

Posting Language

Recommend approval of a resolution adopting a Drought Contingency Plan, as required by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality and repealing Resolution No. 20160505-004.

Lead Department

Austin Water

Client Department

Austin Water Assistant Director of Environmental, Planning and Development Services, Kevin Critendon

Fiscal Note

This item has no fiscal impact.

Prior Council Action:

May 5, 2016 – Council approved Resolution 20160505-0004, adopting a new Drought Contingency Plan and applicable revisions to the City Code, Chapter 6-4 (Water Conservation)

November 29, 2018 – Council approved adoption of Water Forward, Austin’s Integrated Water Resource Plan.

April 11, 2019 – Council approved Resolution No. 20190411-002, repealing Resolution No. 20140417-004 and adopting the Utility Profile & Water Conservation Plan for Municipal and Wholesale Water Use as required by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality.

Council Committee, Boards and Commission Action:

April 16, 2024 – To be reviewed by the Resource Management Commission

April 17, 2024 – To be reviewed by the Water and Wastewater Commission.

Additional Backup Information:

Austin is required by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) to file a Drought Contingency Plan and a Water Conservation Plan under 30 Texas administrative Code (TAC) 288. A Drought Contingency Plan (DCP) establishes a series of drought stages and the measures to curtail water use during specific times of drought. A Water Conservation Plan (WCP) describes a utility’s water use profile and describes water conservation goals and programs to reduce water use and otherwise increase water use efficiency. These plans are required to be updated on a five-year basis and submitted to TCEQ. Austin’s last DCP was approved by Council in 2016. The TCEQ accepted resubmission of the 2016 DCP to fulfill the required update in 2019.

Austin is also required by its 2007 agreement with the Lower Colorado River Authority (LCRA) to develop a DCP that is in alignment with the targets and goals of LCRA’s Drought Contingency Plan. The LCRA Board of Directors have recently approved various changes to their plan. City staff actively participated in LCRA’s process to update their DCP and have subsequently recommended updates to our plan that include changes in drought trigger levels that align with LCRA’s revisions.

In addition to providing input to LCRA’s DCP update process, City staff engaged in several activities aimed at soliciting input from Austin Water customers regarding potential changes to Austin’s DCP. Staff launched a Speak Up Austin page in November 2023 and held an online public meeting on

December 15, 2023, to discuss the current DCP and potential adjustments for 2024. The Austin community provided sentiments and comments through a Speak Up Austin online survey and an email survey sent to a random selection of our customers. In both surveys, Austin Water presented five potential additional restrictions for inclusion in an updated DCP. The responses and comments in each survey were very similar, and most respondents favored the proposed additional restrictions. These additional proposed restrictions in the survey included implementing a variance from watering restrictions for athletic fields rather than an exemption and, during an extreme drought, delaying requirements for landscaping in new buildings until a drought lessens, suspending approving new single-family pool permits, suspending approving new irrigation permits, and imposing mandatory water budgeting for all customers during extreme drought.

Most of the water use restrictions during the drought stages remain the same as in the current DCP. These include: mandatory no more than one day per week watering schedule throughout the Conservation Stage and Stages 1, 2 and 3; progressive reductions in allowable watering times as drought conditions increase, for automatic and hose-end irrigation systems, and other restrictions, such as water waste prohibition, ornamental fountains, and commercial conservation assessments.

Recommended Changes from the 2016 Drought Contingency Plan

Changes to the DCP include both changes to the drought trigger levels and changes to drought stage water use restrictions.

Changes to Drought Stages and Triggers

The proposed Austin DCP updates the specified triggers used to initiate implementation of specific water use reduction measures contained in the City's Water Conservation Code (§ 6-4 Austin City Code). These triggers are established based on three types of criteria:

- 1) demand based (how much water is consumed),
- 2) supply based (how much water is available) and
- 3) emergency based (man-made or natural disaster).

Historically the supply-based trigger has only been calculated as the combined storage in Lakes Travis and Buchanan. However, LCRA's recently updated DCP includes a new Stage 2 trigger based upon the volume of water flowing into the Highland Lakes from the Texas Colorado River basin upstream (known as the "inflow trigger") as summarized below.

- Addition of an inflow trigger for Stage 2 Regulations, in alignment with LCRA's new trigger
- Addition of a new drought stage (Stage 3 at 750,000 acre feet of combined storage) and the redesignation of Stage 4 and 5 (Emergency)
 - o Stage 3, triggered at a combined reservoir storage volume of 750,000 acre feet
 - o Stage 4, triggered at a combined reservoir storage volume of 600,000 acre feet
 - o Stage 5, triggered at the determination of the City Manager

A comparison of the current and proposed drought stage triggers is shown in the tables below:

Current Drought Stages		Updated Drought Stages		
Drought Stage	Supply Trigger (acre feet)*	Drought Stage	Supply Trigger (acre feet)*	Inflow Trigger
1	1,400,000	1	1,400,000	n/a
2	900,000	2	900,000	25th percentile of historic inflows**
3	600,000	3	750,000	n/a
4	Emergency	4	600,000	n/a
		5	Emergency	n/a

*Volume of combined storage in lakes Buchanan and Travis. Storage when full is approximately 2 million acre feet.

**On March 1 or July 1, combined storage in lakes Buchanan and Travis is below 1.1 million acre feet and the cumulative prior three months of inflows is less than the 25th percentile of historic inflows for the three-month periods.

Other Key Changes and Highlights

- In Stages 2, 3, and 4, the automatic exemption from watering restrictions for athletic fields would be replaced by an explicit variance-request process.
- In Stage 4, new irrigation restrictions as required by LCRA, restrictions on certain irrigation practices, temporary suspension of approval of new irrigation permits, and temporary suspension of single-family residential pool permits would be implemented.
- Addition of discretionary non-regulatory measures that could be undertaken at each drought stage by Austin Water and other City of Austin departments.
- All the referenced water use restrictions would apply to both residential and commercial water users.

The recommended changes to the Austin Drought Contingency Plan will become effective immediately after adoption by Council.