

Updated prospects for irrigation – Area forecasts for 2025

Our updated prospects for irrigation across England in 2025 are Good to Moderate. Further detail of the prospects for your <u>local area</u> can be found in this document.

Ensuring a successful irrigation season

We ask all irrigators to take such actions as possible to minimise the impacts of prolonged dry weather on the environment and their businesses. If you have any concerns about your abstraction this summer, please talk to us about actions you can take. If you don't know your local Environment Agency contact, please call our customer service line on 03708 506506 and ask to speak to your local water resources member of staff dealing with irrigation prospects. We have provided local Environment Agency contacts within this report.

Abstraction Licences

- Please comply with your licence conditions, please get in touch with the Environment Agency and we can help you if you have any questions.
- Check your licence details and, always:
 - adhere to licence conditions ensuring that abstractions are only taken from authorised locations during authorised periods
 - o ensure volumes and rates are not exceeded and keep accurate records of meter readings
 - \circ check for any local conditions on your licence such as hands off flow restrictions
- Where third parties undertake irrigation, licence holders should ensure contractors fully understand the abstraction licence conditions. Those who have licences with compensation discharges and reabstraction conditions should ensure that water is released at the same time as abstraction is taking place
- Review your water needs. Make sure that you apply to make any changes to your water rights so that your abstraction is more resilience
- Register to manage your licences online:
 - The EA has developed a secure <u>Managing Water Abstraction Service</u> on GOV.UK for abstractors, and over 9,000 abstractors have already registered.
 - We are encouraging abstraction licence holders to register so they can submit abstraction returns easily and quickly online (or delegate access to a third party to submit returns) and see a summary of their licences while in the field.
- EA area teams are now using the service to send abstractors Water Abstraction e-Alerts when hands-off conditions are coming into force or being lifted.
 - If you hold or use a water abstraction licence, please contact the Environment Agency at <u>enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk</u> with your licence number to provide or update your email address. While the Environment Agency can post notifications about hands-off conditions, this may result in several days of lost abstraction



- The e-Alerts system is similar to the Environment Agency's targeted flood warning service but considers water management during periods of dry weather. These alerts help improve access to water when it is available and better protect the environment when it is not. It is one of the ways the Environment Agency is supporting abstractors to adapt to climate change, and industry data has shown a potential benefit of up to £6.3 million per year to affected businesses through the provision of more timely alerts.
- The Environment Agency <u>Regulatory Position Statement</u> for abstraction of floodwater outside of licence conditions is in place to support abstractors. The statement applies to the abstraction of water at times of year that are not included within licence holders' conditions, or at instantaneous, hourly, or daily rates that exceed licence holders' quantities. Other licence conditions must still be met. It is important to note that it is not intended as an alternative to the abstraction licensing system. We still expect abstractors to vary their licences if they require additional water or want to change the conditions on their licences.
- To help secure your future water supply, consider applying for a Local Resource Option (LRO) screening study with a group of farmers or growers in your area. These fully funded studies provide access to a water resources consultant who will help identify and professionally assess local solutions, such as farm reservoirs, rainwater harvesting, and licence trading, that can strengthen drought resilience. A new round of applications will open in May 2025, with more details to follow. We encourage early planning to build long-term water security, and this is a great opportunity to get started.
- The Environment Agency is planning a smart farming trial this year. It will initially be conducted in two
 river catchments in East Anglia and involve installing sensors and telemetry to monitor water flow and
 manage abstraction. The trial will also test cost-benefit analysis of precision irrigation, collaborative water
 sharing, and governance structures involving farmer-focused knowledge exchange. Key outcomes
 include templates for shared licensing, dashboards to support decision-making, and real-world data to
 inform future water resources policy and technology investments. Look out for more information on the
 <u>Water Hub</u>.

Voluntary Restrictions

• Support voluntary restrictions if they are requested. This will delay and may avoid the need for more formal restrictions. If you voluntarily reduce your abstraction, this will not count against you if you apply to renew your licence.

