

Idaho water officials issue emergency drought declaration for majority of state

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The Idaho Department of Water Resources on Friday issued an emergency drought declaration for all but 10 of the state's 44 counties.

Gary Spackman, the department's director, issued the declaration for all 34 counties south of the Salmon River, according to a news release. Gov. Brad Little approved it, meaning it will go into effect immediately for Ada and Canyon counties, and the 32 others.

Drought declarations allow for temporary changes in [water rights](#). Water users can apply for changes to where water can be diverted, where it can be used and the purpose of use. Officials said such declarations can also pave the way for federal aid in drought-stricken areas.

According to the U.S. Drought Monitor, all of Idaho south of the Salmon River is in moderate to [severe drought](#), with some small areas experiencing extreme drought. In the Panhandle, much of the state is considered abnormally dry with the exception of a small swath along the Idaho-Montana state line.

Department of Water Resources [officials](#) said snowpack in the affected counties was between 50% and 78% of normal at the start of April, and reservoirs in the southern part of the state were between 20% and 65% of capacity. The news release Friday said it's likely many reservoirs in the southern half of Idaho will not fill.

It's the second year of widespread drought in Idaho, exacerbated by an exceptionally hot summer in 2021 and consecutive springs with below-average precipitation. Some irrigation districts began warning earlier this month that water users must reduce [water usage](#) in order to avoid early irrigation shutoffs.

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