

Washington finally catches a (small) break from drought conditions

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If you've noticed a little bit more greenery outside these last few weeks,

your eyes haven't deceived you. Washington's drought conditions are improving ever so slightly.

And for what might seem like the first time yet this summer, the outlook for the months ahead seems to be improving.

Washington isn't out of the [danger zone](#) just yet, bear in mind. But with a bit of luck, conditions might not sink worse before the fall rains arrive.

As of Thursday, 40% of the state suffers from what the U.S. Drought Monitor calls a moderate drought. Less than 5% of the state is considered to be in [severe drought](#) and just over 1% of the state remains in extreme drought conditions. That marks the first time since June that the [dry conditions](#) have markedly improved across the state.

Climatologists and hydrologists warned of serious drought conditions earlier in the year after a poor snowpack in the mountains. The state declared a drought emergency in mid-April and early on farmers suffered from extremely low water supply, forcing some to shut off their spigots for a time. The dry landscape also pushed forestry experts to brace for wildfires.

But hydrologically speaking, Washington actually had a couple strokes of luck this year, said Karin Bumbaco, deputy state climatologist.

First was the [cold snap](#) this spring, which slowed the melting snowpack, holding on to the state's much-needed water reserves just a little longer. The scattered rains and unseasonably cool weather across much of western Washington also offered a bit of respite, Bumbaco said.

Now, much of Western Washington has emerged from the drought entirely and [stream flows](#) are showing an improvement, Bumbaco said. This is particularly relevant for the Olympic Peninsula, which was one of

the driest regions of the state last summer.

Portions out west do remain dry, though. According to state's drought officials, at least two [water systems](#) (one each in Clallam and Whatcom counties) have been forced this summer to bring water into their communities by truckload. Clallam County is likely still trucking in water, but Whatcom County no longer is, said Caroline Mellor, the drought lead within the Department of Ecology.

Washington's drought emergency remains in place, Mellor noted, and will not be lifted until conditions have fully improved.

Central Washington is in the worst shape with the drought cutting into crop production in the Yakima River Basin especially.

Climatologists had anticipated a dry summer. El Niño conditions last year and into the winter pushed warm, tropical air into the Pacific Northwest, diminishing the much-needed snowpack. That trend has been exacerbated by atmospheric warming caused by humans burning fossil fuels.

The El Niño trend is now finished, Bumbaco said, and the state can expect the opposite trend in the months ahead: La Niña.

That likely means a bit cooler weather with perhaps slightly above average precipitation, Bumbaco said.

La Niña isn't expected to arrive in Washington until much later in the year, however, and the potential for a hot, dry September and October remains. Seattle experienced [warmer temperatures](#) last week and east-flowing winds heightened wildfire danger, according to the U.S. Forest Service.

"We are moving in the right direction," Bumbaco said. "But we're not totally out of the woods yet."

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