Storage Reservoirs

- Take every possible opportunity to ensure that high flow storage reservoirs are as full as possible by the start of the irrigation season.
- If you are currently having trouble filling your irrigation reservoirs, please contact us as early as possible to enable maximising any potential that may exist to fill your reservoir.
- Ensure your reservoir is regularly maintained, checking for cracks and leaks.



Irrigation Management

- Make sure that meters are in good working order and properly fitted.
- Check irrigation systems and replace worn or broken items before the start of the season.
- Make sure that irrigation systems are properly set up and operated in accordance with an accurate and reliable irrigation scheduling system.
- Ensure you are prepared to change your irrigation plans if necessary.
- You should be especially rigorous about irrigation scheduling and ensuring that your equipment is set up properly to apply no more water than the crop needs
- Choose irrigation times carefully, e.g. avoid the heat of the day; irrigate at night, if possible.
- Undertake a water audit. Know the cost of your water, calculate crop per drop.
- Be aware of the EA dry weather advice which is available under the prolonged dry weather abstraction guidance.
- A water rights trading map has been updated with more recent data to cover all of England

Abstractor Groups and Guidance

- Where appropriate, discuss issues and share ideas with neighbouring farmers. Several local liaison groups already exist for this purpose. Consider joining or setting up a group.
- Consider joining or setting up a water abstractor group to share information, increase knowledge of water regulation and best practices and improve communications with regulators.
- Maintain an awareness of developing guidance from academic institutions and farming organisations (such as e.g. NFU, UKIA, Cranfield University etc.).

Other useful links and guidance

- We have a range of literature available to help support your business including Rainwater Harvesting; Adopting Best Metering Practice; and Think About Installing an Irrigation Reservoir (please request these from our local Environment Agency area – contacts below).
- Keep updated on the latest water situation reports at <u>https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/water-situation-reports-for-england</u> (national and area specific reports are available).

Definitions

- Good Water levels are average or above average and supplies are expected to be safe. There is a possibility of minor local controls on abstraction from surface water in late summer if the weather is exceptionally hot and dry.
- Moderate Water levels are low. Some controls on surface water abstraction are possible by midsummer if the weather is hot and dry. Controls on abstraction from groundwater are possible in small, sensitive groundwater areas.
- Poor Water levels are well below average. Soil moisture deficit is developing early and significant restrictions on abstraction from surface and groundwater are probable.

incident hotline 0800 80 70 60



Prospects for individual areas

To jump to specific areas, please click the links below: **Cumbria and Lancashire** Devon, Cornwall and Isles of Scilly East Anglia (East- covering Essex, Norfolk and Suffolk East Anglia (West- covering Cambridgeshire and Bedfordshire) East Midlands Greater Manchester, Merseyside and Chesire Hertfordshire and North London Kent, South London and East Sussex Lincolnshire and Northamptonshire North East Solent and South Downs Thames Wessex West Midlands **Yorkshire**

Area detail

Environment Agency - Cumbria and Lancashire

Forward look

The overall summer prospects for water resources availability for irrigation in Cumbria and Lancashire are currently **MODERATE**. The irrigation prospects are likely to remain moderate should we receive average rainfall in the coming months, and it may deteriorate should the weather remain hot and dry. The Cumbria and Lancashire area has quick responding rivers and therefore the surface water situation can change relatively quickly. There are currently no concerns regarding irrigation from groundwater.

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Rainfall/Soil Moisture Deficit

Cumbria and Lancashire observed below average rainfall during the 3 month period January to March 2025. Rainfall was 65% of the long-term average (LTA) and was classed as notably low. Up to the 15 April, only 6.6mm of rainfall has been observed at Crossens Auto site, significantly below average for the time of year.

The main surface water irrigation area in Cumbria and Lancashire is the Crossens, located in the Douglas hydrological area. The Douglas area observed below normal rainfall during March (35% of the LTA). Cumulative rainfall over the previous 3 months at Crossens was below average with 70% of the LTA recorded. Once we reach the drier months, the pumping station trigger levels will change with the aim of maintaining water levels able to support irrigation abstraction in the level dependent part of the Crossens catchment.

