



For More Information Contact:

Paul Donsky
(404) 463-3192
Cell: (404) 202-4662
pdonsky@atlantaregional.com

Metropolitan North Georgia Water Planning District – Drought Fact Sheet

“We don’t know how long this drought will last, so we all need to do our part to conserve. Thankfully, the Metro Water District’s robust conservation and education programs have significantly reduced water use and have prepared us well to manage our water supplies safely and responsibly through drought periods, now and in the future.”

- Mayor Boyd Austin, Chairman
Metropolitan North Georgia Water Planning District

Drought Response Declaration

Georgia’s Environmental Protection Division declared a Level 1 drought response across 53 counties in northern and central Georgia, including Cherokee County, on September 9, 2016. This declaration requires water providers to educate the public about drought conditions and water conservation.

The declaration follows a wet winter, but a dry spring and summer. According to the National Weather Service, from March through August, Atlanta received 16.59 inches of rain – around 8.5 inches less than the 30-year average for the same six-month period. We don’t know how long the dry weather will continue. Rainfall may return to normal, but we need to take reasonable measures to be responsible stewards of water and to be prepared for the possibility this is a long-term drought.

The state’s permanent [year-round outdoor watering restrictions](#) limit outdoor watering to the hours between 4 p.m. and 10 a.m. to avoid the hottest part of the day when more evaporation occurs, with certain limited exceptions as set forth in the 2010 Georgia Water Stewardship Act.

Metro Water District’s Response

Our region has a robust track record of water conservation. Since its creation in 2001, the Metropolitan North Georgia Water Planning District (Metro Water District) has implemented one of the most comprehensive regional water management plans in the country that mandates an array of conservation initiatives, including:

- A toilet rebate program that has replaced more than 110,000 old fixtures with high-efficient models, saving nearly a billion gallons of water a year
- A tiered pricing structure that charges higher rates the more water that is used, encouraging conservation
- Ordinances requiring all new drive-through car washes to recycle water, reducing water use per facility by 35 percent.

As a result of these and other practices, water use in the Metro Water District has dropped by more than 10 percent since 2001, despite a population increase of more than one million. In addition, water demand forecasts show that the region will use 25 percent less water in 2050 than was estimated as recently as 2009.

Meanwhile, water providers across the region have also found innovative ways to conserve our water supply. For example:

- **Cobb County**'s Inspect Direct Connect program encourages citizens and green industry professionals to inspect their irrigation systems for inefficiencies and leaks. If an issue is identified, the lawn is flagged and the owner is provided with resources to address and fix the problem.
- **DeKalb County** has a "retrofit-on-reconnect" requirement that requires older, inefficient toilets to be replaced upon reconnecting water service after a home sale.
- **Clayton County** has implemented a comprehensive, system-wide leak detection program, saving millions of gallons of treated potable water on an annual basis.
- **Fulton County** created the South Fulton Demonstration Garden, an approximately one-acre series of gardens with an outdoor classroom used for water-wise landscaping and environmental sustainability education programs.
- **Douglas County** conserves water and energy and maximizes storage in the Dog River Reservoir by reclaiming 6 million gallons of highly treated wastewater per day for cooling water usage in order to maximize the volume of water stored in the reservoir.
- **Gwinnett County**'s Water On Wheels initiative is an in-classroom program that travels to Gwinnett County schools. Students participate in engaging hands-on lessons that teach the importance of water conservation and foster attitudes that inspire life-long water efficient behaviors.

Steps Metro Atlanta Residents Can Take to Conserve Water

It's important to note that dry periods are part of the normal weather cycle. We don't know how long this drought may last, so we all need to do our part to conserve.

As a reminder, here are some ways metro Atlanta residents can save water:

- Using a rain gauge to determine how much it has rained over the week before watering outdoor plants. Most outdoor plants need an inch of water per week.

- Water in several short sessions instead of one long session. This reduces runoff and allows water to infiltrate into soil and plant roots.
- Only water lawns when needed. If the blades of grass don't bounce back after walking across the lawn, it is time to water. Water lawns and plants in the early morning and late evening.
- Check and repair leaks inside and outside the home.
- Shorten showers and turn off water when shaving or brushing teeth.
- Fill dishwashers and washing machines. Make sure there is a full load every time.

Find more conservation tips at [My Drop Counts](#).

The Georgia Department of Natural Resources Board adopted a new drought management rule in 2015 which updated outdoor watering restrictions. Per the rule (which can be found [here](#)):

- (a) **Persons may irrigate outdoors daily for purposes of planting, growing, managing, or maintaining ground cover, trees, shrubs, or other plants only between the hours of 4:00 p.m. and 10:00 a.m.**
- (b) Paragraph (a) shall not create any limitation upon the following outdoor water uses:
1. Commercial agricultural operations as defined in Code Section 1-3-3;
 2. Capture and reuse of cooling system condensate or storm water in compliance with applicable local ordinances and state guidelines;
 3. Reuse of gray water in compliance with Code Section 31-3-5.2 and applicable local board of health regulations adopted pursuant thereto;
 4. Use of reclaimed waste water by a designated user from a system permitted by the Environmental Protection Division of the department to provide reclaimed waste water;
 5. Irrigation of personal food gardens;
 6. Irrigation of new and replanted plant, seed, or turf in landscapes, golf courses, or sports turf fields during installation and for a period of 30 days immediately following the date of installation;
 7. Drip irrigation or irrigation using soaker hoses;
 8. Handwatering with a hose with automatic cutoff or handheld container;
 9. Use of water withdrawn from private water wells or surface water by an owner or operator of property if such well or surface water is on said property;
 10. Irrigation of horticultural crops held for sale, resale, or installation;
 11. Irrigation of athletic fields, golf courses, or public turf grass recreational areas;
 12. Installation, maintenance, or calibration of irrigation systems; or
 13. Hydroseeding.
- (c) Paragraph (a) shall not create any limitation upon outdoor water uses for purposes other than planting, growing, managing, or maintaining ground cover, trees, shrubs, or other plants.

Georgia Drought Response Declaration September 9, 2016

