



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Media Contacts

Michael Sanchez
Utah Division of Water Resources
385-226-8967
masanchez@utah.gov

Drought Update

SALT LAKE CITY (June 9, 2022) – Conditions in Utah are getting hotter and drier. According to the [U.S. Drought Monitor](#), 5.71% of the state is now in exceptional drought (the worst category) and 99.88% of the state in severe drought. Southern Utah saw little to no precipitation in May 2022, with Cedar City and St. George tying their records for the driest May on record in 127 years.

“Now that portions of the state have moved into ‘exceptional drought,’ water conservation becomes even more critical,” said Brian Steed, executive director of the Department of Natural Resources. “Residents looking to stretch our water supply can find rebates and conservation tips at SlowtheFlow.org”

At-a-glance highlights:

- Crop yields and feed availability for livestock are expected to be scarce. Farmers and ranchers are already making contingency plans and working hard to make sure animals are fed and watered and they can continue to deliver food to the grocery stores.
- Current drought conditions have created drier fuels which in turn increase the chance of wildfire starts. To date, there have been 183 wildfires in the state of Utah. Out of the 183 wildfires, this year 152 of them have been human-caused.
- Due to extremely dry conditions, many state parks are currently under fire restrictions. Fire restrictions limit where visitors can have campfires as well as what types of fires or camping appliances may be used. Fire restrictions for each park are updated regularly and are listed [here](#).
- Drought impacts [fish](#) by reducing the amount of water available in lakes, reservoirs and streams throughout the state. There are a few simple changes anglers can make to decrease stress to fish while you are out enjoying an afternoon of fishing during drought conditions.
- Harmful algal bloom (HAB) monitoring conducted by Zion National Park has detected the presence of HABs in the Virgin River Watershed.



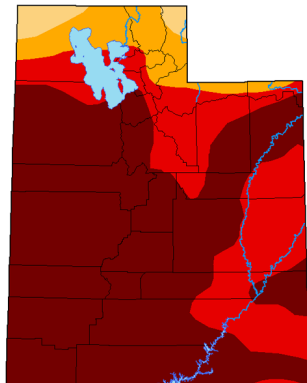
- Thirteen of Utah's largest 45 reservoirs are below 55% of available capacity. Overall statewide storage is 63% of capacity. This is about where reservoirs were this time last year.
- Of the 99 measured streams, 61 are flowing below normal despite spring runoff. **Four streams are flowing at record 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.
- 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.
- According to the latest information released by the U.S. Drought Monitor, drought conditions continue to plague the state with 5.71% of the state now in exceptional drought (the worst category) and 99.88% 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.

###

FULL REPORT

U.S. Drought Monitor
Utah

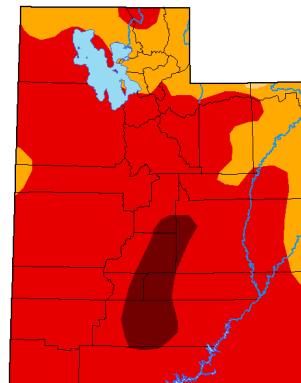
June 8, 2021



2021

U.S. Drought Monitor
Utah

June 7, 2022
(Released Thursday, Jun. 9, 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:

