



Regional Drought and Water Supply Status

July 2026

Summary of Current Conditions in the COG Region

The [Drought Watch declared on June 3, 2026](#) remains in effect for the COG region. Local water supplies remain adequate, but voluntary wise water use is encouraged while persistent long-term precipitation deficits, low groundwater, and drought conditions continue throughout the region.

U.S. Drought Monitor update. The latest U.S. Drought Monitor shows slight improvement from the previous week. Approximately 81% of the watershed remains in drought, including 31.5% in Severe Drought (D2) and 1.1% in Extreme Drought (D3).

Week-over-week changes. The area in Severe Drought decreased from 42.5% to 31.5%, reflecting some recovery from recent rainfall. At the same time, the area classified as Abnormally Dry increased from 4.8% to 16.5%, indicating that some portions of the basin have improved but have not fully recovered.

The July Water Supply Outlook from ICPRB continues to indicate an above-normal probability of water supply releases from the Washington metropolitan area's back-up reservoirs during the 2026 summer and fall seasons. Reservoirs remain near full, and there is currently sufficient Potomac River flow to meet metropolitan water demands without augmentation from upstream reservoirs.

Although thunderstorms brought much-needed rain over the past month, they have not erased the basin's longer-term precipitation deficits. Over the past 12 months, the basin received 30.8 inches of precipitation compared with a normal of about 40.1 inches, leaving it 9.3 inches below normal. This sustained shortfall is one of the primary reasons groundwater levels and streamflows remain well below average despite recent rainfall.

VADEQ continues to maintain a Drought Warning across most of Virginia, including Northern Virginia, and MDE reports that Western and Central Maryland are in a Drought Watch and Eastern and Southern Maryland are in Drought Warning status.



U.S. Drought Monitor Potomac Watershed

July 14, 2026

(Released Thursday, Jul. 16, 2026)

Valid 8 a.m. EDT

Drought Conditions (Percent Area)

	None	D0	D1	D2	D3	D4
Current	2.72	16.48	48.30	31.46	1.05	0.00
Last Week <i>07-09-2026</i>	2.72	4.79	47.61	42.51	2.37	0.00
3 Months Ago <i>04-16-2026</i>	0.00	1.42	67.48	31.10	0.00	0.00
Start of Calendar Year <i>01-08-2026</i>	0.00	0.00	14.96	85.04	0.00	0.00
Start of Water Year <i>10-02-2025</i>	4.61	34.36	39.54	17.48	4.01	0.00
One Year Ago <i>07-17-2025</i>	100.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00

Intensity:

	None		D2 Severe Drought
	D0 Abnormally Dry		D3 Extreme Drought
	D1 Moderate Drought		D4 Exceptional Drought

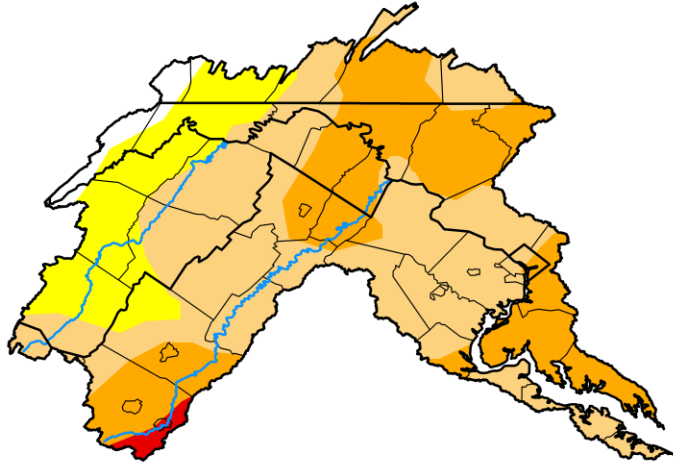
The Drought Monitor focuses on broad-scale conditions. Local conditions may vary. For more information on the Drought Monitor, go to <https://droughtmonitor.unl.edu/About.aspx>

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droughtmonitor.unl.edu



Potomac River Streamflow Conditions

Instantaneous flows as of July 13, 2026

Location	Current Flow (cfs)	Median Flow (cfs)
Little Falls	5,080	4,115
Point of Rocks	4,060	3,530

