



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## Drought Update

**SALT LAKE CITY** (May 26, 2022) – As spring runoff dwindles, Utah begins its drying out period. Soil moisture is decaying faster than usual this water year, this could mean heightened fire danger this summer. According to the [U.S. Drought Monitor](#), 99% of the state is in the second and third-worst categories: severe and extreme drought.

“As we approach Memorial Day weekend, I urge residents to use good [Fire Sense](#) and check for impacts, such as [boat ramp closures](#), before heading out to state parks,” said Brian Steed, executive director of the Department of Natural Resources. “When recreating at Utah’s beautiful reservoirs, remember, our reservoirs aren’t just for fun, they store our water and help get us through drought.”

### **At-a-glance highlights:**

- Great Salt Lake typically drops a little over 2 feet each summer. With a current elevation of 4190.8, this would mean the lake could hit a new historic low.
- Black bears are the only species of bear in Utah, and they live and roam across much of the state. The likelihood of conflicts with bears often increases during drought years when a bear’s normal food supply is decreased, leading them to seek alternate food sources. Utahns should be extra vigilant this year to take measures to reduce conflicts with bears.
- Statewide snow water equivalent (SWE), or how much water would be in the snowpack if it melted, peaked at 12 inches. This is 75% of the typical median peak of 16 inches for our water year.
- Eighteen of Utah’s largest 45 reservoirs are below 55% of available capacity. Overall statewide storage is 63% of capacity. This time last year, reservoirs were about 67% of capacity.
- Of the 98 measured streams, 47 are flowing below normal despite spring runoff. Six streams are flowing at record low conditions. Due to low snowpack, streamflows are expected to be lower than normal. This means our reservoirs won’t fill as they normally would.



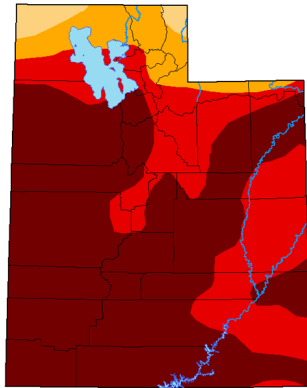
- Current drought conditions have created drier fuels which in turn increase the chance of a wildfire starts. To date, there have been 147 wildfires in the state of Utah. Out of the 147 wildfires, this year 124 of them have been human-caused.
- According to the latest information released by the U.S. Drought Monitor, drought conditions continue to plague the state with 99.86% of the state experiencing “severe” or “extreme” drought conditions. Severe and extreme drought conditions are the Drought Monitor’s second and third most serious categories.

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## FULL REPORT

U.S. Drought Monitor  
Utah

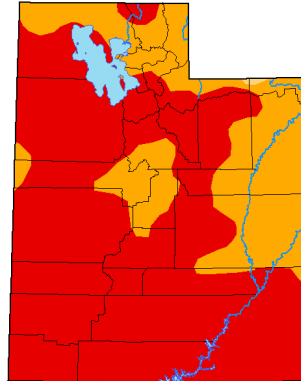
May 25, 2021



2021

U.S. Drought Monitor  
Utah

May 24, 2022  
(Released Thursday, May 26, 2022)  
Valid 8 a.m. EDT



2022

### Intensity:

- None
- D0 Abnormally Dry
- D1 Moderate Drought
- D2 Severe Drought
- D3 Extreme 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>

### Author:

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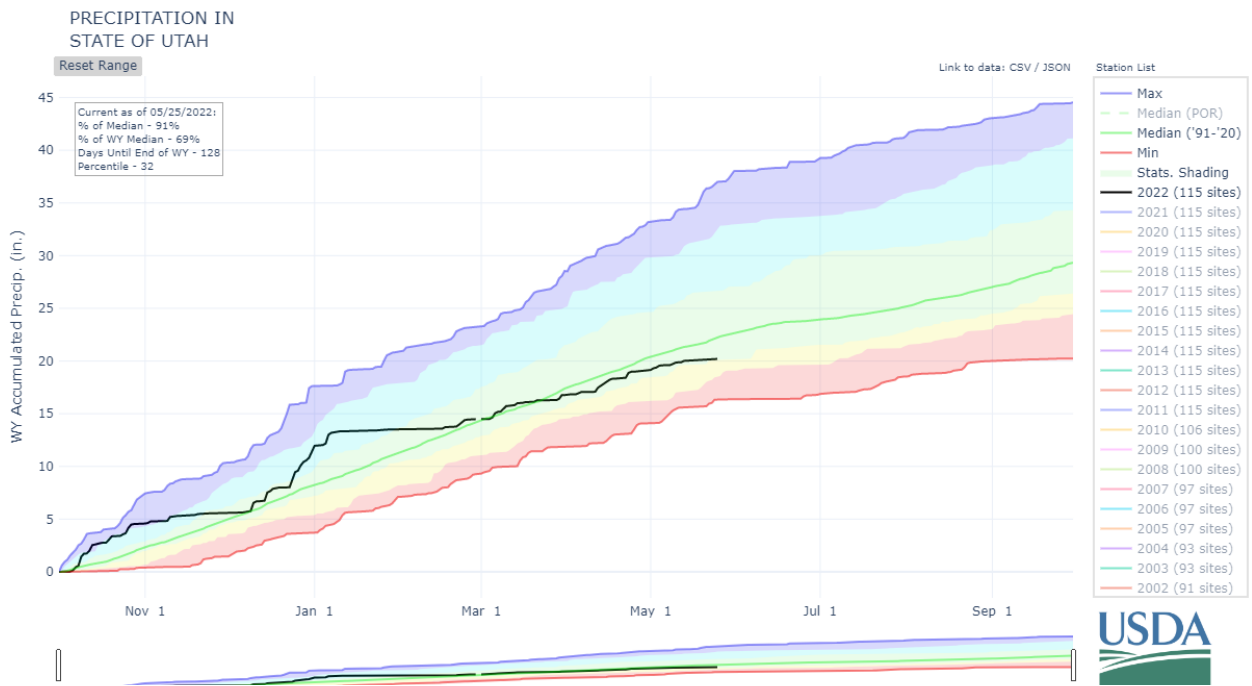