Soil moisture deficit levels recorded during April in the Douglas hydrological area has been at its highest ever recorded level since 1961 for the time of year.

River Flows

In the Douglas area, the River Yarrow at Croston observed low monthly mean river flow during March (41% of the LTA for March). River flows will continue to decline if Cumbria and Lancashire experience periods of below average rainfall over the coming months. River flows up the 22 April across Cumbria and Lancashire were classed in the range of below average to notably low for the time of year.

For the week ending 6 April, total reservoir storage for North West England was at 77%, compared to 94% this time last year. This is much lower than expected for the time of year.

Groundwater

There are no concerns regarding irrigation from groundwater despite the dry weather. As of March 2025, most groundwater levels are healthy. At monitoring sites some groundwater levels have been falling earlier this year due to the dry weather, but this is from high levels last year. The borehole which is exceptionally low reacts quickly to dry weather but also isn't in an area where groundwater is used for irrigation.

Please contact for more information: Integrated Environment Planning team - <u>drought.northwest@environment-agency.gov.uk</u>

Environment Agency - Devon, Cornwall and Isles of Scilly

Forward look

The overall summer prospects for water resources availability for irrigation in Devon, Cornwall & Isles of Scilly are currently **MODERATE** due to the recent dry weather in March and the beginning of April. With the groundwater levels generally remaining healthy and the limited environmental benefit of placing S57 spray irrigation restrictions in Devon, Cornwall & Isles of Scilly, we do not anticipate introducing any S57 restrictions on abstraction for irrigation, although lack of rainfall may restrict volumes available for abstraction. This position may be reviewed during 2025, dependent on the rainfall patterns and river/groundwater levels.

Rainfall/Soil Moisture Deficit

Devon and Cornwall received average rainfall over the four-month period October 2024 to February 2025. Over this period, rainfall was 105% of the long-term average (LTA) and was 'normal' for the time of

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year. March 2025 rainfall was significantly below average at 14% of the LTA, 'exceptionally low' for the time of year.

Soil moisture deficit for Devon and Cornwall was significantly above average (drier than the LTA) by April 2025, being drier than previously recorded levels (from 1961 to date) for the time of year.

River Flows

River flows up to 22 April 2025 were above normal for the time of year reflecting from increased rainfall during the middle of April.

Groundwater

Groundwater levels were generally healthy as of the end of March 2025. Six of our seven indicator boreholes recorded levels between 'normal' and 'exceptionally high'. The remaining one recorded below normal, but this is a secondary aquifer and responds very quickly to a lack of recharge from rainfall. The generally healthy groundwater means that very low groundwater levels are unlikely to be widespread later in the year, though localised responses to any prolonged dry weather are always possible in secondary aquifer.

To stay up to date with the water situation of Devon and Cornwall, read our monthly situation report: <u>Water</u> situation: area monthly reports for England 2025 - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Please contact for more information: DCIS IEP WR <u>Drought.DCIS@environment-agency.gov.uk</u>

Environment Agency - East Anglia (East)

Forward look

The overall summer prospects for water resources availability for irrigation in East Anglia (East) are currently **MODERATE** for river abstractions and **GOOD** for groundwater sources.

Current groundwater conditions are the best indicator of prospects for most catchments and with levels across the area near the long-term average, we should expect a low risk for the need of restrictions. However, the very dry start to spring and rapid rise in soil moisture deficit has resulted in observed flows by mid-April that are locally comparable with 2022. Whilst groundwater levels in 2022 were slightly lower than in 2025, it is not unreasonable to expect that in the event of a period of prolonged hot, dry conditions we may experience comparable flow rates by the late summer.

Rainfall/Soil moisture Deficit

September was a notably wet month followed by a winter of slightly below average rainfall. Accumulations over the last 6 months have typically been around 85 % to 95 % of the long-term average. The past 4 months have been increasingly dry with totals around 70% in parts of south Norfolk and Suffolk. March was exceptionally dry with totals as low as 3mm being recorded.