Source: [USGS Little Falls](#)

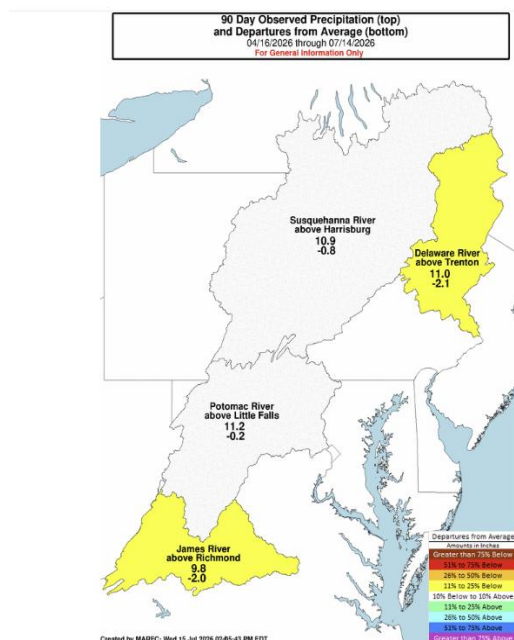
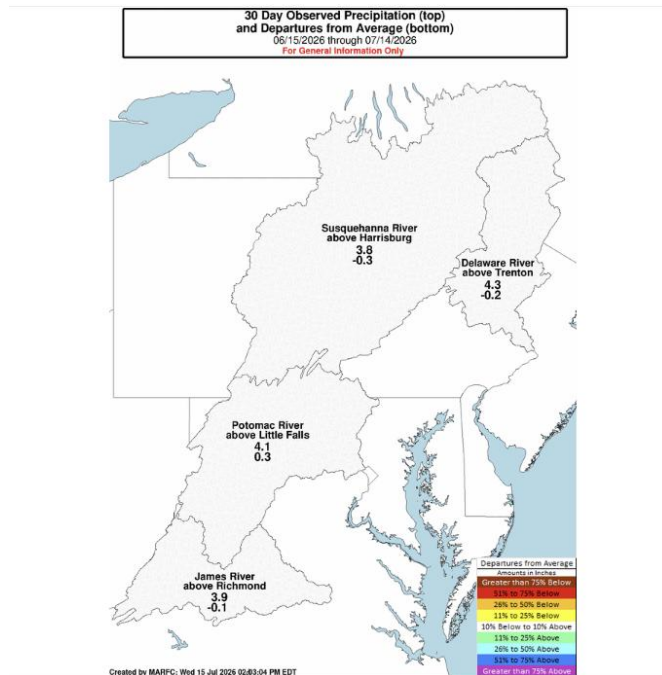
Source: [USGS Point of Rocks](#)



Observed Precipitation Conditions

30-Day Total: 4.1 inches (0.3 inches above normal)