Brad Pugh
CPC/NOAA



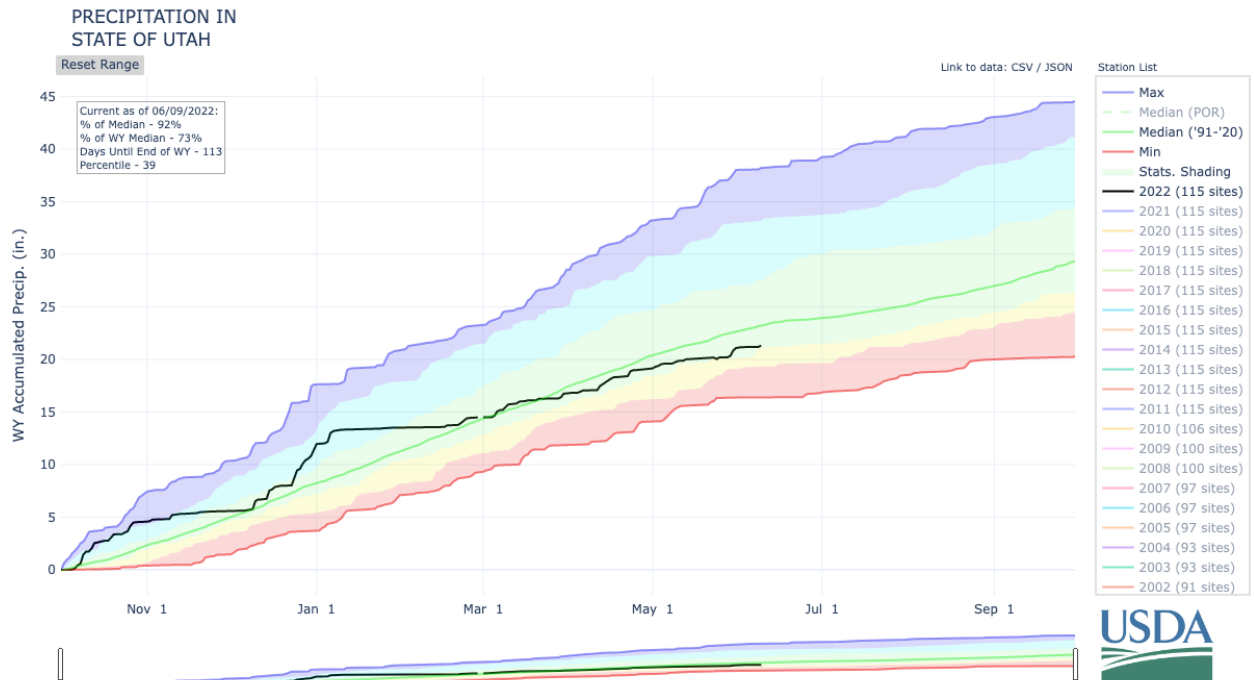
droughtmonitor.unl.edu

Graphic compares Utah's current drought situation to 2021. Exceptional drought (the worst category) covers 5.71% of the state is now. Last year at this time 63.97% was in exceptional drought.

Precipitation and soil moisture

- Southern Utah saw little to no precipitation in May 2022, with Cedar City and St. George tying their records for the driest May on record.
- Precipitation has been lower than average. This is shaping up to be the 19th driest spring on record in approximately 125 years of data

- Soil moisture is decaying faster than usual this water year, this could mean increased fire danger this summer.
- Spring runoff is nearly over causing streamflow levels to decline. Snowpack was 25% below average and runoff is not enough to refill our reservoirs.



Total Precipitation is below typical for this time of year.

Temperature and Evaporation

- Temperatures over the last two weeks were 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

- Sixty-one of Utah's 99 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.
- Four 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 is declining signaling that the snowpack is mostly melted.

Reservoir and Lake Levels

- Major reservoirs statewide are at 63% capacity. Reservoirs have received much of their spring inflow. Spring runoff (from melting snow) is needed to refill the reservoirs in the spring prior to the higher use summer months.
- Thirteen 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.

Department of Environmental Quality

- Harmful algal bloom (HAB) monitoring conducted by Zion National Park has detected the presence of HABs in the Virgin River Watershed. The North Fork of the Virgin River including "the Narrows," and North Creek are under Warning Advisory, and La Verkin Creek is under a Health Watch. Primary contact recreation (swimming and submerging the head), should be avoided, pets should be kept away, and water should not be ingested anywhere in the park.

Agricultural Impacts

- Water and canal companies across the state have already made significant cuts in water allotments for farmers and ranchers in anticipation of the drought conditions this summer. Farmers and ranchers will be cut back on water that is available to them and will have to cut back on the number of crops/acres they are able to plant.
- It is expected that crop yields and feed availability for livestock will be scarce. Farmers and ranchers in our state are already making contingency plans and working hard to make sure animals are fed and water and they can continue to get food to the grocery stores.
- Agricultural water optimization continues to be a priority for the Utah Department of Agriculture and Food as well as Utah's farmers and ranchers. Applications for the next round of water optimization funding will be accepted starting July 1, 2022. For more information on the Agricultural Water Optimization Program, visit <https://ag.utah.gov/farmers/conservation-division/water-optimization-program/>