A wet autumn resulted in a normal wetting up of the catchments with soil moisture deficits (SMD) below 10mm through January through to the start of March. At these low levels recharge was observed in all major and minor aquifers and field drainage active throughout. The shift to drier conditions at the start of March resulted in a rapid drying of soils and by mid-April SMD is recorded at an average of 55 mm. This is

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notably high and above the level at which any further recharge is likely. Field drainage also ceased ahead of the norm, becoming inactive by mid-March.

River Flows

Normal flow rates were sustained throughout the winter period allowing winter storage reservoirs to refill early, most of which were only partially depleted at the start of the season. The drier conditions in March and April have resulted in many rivers falling below normal rates of flow and some to notably low levels by mid-April. We currently only have concerns for prospects and the potential for very low flows in late summer in the event of a prolonged hot dry period generating high demand for water.

The most likely scenario is that flow rates will remain close to or slightly below normal and no additional intervention other than standard abstraction restrictions will be enforced. The most at-risk catchments in the event of extreme dry conditions are currently from South Norfolk and East Suffolk (excluding coastal groundwater fed streams). It is these catchments which continue to experience very high unconstrained summer demand for irrigation direct from the rivers. i.e. licenced daily rates can exceed the total flow in the river. Where/when this leads to a high risk of environmental incident, we may need to enforce targeted, evidence-based restrictions. This risk relates only to direct abstractions and not groundwater sources.

Groundwater

Recharge was noted in all observations by December and continued at a steady rate through to the end of February. A reduced period of recharge was the overall pattern in the winter and spring 2025. However, the exceptional high groundwater of the previous year meant autumn 2024 levels were above average and therefore most aquifer units remain close to their normal level for the time of year.

Please contact for more information: IEP ANG Central@environment-agency.gov.uk

Environment Agency - East Anglia (West)

Forward look

The overall summer prospects for water resources availability for irrigation in East Anglia (West) are currently **MODERATE**. The Fenland IDB-drained areas are always susceptible to prolonged dry, hot weather during the irrigation season. With such weather, local water management actions using existing licence conditions are likely to be required. Overall, the conditions are similar to 2022 at this stage of the year. There's only a low probability of similarly low rainfall and high temperatures that followed in 2022 occurring this year, but 2022 demonstrates the restrictions that could be required if they do. Average rainfall during the spring and summer is unlikely to lead to widespread restrictions.

Rainfall / Soil Moisture Deficit

A wet September gave an early start to the groundwater recharge season. Rainfall from October to February was close to the long-term average. March was then very dry, with an average of only 7 mm across East Anglia (West).

Through March, the soil moisture deficit across the area built up to around 50 mm, indicating an early end of the groundwater recharge season.

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River Flows

River flows across East Anglia (West) have generally been close to average during the past three months. Lower flows recorded during March and April partly reflect the lower rainfall, although baseflows have also now dropped slightly below average due to the earlier end to the recharge season. The exceptions are the Rivers Ivel and Rhee, where baseflows have remained higher than the observed averages. The flow of the Ely Ouse to Denver, which supplies the South Level IDBs during summer, and the flow of the Bedford Ouse, which supplies IDBs from the Hundred Foot River, are both slightly below average for the time of year. The rivers of northwest Norfolk are in a similar situation.

Groundwater

Groundwater levels were generally high for the time of year going into the autumn last year, and the early start to the recharge season reinforced the healthy situation. However, high discharge rates from the aquifers in response to the higher levels, and average winter rainfall followed by the dry March and April, have led to groundwater recessions in most boreholes towards average levels for the time of year. The exceptions are water levels in the boreholes of the Ivel and Rhee catchments, which began winter particularly high and remained above average.

Please contact for more information: IEP ANG Central@environment-agency.gov.uk

Environment Agency - East Midlands

Forward look

The overall summer prospects for water resources availability for irrigation in the East Midlands Area are currently **MODERATE** due to recent dry weather and below average rainfall. The irrigation prospects are likely to remain moderate should we receive average rainfall in the coming months, and it may deteriorate should the weather remain hot and dry.

