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Drought leading to water restrictions

The French Broad River runs low Aug. 23 due to the lack of rain.

MIKE DIRKS/TIMES-NEWS

Hendersonville residents have been asked to voluntarily conserve water by taking shorter showers, limiting watering lawns and avoiding other non-essential uses of water.

By [Harrison Metzger](#)

Times-News Staff Writer

Ron Reid, superintendent of the Hendersonville Water Plant, checks the gauges that monitor how much water 62,000 residents use daily. Each day he also watches the flow of the Mills River drop as the drought blanketing the South squeezes nature's spigots to record-low flows. "Our water source is diminishing at a steady rate," Reid says. "The rainfall we have been getting has been running off instead of really soaking into the ground water." The situation prompted Hendersonville officials to call Thursday for customers to voluntarily conserve water by taking shorter showers, limiting watering lawns and avoiding other non-essential uses of water. The situation is more dire in Tryon, which on Thursday instituted mandatory water restrictions. The town began asking residents to voluntarily conserve water in mid-June. Tryon's water supply, Lake Lanier, got less rainfall since June this year than it did in the same period during the 2002 drought, when mandatory restrictions were last required.

The drought is also starting to have far reaching effects for the environment and recreation businesses. Every day of dry, hot weather drains the underground wellsprings of pure, cold mountain water upon which residents, businesses and fish and wildlife depend. And the outlook for relief doesn't look good. The National Climate Prediction Center predicts an "equal chance" of wet or drier-than-normal weather for the next three months, but the short-term forecast calls for only a 30 percent chance of showers through the weekend. Temperatures are, however, forecast to moderate from near 90 Saturday back into the 80s next week.

Forecasters say it would take soaking rains dumping 15 to 25 inches over days to weeks to alleviate the drought statewide. But barring tropical moisture, the months of September and October are usually fairly dry in the mountains. **Drought worsens**

The area has seen more prolonged droughts, but few have been as intense over the short term. Rainfall at Asheville Regional Airport is approaching a deficit of one foot for the year since the drought started in February. Flows of the Mills and other streams provide a good snapshot of how bad it is.

The U.S. Geological Survey tracks stream flows in cubic feet per second using automated river gauges and decades of

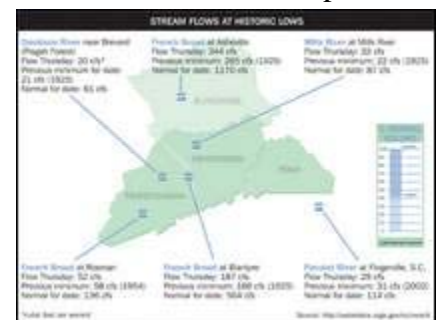


Illustration by Knox Crowell / Times-News

data records. On Thursday, the Mills River was flowing at 31 cfs, about a third its normal flow of 87 cfs for the date based on 75 years of records.

Things are worse on the Davidson River in Transylvania County, where Thursday's low flow of 20 cfs eclipsed the old record low of 21 set back in 1925. The French Broad at Blantyre near the Henderson County line was approaching its 1925 record low of 166 cfs. Upstream at Rosman, the big river was flowing at 54 cfs, below the previous record low of 58 set in 1954. Hendersonville's drinking water treatment plant on the Mills River can treat 12 million gallons of water per day, but has not approached that capacity. The city is pumping about 7.5 million gallons daily from the Mills River and is buying another million gallons or so daily from Asheville's nearby water treatment plant to meet average daily usage of 8.5 million gallons, says Reid, the plant superintendent. The city is buying extra water from Asheville as it prepares to renovate its plant while cutting back on drawing water from two small reservoirs in Pisgah National Forest to leave water in the streams for fish and wildlife. Demand for Hendersonville's water has increased since July, when more frequent rain showers and cloud cover helped cut down on watering, said Lee Smith, Hendersonville utility director. **Tryon to enforce rules**

RAINFALL DEFICIT			
Month	Actual	Normal	Departure
JAN	3.35	4.06	-.71
FEB	1.45	3.83	-2.38
MAR	4.29	4.59	-.30
APR	1.77	3.50	-1.73
MAY	.96*	4.42	-3.46
JUN	2.91	4.38	-1.47
JUL	4.85	3.87	+.98
AUG (to date)	.75	3.18	-2.43
YTD	20.33	31.83	-11.5

*record monthly minimum

If the drought continues, the city would follow its water conservation ordinance, which requires successive stages of mandatory restrictions, as Tryon has done. By plugging leaks in its water system Tryon was able to cut the total amount of water it treats from 883,333 during the last major drought -- in June 2002 -- to just under 500,000 gallons daily this June, a 43.5 percent reduction. The town's water supply would be in much worse shape if not for the water line repairs, Water Superintendent Betty Jones said. The town is awaiting final approval from the state on a renovation of its treatment plant, which will treat 500,000 gallons of water from mountain sources in addition to water from Lake Lanier. Construction is set to start in January. Violation of the town's mandatory conservation rules is a misdemeanor. Willful disregard of the rules could result in water service being temporarily disconnected. **Rules and restrictions**

Rules for stage 1 (voluntary) water conservation in place in Hendersonville:

1. Limit car washing to a minimum.
2. Limit lawn and garden watering to that which is necessary for plants to survive.
3. Do not wash down outside areas such as sidewalks, patios, parking lots, service bays, aprons, etc.
4. Do not leave faucets running while shaving or rinsing dishes.
5. Water shrubbery to the minimum required, reusing household water when possible.
6. Limit use of clothes washers and dishwashers, and when used, operate fully loaded.
7. Use showers for bathing rather than bathtub and limit showers to no more than four minutes.

8. Limit flushing of toilets by multiple usage.

9. Use of disposable and biodegradable dishes if possible.

10. The use of flow restrictive and water saving devices is encouraged.

11. Limit hours of operation of water-cooled air conditioners.

12. All residents, businesses and institutions are asked to temporarily delay new landscape work until the water shortage has ended.

Rules for stage II (mandatory) water restrictions in place in Tryon:

1. Do not water lawns, grass, shrubbery, trees, flowers and vegetable gardens except by hand held hose or container or drip irrigation system.

2. Do not fill newly constructed swimming and/or wading pools or refill swimming and/or wading pools which have been drained.

3. Do not wash automobiles, trucks, trailers, boats, airplanes, or any other type of mobile equipment, including commercial washing.

4. Do not wash outside areas such as streets, driveways, service station aprons, parking lots, office buildings, exteriors of existing or newly constructed homes or apartments, sidewalks or patios, or to use water for similar purposes.

5. Do not use water from public or private fire hydrants for any purpose other than fire suppression or other public emergency.

6. Do not operate or introduce water into any ornamental fountain, pool, or pond or other structure making similar use of water.

7. Do not serve drinking water in restaurants, cafeterias or other food establishments, except upon request.

8. Do not operate water-cooled air conditioners or other equipment that does not recycle cooling water, except when health and safety are adversely affected.

9. Do not use water for unnecessary purpose or intentionally waste water.

10. Do not use water for industrial purposes in an amount in excess of that amount set by the Town Manager.

Any violation of the Stage II guidelines is considered a misdemeanor, punishable upon conviction by a fine or imprisonment. Willful disregard of Stage I and/or Stage II guidelines will also result in water service being temporarily disconnected. A reconnect fee will be imposed before restoration of service.

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