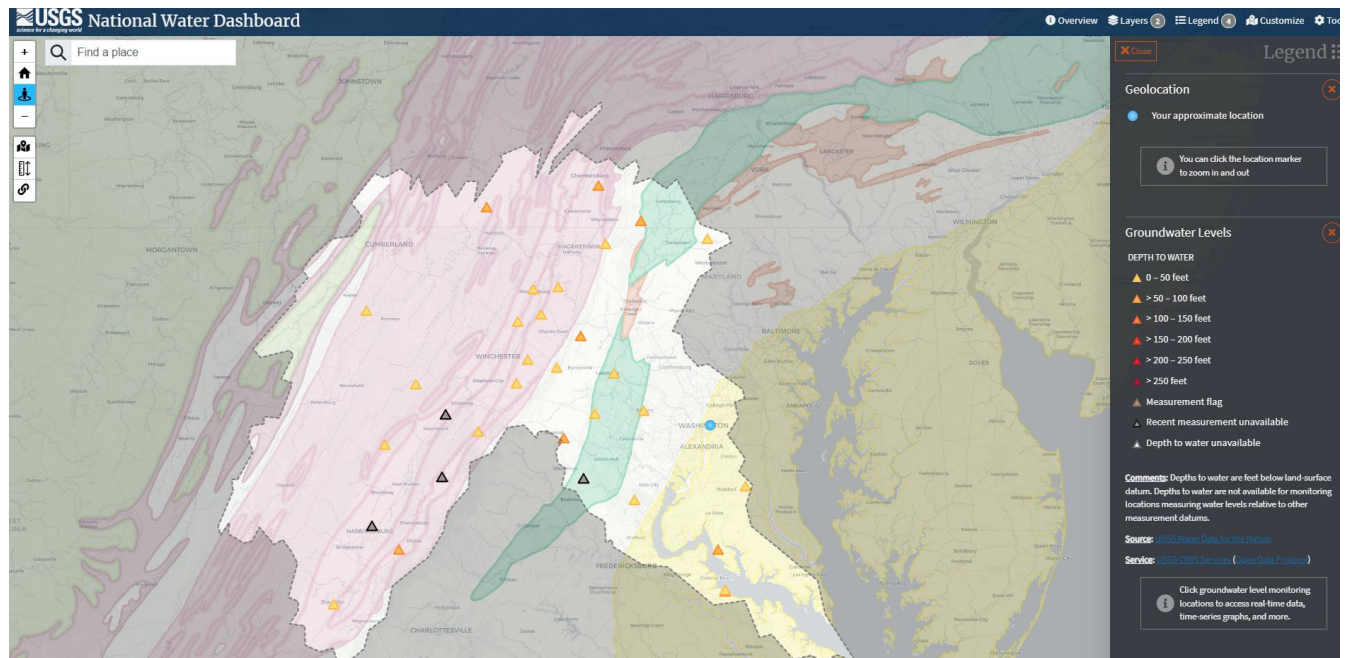
90-Day Total: 11.2 inches (0.2 inches below normal)



Source: [NOAA Middle Atlantic River Forecast Center](https://www.noaa.gov/middle-atlantic-river-forecast-center)

Groundwater Conditions

Groundwater levels remain below normal across the region.



Source: <https://dashboard.waterdata.usgs.gov/app/nwd/en/?aoi=geolocate-huc4&view=groundwater>

Reservoir Storage Conditions

Jennings Randolph and Little Seneca reservoirs are within normal operating ranges.

Source: [U.S. Army Corps of Engineers](#)

Probability of Water Supply Releases

As of the July 2026 report, the probability of needing water supply releases from the Washington metropolitan area's backup reservoirs during summer and fall 2026 is above normal. Generally, the use of Jennings Randolph and Little Seneca reservoirs is triggered by low flows brought about by a combination of low precipitation and low groundwater levels. There is a 33 to 48 percent conditional probability that natural Potomac flow will drop below 600 to 700 million gallons per day (MGD) at Little Falls through December 31, 2026.

Source: [ICPRB – Cooperative Water Supply Operations on the Potomac](#)

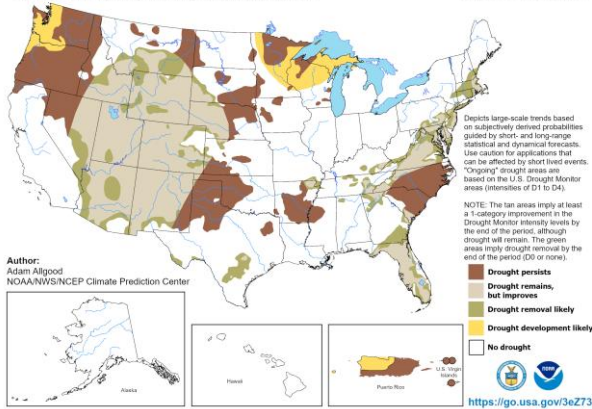
Climate and Drought Outlooks

The U.S. Seasonal Drought Outlook released today predicts that the drought is likely to persist but improve over the next three months.



