# Drought officially declared in north west England amid historic dry spring and low reservoir levels



Drought has been officially declared across the north west of England following the driest start to spring in nearly seven decades. The Environment Agency's declaration, made on May 21, highlights a significant decline in river flows and groundwater levels, attributable to severely low rainfall in March, April and early May. This year, the region recorded the third-lowest rainfall between February and April since records began in 1871, while the overall situation in England is the driest seen since 1929.

Reservoirs across the north west are currently at historic low levels for this time of year, a concerning trend that mirrors conditions seen during previous drought years in 1984, 1995, and 2022. Although recent rains have brought temporary relief, the Environment Agency warns that they are insufficient to remedy the ongoing dry conditions. With forecasts predicting a resurgence of hotter weather, the need for action is increasing.

In response to these alarming developments, the Environment Agency has intensified its operational response to drought conditions. This includes mandating water companies, such as United Utilities, to enhance their drought plans, which encompass measures like repairing leaks, communicating effectively with customers, and actively encouraging water conservation. The agency's Drought Manager, Andy Brown, remarked, "As we see more impacts from climate change, heavier rainfall and drier summers will become more frequent. This poses an enormous challenge over the next few decades."

The government has also taken steps to bolster water supply resilience. Emma Hardy, the Water Minister, indicated that regular updates from the Environment Agency are a priority, asserting, “I’m doing everything in my power to hold United Utilities to account to ensure we have the regular supply of water that is needed across the region.” To this end, the government is investing in infrastructure, including the construction of nine new reservoirs and upgrades to pipe systems aimed at reducing leakage by 17%.

However, the impact of drought extends beyond human consumption, affecting the environment and agriculture significantly. Periods of dry weather can severely deoxygenate water bodies, leading to fish kills, algal blooms, and impaired mobility for aquatic wildlife. The Environment Agency encourages public engagement by asking citizens to report any environmental incidents via a 24/7 hotline.

The implications of these drought conditions resonate widely. With England's reservoirs at lower levels than desired, the National Drought Group, which includes government officials and various stakeholders, is actively discussing water scarcity management. The urgency of addressing these issues has intensified following leaked government meeting minutes that highlighted vulnerabilities in regions like Cumbria and the Lake District. In some cases, expected increases in tourism could further strain water resources.

As droughts can manifest in multiple forms—agricultural, environmental, and water supply-related—the necessity for a nuanced understanding of their causes is critical. Drought is not merely a result of low rainfall; its definitions and consequences vary according to context. The Environment Agency monitors an array of indicators such as soil moisture, river flows, and groundwater levels to respond effectively to emerging situations.