[droughtmonitor.unl.edu](https://droughtmonitor.unl.edu)

*Graphic compares Utah's current drought situation to 2021. Last year at this time 62.18% was in exceptional drought. Currently, no part of the state is in exceptional drought (the worst category), but reservoir storage has dropped significantly due to the extended drought. Currently, 71.87% of the state is in extreme drought.*

## Precipitation and soil moisture

- Soil moisture is decaying faster than usual this water year, this could mean increased fire danger this summer.
- Spring runoff is nearly over, with the streamflow levels declining as snowpack melts. Snowpack was 25% below average and did not refill our reservoirs.



*Total Precipitation is below typical for this time of year.*

## **Temperature and Evaporation**

- Temperatures over the last two weeks were slightly cooler in the northern portion of the state and slightly warmer in the southern portion.
- Evaporation followed roughly the same pattern as temperature with above-average evaporation in the southern half of the state and average evaporation in the north/northwest of the state.

## **Streamflows**

- Forty-seven of Utah's 98 streams reporting data are flowing below normal.
- Due to low snowpack, streamflows are expected to be lower than normal. This means our reservoirs won't fill as they normally would.
- Six streams had their seven-day average flow reach record low.
- Daily flow from 28 headwater streams is flowing below the median for this time of year. Early snowmelt brought headwater streamflow up significantly. Streamflow has begun to decline signaling that the snowpack is mostly melted.

## **Reservoir and Lake Levels**

- Major reservoirs statewide are at 63% capacity. Reservoirs have begun to receive their spring inflow. Snowpack is needed to refill the reservoirs in the spring prior to the higher use summer months.
- Eighteen of Utah's 45 reservoirs are below 55% of available capacity.
- After dropping to 4190.2 feet, a new record low, on Oct. 18, winter storms helped refill Great Salt Lake and the elevation rose to 4191.1. Levels have remained nearly unchanged

for the last month. Inflow is needed to overcome the typical seasonal summer drop of about 2.3 feet. So far the lake has only risen about 1 foot and has likely peaked. With the seasonal summer drop of about 2.3 feet, the lake is likely to hit a new historic low this summer. The current elevation of Great Salt Lake is 4190.8.