State Parks

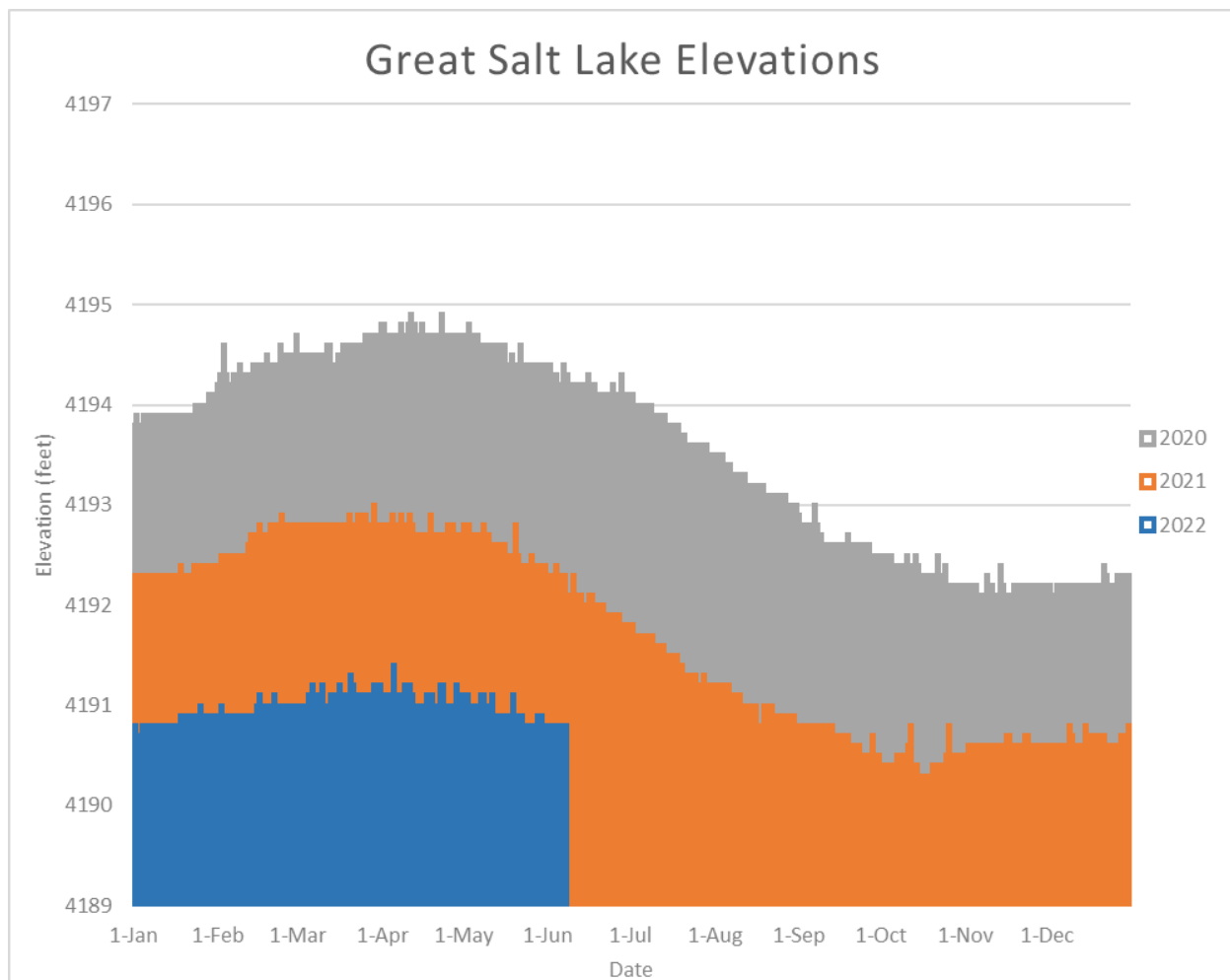
- Many Utah state parks are experiencing extreme lows in water levels. When reservoirs reach these levels, some parks are forced to close their boat launch ramps in order to help better protect visitors and their property. Several boat ramps at state parks across Utah are already closed or under advisory. Boat ramp conditions are updated regularly, and visitors can plan ahead by checking boat ramp conditions at: <https://stateparks.utah.gov/activities/boating/>
- Due to extremely dry conditions, many state parks are currently under fire restrictions. Fire restrictions limit where visitors can have campfires as well as what types of fires or camping appliances may be used. Fire restrictions for each park are updated regularly and are listed here: <https://stateparks.utah.gov/resources/fire-restrictions/>

