

EXTREME HEAT IN FORECAST

Drought continues to grow in region

Lake, aquifer levels in decline due to lack of rainfall

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How are water supplies doing?

We were supposed to get rain this week, and some of us did, but none of us seem to have anything to show for it.

For all the excitement of seeing wet spots on pavement where water finally fell from the sky in sporadic showers across Central Texas this week, Austin

continues to wither under one of the worst droughts in more than a decade — and the city's main weather station still hasn't recorded measurable rainfall since June 27.

Austin this week also was supposed to get a break from the triple-digit temperatures that have dominated the summer. But the 100-degree weather persisted Friday and is expected to recur throughout next week with only a slim chance of

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showers this weekend, according to the National Weather Service.

If that forecast holds, the ongoing statewide drought could worsen in the Austin metro area. The volume of water stored in lakes, creeks, rivers and aquifers continues to decrease each week. Local authorities already have enacted light restrictions on water use, but without rain tougher mandates are possible.

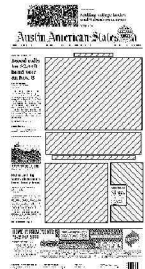
Drought will keep critical regional water sources, such as the watersheds that feed underground aquifers and the Highland Lakes west of Austin, from being adequately replenished.

According to the Lower Colorado River Authority, which manages the Highland Lakes for hydroelectricity and flood control, the volume of water stored in the reservoir lakes, Travis and Buchanan, at full would be about 2 million acre-feet. As of Friday, that number was down to about 1.1 million acre-feet and dropping. An acre-foot is the amount of water it takes to cover an acre a foot deep.

Lake Travis, a popular aquatic playground but also a critical water source for Central Texas, was considered filled to only 52% of capacity, the LCRA reported Friday. The water elevation at Mansfield Dam, which forms the lake, was about 645.2 feet above mean sea level, which is not only about 19 feet below the historical average for August but also about a foot lower than just seven days ago.

Underground water sources also remain vulnerable to the drought without rain seeping from the surface. In its drought report issued Thursday, the National Weather Service described falling well levels in the Edwards Aquifer, an underground layer of porous, water-bearing rock sitting beneath Central Texas.

"A continued lack of rain over the aquifer recharge zone during a high-usage period has contributed to falling aquifer levels through the spring and



early summer,” the report said. “The aquifer level at the J-17 index well has dropped nearly 10 feet over the past five weeks.”

The well level of about 630.7 feet last week was about 27.2 feet below the historical average for August, a low not reached since October 2014, according to the weather service. On Friday, the J-17 well was at 631.5 feet, the [Edwards Aquifer Authority](#) reported.

The weather service’s drought report also found creeks and streams to be slowing, adding that, “according to the USGS Current Water Data, seven-day flows remain below to much below normal across nearly all basins in South-Central Texas.”

What’s the drought situation now?

About 99% of the state is experiencing drought — from “abnormally dry,” the lowest level, to the most severe “exceptional drought,” according to the latest data released Thursday by the U.S. Drought Monitor, a joint effort of the National Drought Mitigation Center, the U.S. Agriculture Department and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Drought monitor data indicate that at least 23.9 million Texans live in drought-stricken areas and that 2022 to date is the state’s second-driest year in the past 128 years.

Exceptional drought — typified by crop loss and extreme sensitivity to fire danger — rose from 21.3% of Texas last week to about 29%. The worst drought conditions expanded in the Permian Basin in West Texas and in counties along and west of Interstate 35. Exceptional and extreme drought even widened into the Austin metro area: About 37.6% of Williamson County, 35% of Travis County, about 89% of Hays County and 62.5% of Caldwell County was in exceptional drought.

The two most severe levels of drought — extreme and exceptional drought — now cover 68.2% of Texas. The Texas Water Development Board, which finances water supply projects, notes that the state also is seeing the largest extent of extreme and exceptional drought

since December 2011, when such conditions covered about 69.4% of the state.

According to the crop and weather report from Texas A&M AgriLife released Tuesday, “hot, dry conditions continued throughout the district” that includes the Austin metro area and the Hill Country.

“There were a few scattered rain showers in some areas, but none provided meaningful rainfall,” the report said. “Pumping capacity for irrigation wells continued to decline in places.”

Although “crops in many of those fields were mature and yields will not be severely impacted,” the report noted, “corn and sorghum harvests neared completion with below-average yields reported.” In addition, “pastures continued to decline, and supplemental feeding of livestock continued. Livestock were being sold due to the short supply and cost of hay.”

Meanwhile, brush fires, fueled by acres of vegetation withering after weeks without rain, continue to plague Austin and Central Texas, Fire crews on Friday were battling a blaze in Bastrop County that had burned 700 acres and was only 10% contained.

The Pine Pond fire, north of Buescher State Park, began Thursday in the 500 block of Old Antioch Road about 11 miles east of Bastrop.

Homes were briefly evacuated along Turkey Trot Lane, Turkey Roost Lane, Old Antioch Road, Rolling Pines Drive, East Broken Tree Lane, Tall Pines Road and Agget Road.

By Friday morning, all residents were allowed to return home. No injuries had been reported, and no homes had been burned, county officials said. The cause of the fire has not yet been determined.

Of the 254 Texas counties, 223 of them, including Travis, Williamson, Hays, Bastrop and Caldwell counties, are under an outdoor burn ban.