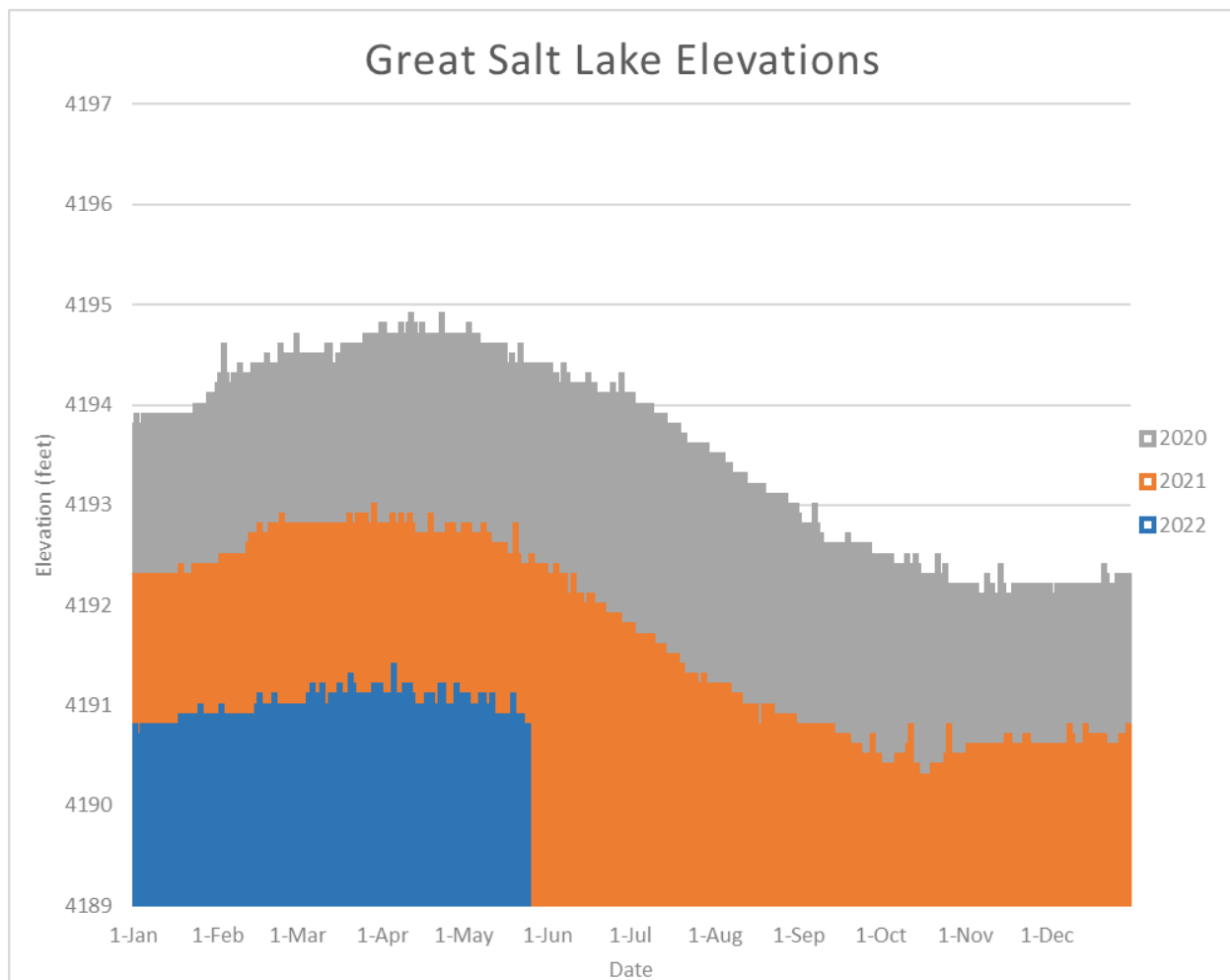
### **Wildlife Impacts**

- Black bears are the only species of bear in Utah, and they live and roam across much of the state. The likelihood of conflicts with bears often increases during drought years when a bear's normal food supply is decreased, leading them to seek alternate food sources.
- Bears typically come out of hibernation in March or April, but similar to last year, they emerged a little earlier than usual, due to the low snow conditions and early warm weather.
- Drought conditions impact plants and other root-like vegetation, which make up 90% of a black bear's diet, so Utah Division of Wildlife Resources biologists think bears may be looking for alternate food sources in other areas this year. As a result, DWR is anticipating a possible increase in incidents this year of bears getting into people's garbage and scavenging for food.
- [Visit the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources website](#) for safety tips and more information to reduce conflicts with bears.

### **Wildfire Risks**

- To date, Utah has seen 147 wildfires since January 1st with 124 of them classified as human-caused.
- According to the [National 7 Day Fire Potential](#), the seven day outlook puts Southern Utah at moderate risk for wildfire. The rest of the state remains categorized as low risk.
- The [National Interagency Fire Center Predictive Services](#) projects in areas where drought is still prevalent in the higher terrain of Utah, fire potential is likely to increase to above normal if the snow melts off early by May and June. After weak storms move through the region in early May, drier and warmer conditions are expected later in the month. Increased fire potential is expected through May and June over the higher terrain of southern Utah into the Arizona Strip that have continued to be plagued by drought and well below normal snowpack. Snow is expected to rapidly melt from mid-May through June, which will lead to a more rapid and slightly early start to fire season in the higher terrain further north. Green-up is well underway over the southern two thirds of the Great Basin and will increase farther north through May.

Fuel moisture is below normal across the southern half of the Great Basin due to warmer and drier weather. Overall fire activity remains low across the Great Basin. A few small fires occur at times, but they have been easily extinguished. Fire activity is expected to remain low through early May but is expected to increase from mid to late May through June from south to north. This would be considered a normal progression at the onset of fire season. However, due to significant warming from mid to late May, fire activity may increase rapidly in the higher terrain over the southern half of the Great Basin.



*Graph compares elevations of the Great Salt Lake for the last three years.*