With the prospect of continuing low rainfall and rising temperatures, immediate action is deemed necessary to safeguard both human and environmental water supplies. The ongoing situation serves as a reminder of the need for strategic planning and community cooperation to adapt to the challenges posed by changing climatic conditions.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.beyond.radio/news/local-news/drought-declared-for-north-west-of-england/), [[2]](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/ea-steps-up-dry-weather-prep-after-driest-spring-start-since-1956)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.beyond.radio/news/local-news/drought-declared-for-north-west-of-england/), [[3]](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/may/06/england-faces-drought-summer-reservoir-water-levels-dwindle), [[4]](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/jun/29/drought-cumbria-lake-district-devon-cornwall-government-committee-leak)
* Paragraph 3 – [[5]](https://www.farminguk.com/news/farm-pressure-as-drought-threat-grows-after-driest-spring-since-1961_66528.html), [[6]](https://www.otsnews.co.uk/environment-agency-issues-drought-permits-north-west-protect-public-water-supplies-environment/), [[7]](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/drought-planning-stepped-up-amid-potential-hottest-june-on-record)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.beyond.radio/news/local-news/drought-declared-for-north-west-of-england/), [[3]](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/may/06/england-faces-drought-summer-reservoir-water-levels-dwindle), [[4]](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/jun/29/drought-cumbria-lake-district-devon-cornwall-government-committee-leak)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.beyond.radio/news/local-news/drought-declared-for-north-west-of-england/), [[2]](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/ea-steps-up-dry-weather-prep-after-driest-spring-start-since-1956)
* Paragraph 6 – [[4]](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/jun/29/drought-cumbria-lake-district-devon-cornwall-government-committee-leak), [[5]](https://www.farminguk.com/news/farm-pressure-as-drought-threat-grows-after-driest-spring-since-1961_66528.html)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.beyond.radio/news/local-news/drought-declared-for-north-west-of-england/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/ea-steps-up-dry-weather-prep-after-driest-spring-start-since-1956> - In May 2025, the Environment Agency (EA) urged water companies to enhance efforts to safeguard water supplies following the driest start to spring in 69 years. March 2025 was the driest since 1961, and April received only half its normal rainfall. Reservoir levels in the North East and North West were notably low, prompting concerns over potential drought conditions. The EA called for increased leak reduction and responsible water usage to mitigate the risk of drought. ([gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/ea-steps-up-dry-weather-prep-after-driest-spring-start-since-1956?utm_source=openai))
3. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/may/06/england-faces-drought-summer-reservoir-water-levels-dwindle> - In May 2025, England faced the prospect of drought due to dwindling reservoir levels. The government convened the National Drought Group to prepare for potential water shortages, as dry weather was expected to continue. Scotland had already issued an early warning of water scarcity in April. The lack of new reservoirs in England over the past 30 years left the country vulnerable to drought, with current reservoir levels lower than desired. ([theguardian.com](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/may/06/england-faces-drought-summer-reservoir-water-levels-dwindle?utm_source=openai))
4. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/jun/29/drought-cumbria-lake-district-devon-cornwall-government-committee-leak> - In June 2023, leaked minutes from the government's National Drought Group revealed that Cumbria and the Lake District were likely to face drought conditions, with significant drops in reservoir levels. Other regions, including Devon and Cornwall, were also at risk. The group discussed the potential impact of high visitor numbers on drought-stricken areas and the need for water companies to manage resources effectively. ([theguardian.com](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/jun/29/drought-cumbria-lake-district-devon-cornwall-government-committee-leak?utm_source=openai))
5. <https://www.farminguk.com/news/farm-pressure-as-drought-threat-grows-after-driest-spring-since-1961_66528.html> - In May 2025, farmers faced increasing pressure as the Environment Agency warned of a growing threat to water supplies following the driest start to spring since 1961. March was the driest in over six decades, and April saw only half the average rainfall. Reservoir levels were notably low in parts of the North East and North West, prompting concerns over crop resilience and water availability. ([farminguk.com](https://www.farminguk.com/news/farm-pressure-as-drought-threat-grows-after-driest-spring-since-1961_66528.html?utm_source=openai))
6. <https://www.otsnews.co.uk/environment-agency-issues-drought-permits-north-west-protect-public-water-supplies-environment/> - In May 2025, the Environment Agency issued drought permits for the North West to allow United Utilities to extract additional water from reservoirs to maintain supplies. The permits applied to Windermere, Scales boreholes, Delph, and Rivington reservoirs. While the region received some rainfall, it had only received around half of the expected rainfall during May to July, with forecasts suggesting continued lower-than-average rainfall into autumn. ([otsnews.co.uk](https://www.otsnews.co.uk/environment-agency-issues-drought-permits-north-west-protect-public-water-supplies-environment/?utm_source=openai))
7. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/drought-planning-stepped-up-amid-potential-hottest-june-on-record> - In June 2023, the National Drought Group, chaired by the Environment Agency, discussed plans to maintain water supply resilience amid ongoing hot and dry weather. England experienced potentially the hottest June on record, with temperatures reaching 32.2°C. The group emphasized the need for water companies to increase resilience to dry weather and encourage customers to reduce demand, highlighting the importance of planning for increasingly extreme weather events. ([gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/drought-planning-stepped-up-amid-potential-hottest-june-on-record?utm_source=openai))