

News Release: Alberta releases drought response plan

Alberta News alberta.news@gov.ab.ca

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Alberta's government is releasing its 2024 Drought Response Plan to help support Albertans through any drought conditions this year.

Alberta's new 2024 Drought Response Plan will help guide the province through any and all drought conditions. This is a plan covering everything from conservation plans and water-sharing agreements to declaring an emergency and prioritizing water for human health and safety. It will help make sure that Albertans, communities, farmers, ranchers and businesses get the support they need, whatever the weather.

"This spring has brought much-needed moisture to many areas of the province, and new forecasts showing increased precipitation are a cause for optimism. However, we must remain prepared for drought now and into the future. Alberta's Drought Response Plan is foundational to that work and will help our province respond to all levels of drought for years to come."

Rebecca Schulz, Minister of Environment and Protected Areas

"From my conversations with producers, associations and irrigation districts, I have heard concerns about the potential for drought conditions this growing season. This drought response plan, in combination with Agriculture Financial Services Corporation's business risk management programs, will be important supports for the hardworking Albertans who put food on tables here and around the world."

RJ Sigurdson, Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation

Drought Response Plan

Drought conditions can change rapidly and impact different areas in very different ways. The Drought Response Plan will help government, irrigators, communities, businesses and others respond quickly and effectively to a wide range of drought conditions. The plan outlines:

- The five stages of Alberta's drought response.
- The roles and responsibilities of partners, including government, to help everyone collaborate and communicate.
- The regulatory and non-regulatory approaches and tools that may be used in various drought conditions.
- How and when emergencies would be declared, with recognition that declaring an emergency is used as a last resort.

Current situation: Stage 4

Alberta is currently at Stage 4 of the Drought Response Plan. Government is now working proactively with major water users to employ all existing regulatory and non-regulatory tools available. This includes creating water shortage response plans, fast-tracking temporary diversion licenses to allow water to be temporarily diverted from new sources, and the landmark water-sharing agreements announced on April 19, along with other steps being implemented across southern Alberta.

Stage 5: Declaring an emergency

Under the 2024 Drought Response Plan, Alberta would only declare an emergency under the *Water Act* as a last resort. Should the government declare an emergency, Albertans should be advised that:

- Emergency declarations are temporary and allow government to prioritise water uses.
- Emergency declarations do not replace the regulatory requirements of the *Water Act*.
- Emergency declarations only apply to a specific location. This could range from a small geographical area within a sub-basin to the entire South Saskatchewan River basin or province, depending on the severity of a drought.

There are three triggers that would make the province consider declaring an emergency:

- If there is not sufficient water available for the priority uses. Human health and safety is the top priority, followed closely by ensuring sufficient water supplies for critical infrastructure, livestock welfare and critical environmental needs.
- If there is increasing distress from local authorities, or if local authorities are unable to respond to issues caused by drought. For example, if a state of local emergency is declared or if the Provincial Emergency Coordination Centre is activated at level 3 or higher.
- If Alberta's water management system becomes so overwhelmed that staff cannot process or implement regulatory measures in a timely manner, impeding the drought response.

These triggers will be watched closely. Each situation will be considered on a case-by-case basis to determine when or if an emergency declaration is needed.

Alberta has never before declared an emergency under the *Water Act*. In the event one is declared, Alberta's government, working closely with water users, would temporarily take steps to manage water in the emergency area. Various steps may be needed, depending on the situation. Potential actions could include suspending approvals, registrations or water licenses, and designating the purposes and volumes for which water may be diverted or used.

While drought is a real risk, May and June often come with risk of floods. That's why we have 24-hour monitoring and emergency response, as well as the new \$125-million Drought and Flood Protection Program and investments in wetlands, watersheds and modernizing Alberta's water management system.

Quick facts

- Alberta Environment and Protected Areas is the Government of Alberta's lead agency for drought preparation and response.
- This plan is led by Alberta Environment and Protected Areas but also applies to drought response activities across Alberta Agriculture and Irrigation, Alberta Municipal Affairs, Alberta Forestry and Parks and the Alberta Energy Regulator, among others.

- The objectives of Alberta's Drought Response Plan are:
 - Protecting the health and safety of Albertans from the impacts of drought.
 - Minimizing the impacts of drought on Alberta's communities and economy, and the environment.
 - Implementing a proactive, risk-based approach to rapidly assess, prepare for and respond to the impacts of a drought.
 - Ensuring response to drought conditions are agile and adjusted in real time as information changes.
 - Enabling all Albertans to take appropriate action to conserve water and work together.
- The Drought Response Plan is considered a living document and will be updated as Alberta's drought situation changes, or if new actions could potentially improve the response to a drought emergency.
- There are currently 51 water shortage advisories in place for select water management areas across Alberta.

Related information

- [2024 Drought Response Plan](#)
- [Alberta.ca/drought](https://alberta.ca/drought)

Media inquiries

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