Rainfall /Soil Moisture Deficit

March was a particularly dry month for the time of year. It was the 8th driest March since 1871. The majority of the East Midlands hydrological catchments received exceptionally low rainfall totals for the month. The month of March has seen exceptionally low rainfall, this trend has continued into April with all of our 3 catchments seeing 2-4% of the long term average in the first 2 weeks of April. During the last 3 months only 2 out of our hydrological catchments received normal rainfall totals. These were the Soar and Lower Trent catchments.

All hydrological catchments in the East Midlands recorded an increase in soil moisture deficit since February and continues to track below the long term average (meaning soils are drier for the time year). By mid-April soil moisture deficit ranged between 41 and 70mm across the area.

River Flows

During March, most sites recorded notably low monthly mean flows and continue to decline in response to the recent lack of rainfall.

The majority of reservoirs have seen a decrease in storage levels over March and into April.

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Groundwater

Groundwater levels at the end of March recorded at monitoring sites were normal or higher compared to the long-term average (LTA). Southard's Lane, Rider Point and groundwater sites recorded normal levels compared to the LTA. Another 2 sites recorded above normal groundwater levels compared to the LTA. These were Crossley Hill and Four Crosses. One site recorded notably high groundwater levels compared to the LTA. This was Coxmoor situated in the northern part of the East Midlands. Although current groundwater levels are healthy, our catchments sit predominantly on aquifers which may take time to show an impact of a dry weather period.

Please contact for more information: emdenguiries@environment-agency.gov.uk

Environment Agency - Greater Manchester, Merseyside and Cheshire

Forward look

The overall summer prospects for water resources availability for irrigation in Greater Manchester, Merseyside and Cheshire are currently **GOOD**, and will remain at this status if we have average rainfall in the coming months

Rainfall / Soil Moisture Deficit

Rainfall was below long-term average (LTA) for Greater Manchester, Merseyside and Cheshire area for March, with 33% of the LTA being recorded. However, over the past 3 months Greater Manchester, Merseyside and Cheshire observed over 127% of its LTA rainfall, and was classed as 'Notably high'.

Soil Moisture Deficit was slightly higher than expected for the week ending 9 April 2025.

River flows

Monthly mean river flow across Greater Manchester, Merseyside and Cheshire was classed between 'exceptionally low' and 'below normal'. Greater Manchester, Merseyside and Cheshire has quick responding rivers and therefore the situation can change relatively quickly with an extended period of hot, dry weather.

Groundwater

There are no concerns regarding irrigation from groundwater. As of March 2025, groundwater levels are healthy as levels at our two indicator boreholes are between exceptionally high and above normal.

Please contact for more information: Integrated Environmental Planning <u>IEP_GMMC@environment-agency.gov.uk</u>

incident hotline 0800 80 70 60



Environment Agency - Hertfordshire and North London

Forward Look

The overall prospects for the summer for water resources availability for irrigation in Hertfordshire and North London are **GOOD**. An extended period of low rainfall could have implications for arable farming, and higher irrigation needs especially within impermeable clay-based areas.

Rainfall / Soil Moisture Deficit (SMD)

Rainfall amounts were slightly below long-term average (LTA) for the winter period (November to March) at 92%. March saw a decline in rainfall with 10% of the LTA being recorded for the month. The SMD rates have risen resulting in drier soil conditions. This could provide challenging where these low rainfall conditions persisted over the summer.

River Flows

In chalk catchments, flows continue to benefit from the favourable groundwater situation resulting in above normal to notably high flows. In those impermeable catchments, flows are more responsive to rainfall and run-off events, flows are presently below normal or lower. An extended period of low rainfall would see flow rates decline and possible abstraction licence restrictions.

Groundwater

Groundwater levels for the Mid Chilterns Chalk show levels within their normal to above normal range. The Upper Lee Chalk, which saw higher rainfall totals over the winter period, have levels within the notably high to exceptional high range. Future projections indicate groundwater levels will remain within their normal range even with below average rainfall over the summer period. The autumn period would see further declines if rainfall totals were to remain below their normal range until this time.