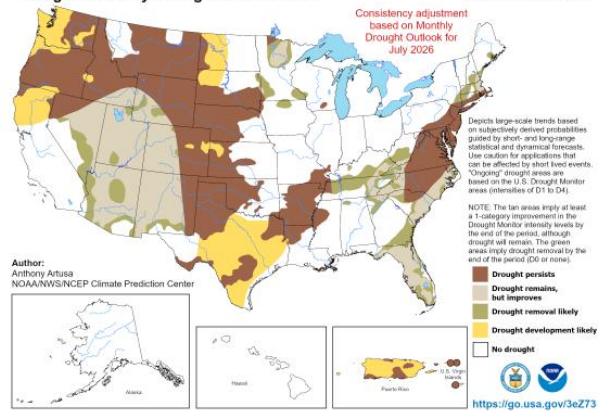
U.S. Seasonal Drought Outlook
Drought Tendency During the Valid Period

Valid for July 16 - October 31, 2026
Released July 16, 2026

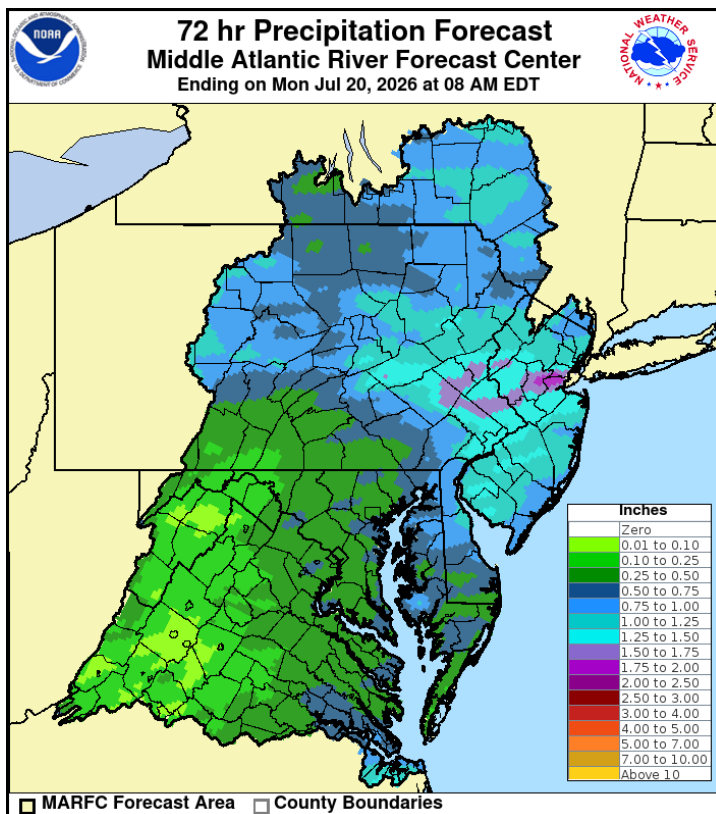


U.S. Seasonal Drought Outlook
Drought Tendency During the Valid Period

Valid for July 1 - September 30, 2026
Released June 30, 2026



The 72-hour precipitation forecast predicts approximately 0.25 – 0.75 inches.

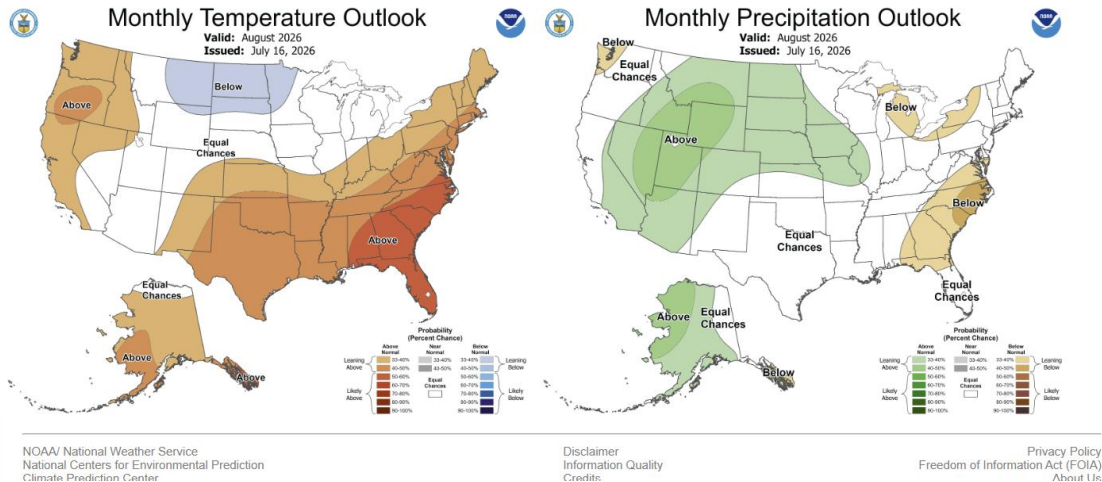


Source: [NOAA NWS Weather Prediction Center](https://www.weather.gov/marfc)



