

Memorandum

To: Town Council
From: Todd Fessenden
Date: May 12, 2026
Re: Declaration of Stage 2 – Watch Conditions of Town of Erie Drought and Water Supply Shortage Plan



Agenda Item: 2026-319

This memo provides background information as well as staff recommendations for Council to declare Stage 2 “Watch” of Erie’s Drought and Water Supply Shortage Plan.

Bottom Line Up Front (BLUF)

Staff recommends the Town of Erie declare **Stage 2 (Watch)** conditions under the Drought and Water Supply Shortage Plan (Plan). While the current water shortage index may not independently trigger a Stage 2 declaration, observed conditions including a historically low snowpack, expected high irrigation demand, as well as regional conditions and actions warrant the Stage 2 declaration.

Declaring Stage 2 for the Town of Erie will formalize the current, voluntary two-day-per-week watering schedule, align messaging with regional partners and position Erie to responsibly steward water as a natural resource as well as work proactively to manage system resiliency and demand through the 2026 irrigation season

Staff have worked on proactive communication and voluntary conservation efforts as the conditions have remained dry since the water shortage emergency at the end of March. A multi-departmental team was created to ensure coordinated monitoring, response actions, and messaging as we move through the irrigation season and beyond. This group will continue to regularly provide recommendations and background information to Council and residents as necessary.

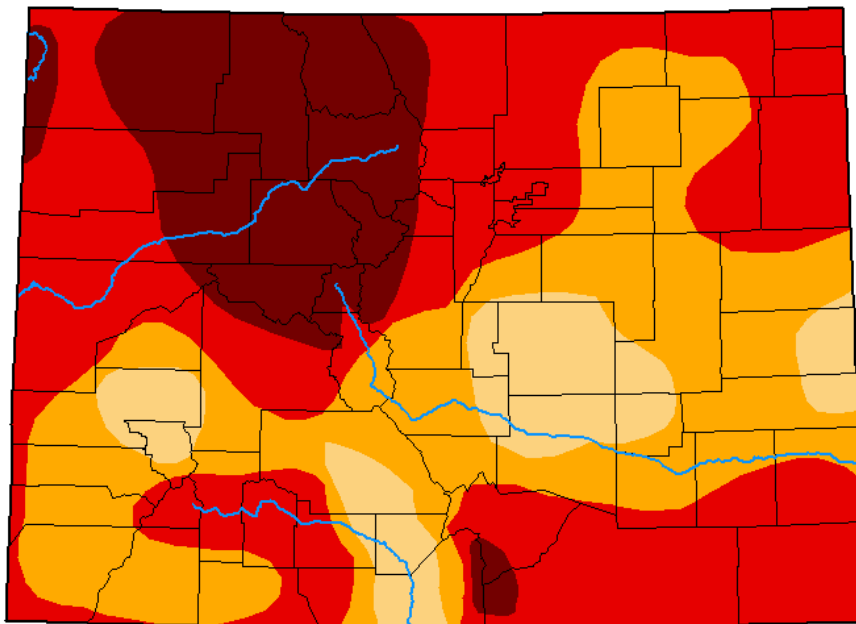
The Plan is designed to be flexible to adapt to the needs of the Town. The water shortage index and associated indicators serve as guidelines rather than prescriptive triggers, and staff may recommend a stage declaration based on professional judgement, knowledge, and current conditions. The final authority of a drought stage rests with Erie’s Town Council.

Facts:

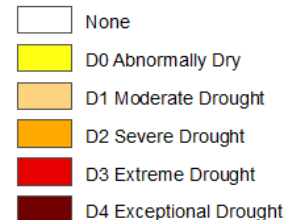
- March was the hottest and driest March on record since record keeping began in Colorado.
- The 2025/2026 was very warm and dry across the board, setting records for low precipitation totals and high temperatures.
- 89% of Colorado is currently in D2 (Severe Drought) drought conditions.
- 58% of Colorado is currently in D3 (Extreme Drought) drought conditions

U.S. Drought Monitor Colorado

April 28, 2026
(Released Thursday, Apr. 30, 2026)
Valid 8 a.m. EDT



Intensity:



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>

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U.S. Department of Agriculture



droughtmonitor.unl.edu

Rationale for Stage 2 Declaration

Erie's water rights portfolio is strong, and we have many systems and programs in place to help our users reduce their consumption. Erie's **Drought & Water Supply Shortage Plan** was designed specifically to handle variable conditions like this. That said, a few realities are worth highlighting:

- 1. Alignment with Current Operations:** The Town has implemented a voluntary 2-day-per-week watering schedule. Stage 2 will formalize this approach by aligning current practice with the appropriate Stage in the Plan. The Parks & Recreation Department has already committed to reducing their usage by 20% against the historical 5-year average which is called out and aligns with the Plan.
- 2. Alignment With Other Providers in the Region:** The 2-day-per-week voluntary restrictions put the Town in line with current best practices as well as many other water providers on the Front Range including: Denver, Aurora, Thornton, etc.
- 3. Warm and Dry Springs Drive Early Irrigation Demand:** Higher-than-average temperatures have resulted in earlier-than-normal and higher seasonal irrigation

demand. This demand will likely continue into the summer without a drastic change in weather pattern.

4. **Early Conservation is Far More Effective than Late Restrictions:** Erie's Drought Plan is built around staged response and early communication intentionally. If we wait until summer to react, the ability to meaningfully reduce peak demand is limited. Once irrigation timers are set, it's more difficult to change.

Town of Erie Drought Stages



Town Programming

The Town offers many water conservation and efficiency programs that are available to all users. These include:

- [Water Efficiency Rebates](#)
- [Slow the Flow Sprinkler Consultations](#)
- [Garden In A Box Kits](#)
- [Turf Replacement Rebate Program](#)