

BSEACD general manager declares Stage III Critical Drought

STAFF REPORT

HAYS COUNTY — The Barton Springs Edwards-Aquifer Conservation District (BSEACD) declared a Stage III Critical Drought on Oct. 20 for the first time since 2013. Permittees will need to meet new reductions in pumpage in November.

Lovelady Monitor Well passed below its critical drought trigger on Oct. 17, according to a news release. Only one of the district's two drought triggers, Lovelady Monitor Well and Barton Springs, need to be reached for a drought declaration to be made and must both rise above their drought triggers

to exit a drought period.

The state has received below-average rainfall every month this year except for February and August. May, June and July were the warmest on record for Austin.

Reducing water use is "critical" now, according to the district, as continued lack of rainfall paired with high pumping rates may result in water levels dropping to the extent that some wells go dry.

The BSEACD has already received reports of dry wells and flow from Barton Springs may eventually decrease to where ecological, recreational and aesthetic uses of Barton Springs would be damaged.

"We can't afford to underestimate the threat that the current drought poses and the need for everyone to do their part to conserve water," said Tim Loftus, general manager of BSEACD.

Requirements for a Stage III Critical Drought Declaration requires all district permittees to implement mandatory measures specified in their Use Drought Contingency Plans to meet monthly pumpage reduction requirements:

- 30% for Edwards Historical and Conditional Class A permittees
- 75% for Edwards Conditional Class B permittees

- 100% for Edwards Conditional Class C and Class D permittees

- 30% for Trinity and Alluvial/Austin Chalk Historical permittees

The press release stated that end-user customers (60,000+ existing groundwater users in the District) served by water utilities on groundwater wells must comply with their utility's water use restriction for this drought stage. Outdoor lawn irrigation and landscaping are now prohibited or severely restricted. Groundwater uses should also be limited for essential indoor demands to preserve health and safety, with minor allocation for

non-essential outdoor water use.

The BSEACD stated that permittees should refer to the monthly drought allocations listed in their User Drought Conservation Plan and Drought Target Charts.

A few ways permittees can conserve water are by planting native or drought-tolerant landscapes, mulching and composting. Permittees should also ensure their irrigation system is functioning at peak efficiency.

BSEACD stressed the importance of replacing leaking gaskets and hoses, which can help conserve water, and suggested installing a rainwater barrel

or rainwater harvesting system to reduce overall water use.

The district recommends that both exempt and permitted well owners follow these conservation tips. Look at the District's Well Owner Guide for additional information on groundwater wells.

For questions, contact BSEACD at 512-282-8441, or visit their office located at 1124 Regal Row in Austin from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. to review the district's management process, receive information about the drought or if you need assistance with other groundwater-related matters.