OFFICIAL 30-Day Forecasts

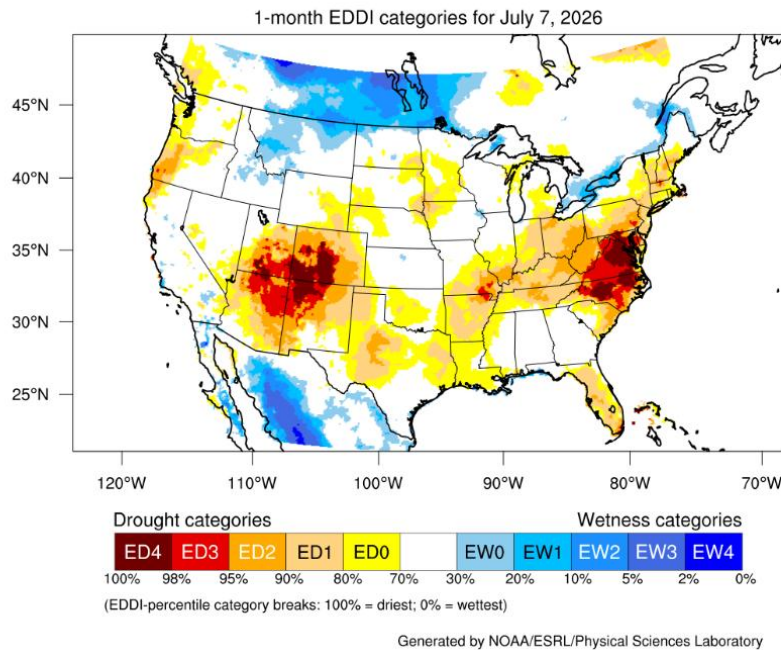
Issued: July 16, 2026



The July monthly outlook from the National Weather Service [Climate Prediction Center](#) indicates equal chances for above-, below-, and near-normal precipitation for the Northeast, and favors above normal temperatures the entire region. Source: [NOAA NWS Climate Prediction Center](#)

Evaporative Demand Drought Index

EDDI Category Map



Evaporative demand was unusually high for past month. The **Evaporative Demand Drought Index (EDDI)** is an experimental drought monitoring and early warning guidance tool. It



examines how anomalous the atmospheric evaporative demand (E0; also known as "the thirst of the atmosphere") is for a given location and across a time period of interest. EDDI can offer early warning of agricultural drought, hydrologic drought, and fire-weather risk by providing near-real-time information on the emergence or persistence of anomalous evaporative demand in a region. Source: https://psl.noaa.gov/eddi/#current_conditions

Evaporative demand is the rate at which water would evaporate from the Earth's surface into the atmosphere if there were an unlimited supply of water. Often described as "the thirst of the atmosphere", it measures how aggressively the environment is trying to pull moisture from soil, plants, and water bodies. Evaporative demand does not measure actual evaporation; rather, it calculates the *potential* for evaporation based on four main weather variables:

- **Temperature:** Warmer air can hold more moisture, increasing its capacity to absorb water.
- **Wind Speed:** Moving air carries away moisture, preventing the air right above the ground from becoming saturated.
- **Humidity:** Drier air (low relative humidity) "demands" more water to reach saturation.
- **Solar Radiation:** Sunlight provides the thermal energy required to convert liquid water into water vapor.

Because actual evaporation depends on both the atmospheric demand and the available water supply, a spike in evaporative demand can quickly deplete soil moisture—even if precipitation levels remain normal.

- **Drought & Flash Droughts:** Unusually high evaporative demand is a primary driver in the onset of rapid "flash droughts" and the worsening of sustained, long-term droughts.
- **Fire Weather:** Increased demand leads to quickly drying vegetation and soils, significantly increasing wildfire risk.