Wildlife Impacts

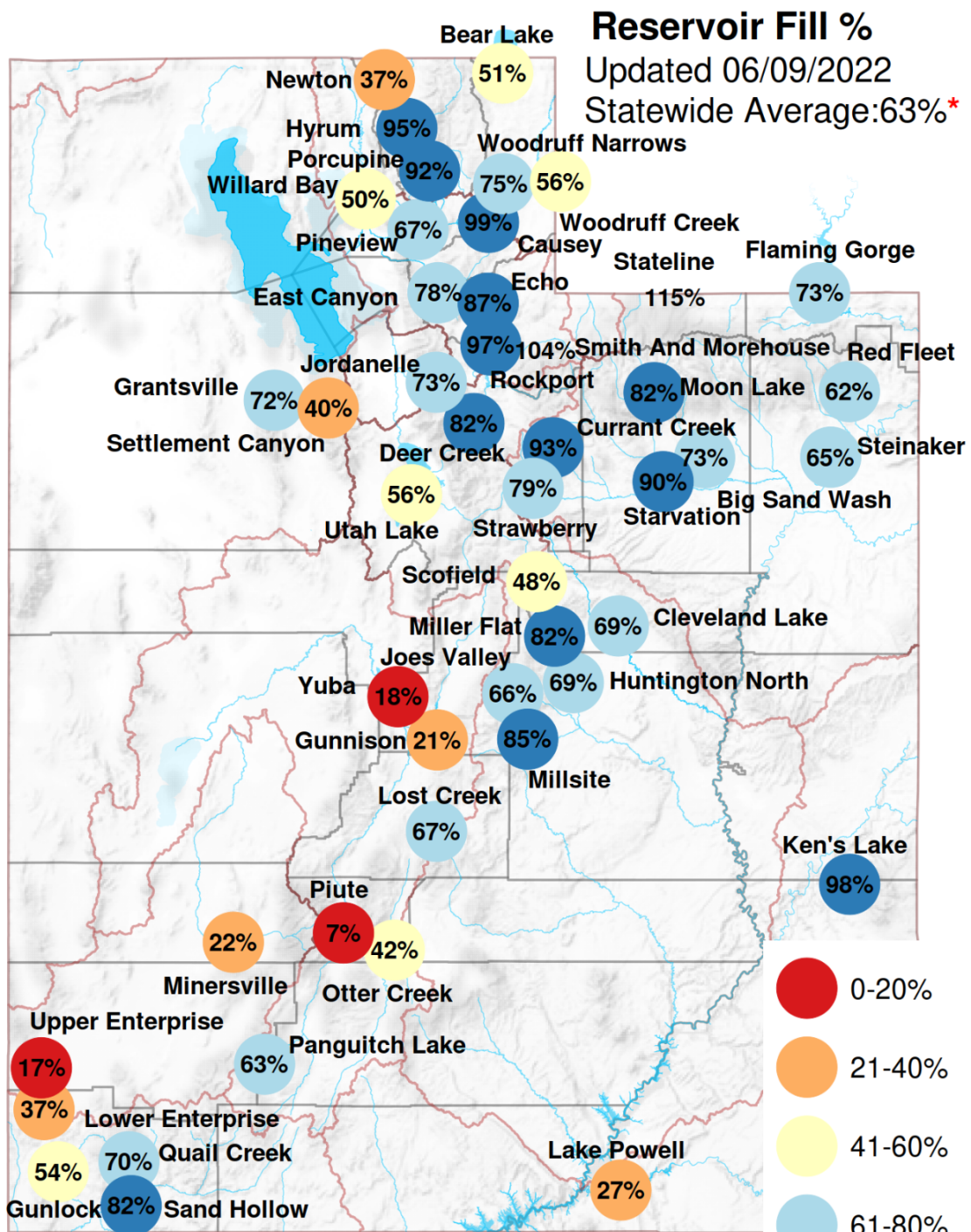
- Drought impacts fish by reducing the amount of water available in lakes, reservoirs and streams throughout the state. A smaller amount of water will heat up more quickly and warmer water contains less oxygen. The combination of high temperatures and low oxygen can stress fish, causing poor growth and disease. Fish can also die when temperatures are too warm or the oxygen levels get too low. Trout in low-elevation waterbodies have the greatest likelihood of being impacted by the drought this year, but low water levels and high water temperatures can affect all fish species.
- If you enjoy fishing from a boat, you should try to visit your favorite lakes and reservoirs as soon — and as often — as you possibly can. Similar to last year, water levels at some reservoirs and lakes could be so low by July that boat ramps may not be functional. Before you plan a boating trip, be sure to check for updates on each waterbody to see if the ramps are open, especially later in the summer.
- Similar to last year, the DWR is again strategically determining where fish will be stocked this year, in order to either reduce or eliminate fish from being stocked into waterbodies where biologists think that summer fish kills are possible due to low water. The fish that were scheduled to be stocked into drought-impacted lakes and reservoirs will be relocated and stocked into other waterbodies around the state that won't have low water levels.
- If you are fishing in a lake or reservoir and want to give the fish you catch and release a better chance of survival during the drought, you should consider fishing in the mornings or evenings when temperatures are cooler. Another way to help fish is to pick a fishing spot that has deeper, cooler water, so you can release any caught fish into an area where they are more likely to survive.
- [Visit the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources website for more tips](#) on how to decrease impacts to fish while fishing during a drought.

Wildfire Risks

- To date, Utah has seen 183 wildfires since January 1st with 152 of them classified as human-caused that have burned a total of 926 acres. Ten fires have been naturally caused this season.
- The [National 7 Day Fire Potential Outlook](#) categorizes Southern Utah at moderate risk with the rest of the state falling in the little to low risk category. However, later in the week Eastern Utah and the Uintah Basin will move to the moderate risk category heading into the weekend.
- According to the [Great Basin Coordination Center Predictive Services](#), small fires will increase over the northern half of the Great Basin later in June, with above normal fire potential expected in the far south. By July, the higher terrain of the Sierra Front into northern Utah will likely see above-normal fire potential due to the drought once the snow melts and fuels cure.



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



Data Sources: water.utah.gov/reservoirlevels

*State average excludes Lake Powell & Flaming Gorge to better represent the state's water supply.

Total capacity including these is 47%