What’s the forecast for Austin?

Austin on Friday logged its 62nd day of triple-digit temperatures for the year — the 11th such day for the month. The National Weather Service’s extended forecast calls for at least another week

of extreme heat, with maximum temperatures of 99 on Saturday, 100 on Sunday, 102 on Monday and Tuesday, 103 on Wednesday and 101 on Thursday.

Although the weekend has a 20%-30% chance of showers because of a storm system in the Gulf of Mexico, the rest of the extended forecast offers little hope for rain.

“At the moment, a weak disturbance is noted over the Gulf just south of Louisiana,” the weather service said in a bulletin Friday. “Model guidance is in agreement that this will attempt to orga-

nize some as it approaches the lower Texas coast” on Saturday.

Since Jan. 1, Austin has logged 12.13 inches of rain, a cumulative total that’s about 9.2 inches below the normal amount at this point in the calendar.

“You may be asking the following question: What about rain chances and possible rainfall amounts across the I-35 corridor, including the Austin and San Antonio metro areas?” forecasters said. “Well, rain chances are less than 10% for these areas from Monday through Thursday.”



John Ty plays Friday with Klaus, a friend’s dog, in some of the only remaining water in Onion Creek in Southeast Austin. Ty stands on a section of rocks that usually serves as a bridge for visitors to cross the creek when it is flowing. Austin’s main weather station hasn’t recorded measurable rainfall since June 27. AARON E. MARTINEZ/AMERICAN-STATESMAN



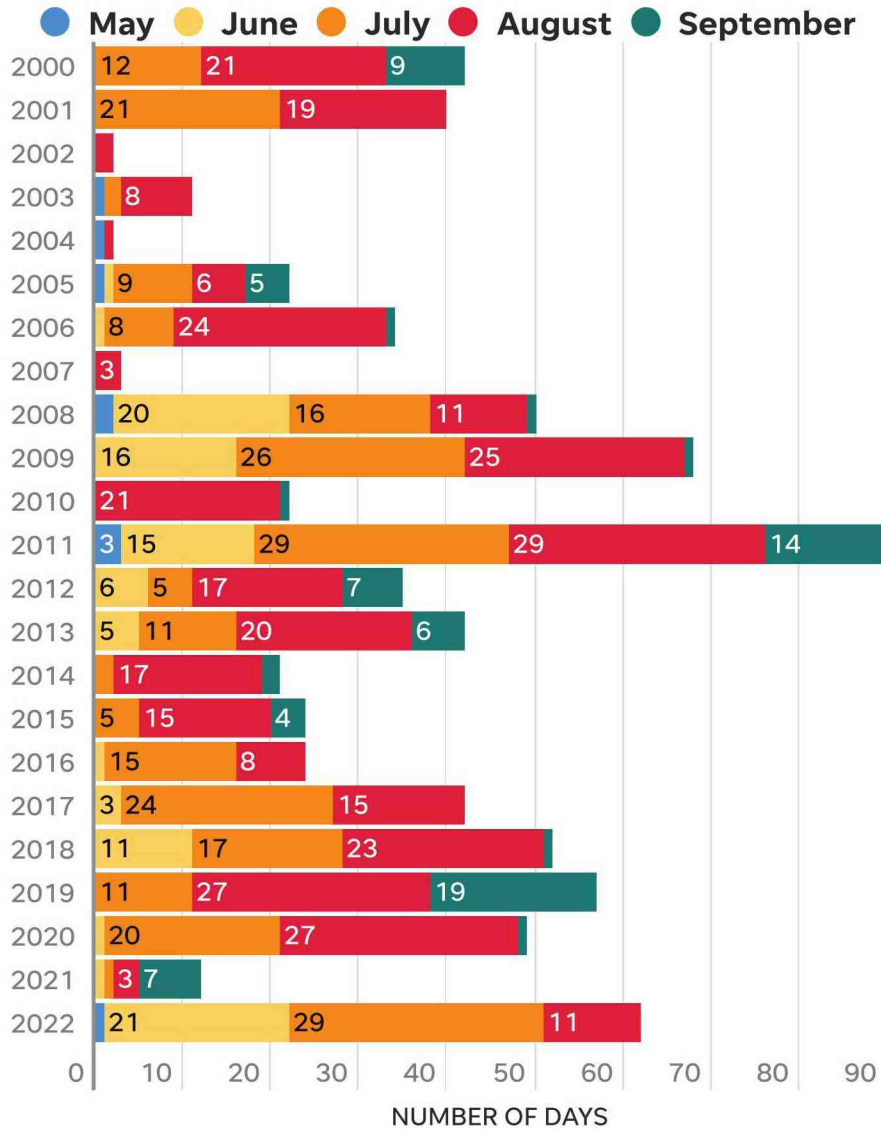
Some grass in Zilker Park is brown and crusty after several weeks without rain on Friday. By comparison, the lush green grass on the Great Lawn is irrigated by water from Lady Bird Lake. Since Jan. 1, Austin has logged just 12.13 inches of rain, about 9.2 inches below the normal at this time of year.

JAY JANNER/AMERICAN-STATESMAN



A section of Onion Creek sits mostly empty in Southeast Austin on Aug. 12. AARON E. MARTINEZ/AMERICAN-STATESMAN

100-degree days in Austin



Source: National Weather Service

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