



STAFF REPORT

To: Summit County Council
From: Patrick Putt, Community Development Director
Date of Meeting: June 30, 2021
Type of Item: Work Session; Drought Period Outdoor Water Use Management
Process: Legislative

A work session is scheduled for Wednesday evening to discuss potential strategies for managing water use in Summit County during the current drought period. The U.S. Drought Monitor puts Utah in the category of “Extreme Drought.” Local reservoir levels demonstrate that Summit County is experiencing the effects of decreased precipitation over the past several years. Soil moisture levels are the driest in two decades. Approximately 40 year-round public water systems and 20-25 seasonal public water systems operate in Summit County—each with their own management operations. Delivering water to Summit County residents is a complex network--physically, administratively, and legally.

Among the immediate steps Council could elect to take to manage outdoor water use is to facilitate water-use reductions through the public systems. Collaborative County/water agency education, communication, and outreach are among the tools available. Council could also choose a more rigorous approach and adopt an emergency order establishing specific drought-period water restrictions, including but not limited to water prohibitions for non-essential turf and landscaping areas; maximum days of watering, permissible watering hours; and duration of watering.

Council may also consider directing staff to initiate immediate, and more rigorous, low-water use/xeriscape regulations and prohibitions/limitations on ornamental water landscape features and non-essential water impoundments. For example, the Snyderville Basin Development Code includes low-water use landscaping standards; however, the Code does not specifically limit maximum landscaping areas, turf and associated irrigation. The Snyderville Basin Development Code’s landscaping regulations also don’t generally apply to single-family residential properties. The Eastern Summit County Development Code has no specific landscaping regulations.

Staff will be reaching out to as many community stakeholders as possible to apprise them of this upcoming discussion. All of the aforementioned strategies will require the help and close cooperation with all affected County departments, water agencies, local homeowner associations, as well as the residents and public at large. Council discussion and direction is requested. Staff will return the follow-up steps at an appropriate upcoming meeting.