improve and we don’t get the community response that we need during a Stage I restriction, the forecasts indicate that we may be in a Stage II restriction by the end of the year, which would be really dramatic,” Murphy told councilmembers. “None of us wants to go there.”

Already, his team has heard a lot of pushback from HOAs and metro districts, who don’t want to reduce irrigation and are “refusing to make adjustments,” he said.

In the past, enforcement has been gentle, Murphy said. His team reminds people multiple times to follow the restrictions before fining them.

This year, his team will issue one warning. The second violation will result in a \$250 fine, and a third violation will result in a \$1,000 fine.

Note

Aurora Water officials are working on communication efforts to make sure water customers are aware of the restrictions and the fines for not following them, Murphy said. Their team is bringing on additional staff members to help make this happen, and he urged the council to spread the word as well.

“We are in a bad situation,” Murphy said. Meanwhile, Aurora Water recently chose a location for a new reservoir in Park County to add more storage capacity to the city’s water assets as Aurora grows.

In a year of record low snowpack, conversations about future water needs across Colorado are front and center for water officials, and Colorado as a whole anticipates needing about 400,000 acre-feet, or more than 130 billion gallons, of new water storage in the next 20 years, according to Aurora Water Assistant General Manager Sarah Young.

An acre-foot is the amount of water needed to cover one acre of land with one foot of water.

Without a new reservoir, Young said, Aurora Water anticipates dipping into its emergency water reserves by 2045.