Abstractors will be notified of any flow or level restrictions by email. We continue to monitor and publish data at https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/water-situation-local-area-reports

Please contact for more information: Alastair Wilson drought.HNL@environment-agency.gov.uk

Environment Agency - Kent, South London and East Sussex

Forward Look

The overall summer prospects for water resources availability for irrigation in the KSLES area are currently **GOOD**. Rainfall conditions experienced over this winter and preceding 18 months have meant that water resources across all catchments are in a healthy condition heading into the irrigation season. Regarding the requirements for irrigation, there are no imminent concerns from a water resources perspective or outlook.

Rainfall / Soil Moisture Deficit

During the 2024/25 winter period, the area experienced average wet conditions from early autumn ending with an intense dry period in March resulting in 94% of the long term average (LTA) rainfall (Oct 2024 to Mar 2025). As a result, soil moisture deficits were consistently below the LTA for the respective months except March. The whole KSLES area registered the driest March since 1990 and fifth driest March on record since records began in 1871.

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River Flows

Following a normal winter ending with a dry March and into April, flows are slightly below normal in most catchments but remain sufficient to support stable abstraction conditions. Impermeable clay catchments will typically be more susceptible to the impacts of drier conditions. As a result, constraints have already started to apply in catchments such as the Medway and these catchments will become more progressive, if drier conditions persist. Catchments where the summer flow component is mainly composed of groundwater-based flow will remain resilient, if drier warmer conditions become prevalent during the summer months. As a result of the wet winter, normal groundwater levels are likely to persist into the summer. This provides baseflow support to rivers. It is therefore unlikely to expect abstraction restrictions for irrigators upon ground or surface water sources within catchments of baseflow dominated rivers. Rainfall sensitive, impermeable catchments will typically be more susceptible to the impacts of persistent drier conditions should they occur. Within these catchments, the onset of restrictions is developing due to the dry start of the season. There are constraints within the Medway, Rother, Mole and Upper Stour catchments already or soon to be imposed should dry conditions continue. Water level dependant marsh areas are heading into this irrigation season with their condition considered healthy.

Groundwater

The wet winter conditions from December 2024 led to a rise in groundwater levels from October to March 2024/2025 (94% of LTA rainfall). Heading into the summer season, winter rainfall conditions have left groundwater levels in the chalk ranging between normal and above normal. Groundwater levels in the chalk are peaking or starting to decrease in most key monitoring sites. The fall in groundwater levels is consistent with the effective rainfall and the soil moisture deficits (SMD) registered by the end of March and into April. Currently, aquifers remain responsive to rainfall with levels that are stable or starting to decrease. The levels are likely to remain normal over the next coming weeks, meaning groundwater resources are heading into the irrigation season in a healthy condition. Therefore, within groundwater supported catchments abstraction constraints are not expected to be applied this summer to abstraction irrigators.

More detailed hydrological information can be found in the Environment Agency's Area Monthly Water Situation Report at:<u>https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/water-situation-local-area-reports</u>

Please contact for more information: ksl.gwh@environment-agency.gov.uk

Environment Agency - Lincolnshire and Northamptonshire

Forward look

The overall summer prospects for water resources availability for irrigation in Lincolnshire and Northamptonshire area are currently **GOOD**. A dry March and April has seen both river flows and groundwater levels generally decrease but most indicator sites are still at normal levels for the time of year.

However, if the spring/summer sees average rainfall it is likely river and groundwater levels will remain mostly in the normal range, which should only result in minimal licence restrictions.

