

Phase I Water Shortage Restrictions

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What are the new water restrictions for the Southwest Florida Water Management District?

A: The District's Phase I water shortage restrictions are in effect Dec. 1, 2025, through July 1, 2026, except where stricter measures have been imposed by local governments. The following restrictions apply to all of Citrus, DeSoto, Hardee, Hernando, Hillsborough, Manatee, Pasco, Pinellas, Polk, Sarasota and Sumter counties; portions of Charlotte, Highlands and Lake counties; the City of Dunnellon and The Villages in Marion County; and the portion of Gasparilla Island in Lee County.

Q: Why did the District declare a Phase I Water Shortage?

A: The District received lower than normal rainfall during its summer rainy season (June-September) and currently has a 13-inch rainfall deficit compared to the historical average 12-month total. In addition, water levels in the District's water resources, such as aquifers, rivers and lakes, are declining due to lack of rain during the rainy season and are anticipated to decline further as the dry season progresses.

Q: When am I allowed to water my lawn?

A: The Phase I Water Shortage Order does not change allowable watering schedules, however it does prohibit "wasteful and unnecessary" water use, such as allowing water to flow from an unattended hose. Twice-per-week lawn watering schedules remain in effect except where stricter measures have been imposed by local governments.

Local governments maintaining once-per-week watering by local ordinance include Citrus, Hernando, Pasco and Sarasota counties and the cities of Davenport, Dunedin, Haines City, Tampa and Venice. Residents should check with their city or county for allowable days and times as many have different schedules or stricter hours in effect.

Q: Why does the District restrict lawn watering versus other water uses?

A: Outdoor water use accounts for more than 50 percent of water consumed by households and residents should know and follow their local watering restrictions. Limiting lawn watering to one day per week can greatly reduce the strain on public water supply systems.

In addition, you can reduce your outdoor water consumption by checking your irrigation system to ensure it's working properly. This means testing and repairing broken pipes and leaks and fixing damaged or tilted sprinkler heads. You should also check your irrigation timer to ensure the settings are correct and the rain sensor is working properly

in accordance with state law. For more water conserving tips, visit the District's website at WaterMatters.org/Water101.

Q: How can I conserve water?

A: There are many ways to conserve water both indoors and outdoors. Conserving water can also help save money on your utility bills. The District's [Water 101 for Homeowners](#) website has simple irrigation and water saving tips for indoors and outdoors.

Q: What is the District doing to ensure that we have water for both now and in the future?

A: The District is required by state law to develop a [Regional Water Supply Plan](#) every five years that assesses the projected population and water demands as well as the potential sources of water and funding to meet those demands over a 20-year period. The District's Regional Water Supply Plan provides a framework for future water management decisions and demonstrates how water demands can be met through a combination of alternative water sources, traditional groundwater, and water conservation measures.

Q: What's being done to ensure we have enough water with all this population growth?

A: Despite significant population growth over the last 40 years, the District has been able to reduce both groundwater withdrawals and total water use due to water conservation efforts, and the development of alternative water supplies and reclaimed water projects. The District has worked closely with the regional water supply authorities, such as Tampa Bay Water, over the last several decades to reduce the region's reliance on traditional groundwater supplies by developing alternative water supplies such as the regional reservoir and desalination plant. Looking to the future, the District has prioritized more than **\$600 million** in cooperative funding for alternative water supply projects in Tampa Bay, Polk County and our southern region counties to meet the projected needs of the growing population over the next 20 years.

Q: Why should we have to conserve even more water if the District keeps approving new permits for construction?

A: We should always conserve water because it is a limited resource. Conservation means not being wasteful.

Land-use decisions regarding growth and community development are made by local city and county governments. District permitting involving new developments is limited to stormwater management to reduce the risks of new development causing flooding or

degrading the quality of the stormwater runoff and to protect the functions of the wetlands in the watershed.

In some cases, a development also wants to create its own water utility rather than accepting water from an existing government or private utility. In these cases, the development will need a water use permit from the District.

A water use permit grants the holder the authorization to withdraw specific quantities of water for a limited period of time under certain conditions.

To get a water use permit, the applicant must demonstrate an actual need for the water and that the withdrawal will not harm the environment or affect existing legal users.

Q: Why should I conserve water when I see golf courses or farmers watering?

A: Most golf courses and farmers have water use permits that have conservation measures built into the permit. For instance, determining how much water a golf course or a farmer needs is based on the acreage being irrigated, the type of irrigation system being used, the type of turf or crop being irrigated and the types of on-site soils. In addition to demonstrating this need for a particular quantity, the permit holder must also demonstrate that the water withdrawal will not harm the environment or affect existing legal users.

During dry conditions, water shortage orders may put additional restrictions on a permit holder's water usage in the same way that additional restrictions are put on residences and businesses.

Q: Why does the District continue to issue water use permits when there are dry conditions?

A: Dry conditions are short-term, temporary problems. Water use permits are longer term authorizations to withdraw water based on average conditions. We don't base the issuance of a water use permit on a drought any more than we would base it on a flooding event such as a hurricane.

The District addresses dry conditions through water shortage actions, which are temporary measures that restrict water use among the various types of permit holders during the course of the dry conditions.

Q: Why doesn't region use more desalination?

A: While we do have a major desalination plant in the Tampa Bay area, desal is the most costly alternative water supply option to operate.

Q: Why does the District continue to issue bottled water permits?

A: It's also important to remember each day we use more than a billion gallons of water in our 16-county district. Bottled water withdrawals are less than 1% of the overall water use. Whereas household irrigation accounts for about 17% of overall water use in our district. That means residents are using 17 times more water for lawns and landscapes than the combined bottled water permits issued to companies.