Rainfall / Soil Moisture Deficit

September 2024 saw exceptionally high levels of rainfall across the area, with 253% of the LTA rainfall falling in this month, making it the second wettest September on record in Lincolnshire and

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Northamptonshire. As a result of the is exceptionally high rainfall, soil moisture deficit dramatically decreased from normal to notably low/exceptionally low levels. October to December saw normal levels of rainfall in each month, with rainfall varying between 103%-120% of the LTA during these months. This rainfall was sufficient to keep soil moisture deficit low across the area, with below normal to notably low levels being recorded across the area during this time. January saw above normal levels of rainfall, with 130% of the LTA rainfall falling, keeping soil moisture deficits low. February's rainfall was classified as normal for the area with 78% of the LTA rainfall falling in that month, however there was a north-divide with some northern catchments only getting below normal levels. March saw the first month of less than normal rainfall since August 2024. The area received 25% of the LTA rainfall, classifying it as notably low for the time of year. As a result of the limited rainfall and above average temperatures, soil moisture deficit increased quite rapidly during March and ended the month at normal to above normal levels for the time of year. The dry weather continued into April with only 21% of the LTA rainfall having fallen in April as of the 15. As a result, SMD has continued to increase and is now at notably high levels.

As of the end of March, the 3-month rainfall trend shows below normal to normal levels of rainfall, the 6month rainfall trend shows normal levels of rainfall in all catchments and the 12-month rainfall trend shows normal to above normal levels of rainfall. The recent dry weather has seen soil moisture deficit built up in the area and if the dry weather continues this could cause high demand for irrigation, and lower river flows and groundwater levels resulting in restricting being enforced across the area.

River Flows

Normal to above normal levels of rainfall from October to January ensured river flows remained consistently high throughout winter, with classification varying between normal and exceptionally high. The slightly dry February saw most sites drop to normal levels for the time of year and with the notably dry March meant that all sites were normal to below normal.

Groundwater

Normal to above normal levels of rainfall during October to January ensured groundwater levels remained high with all sites ranging between normal to notably high levels by the end of January. The highest groundwater levels were generally observed in the Limestone aquifer. A slightly dry February resulted in groundwater levels slightly declining with most sites at normal to above normal levels by the end of February, with sites in the south in the limestone aquifers recording the higher levels. The notably dry March resulted in groundwater levels declining further, with most ending the month at normal levels for the time of year, with 1 site at below normal levels and 1 site at above normal levels. Despite the dry start to April, as of 15 April groundwater classifications are unchanged with most sites still at normal levels for the time of year.

Please contact for more information: drought.lna@environment-agency.gov.uk

Environment Agency - North East Area

Forward look

The overall summer prospects for water resources availability for irrigation in the North East area are **MODERATE** due to recent dry weather and below average rainfall. The irrigation prospects are likely to

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remain moderate should we receive average rainfall in the coming months, and it may deteriorate should the weather remain hot and dry.

Rainfall / Soil Moisture Deficit

Recorded rainfall has been below the long-term average (LTA) throughout winter (November to March), with the exception of December where it was slightly above the LTA. Overall, 7 of the past 10 months have below the LTA. Rainfall totals were low in March with monthly rainfall ranging from 33% of the LTA in the Tweed catchment to 53% of the LTA in the Seaham Area. The 3-month rainfall totals are in the exceptionally low range for the Tyne catchment and in the notably low range for the rest of the area, with the exception of the Seaham catchment. The Tyne catchment has recorded the fifth driest start to the year since records began in 1871 and the driest since 1973.

Soil moisture deficits (SMD) are less than 10mm in the Tyne catchment and between 11 and 40mm across the rest of the area. Soils in many areas are drier than average for the time of year, especially along the coast.

River Flows

March monthly river flows fall within the notably low or exceptionally low ranges. Monthly mean flows ranged from just 18% of the LTA at Hartford Bridge on the River Blyth to 36% of the LTA at Rothbury on the River Coquet. Middleton in Teesdale on the River Tees recorded the lowest monthly mean flow for March since records began in 1972. Haydon Bridge on the South Tyne also recorded the lowest monthly mean flow for March since records began in 1974.

River levels are currently low in some catchments, and it is possible that some restrictions on abstraction licences may be required should the dry weather continue. Individual abstractors will be notified of any flow or level restrictions.

We are undertaking pre-season surveys with some sectors to better understand likely abstraction operations for the coming months. We would request that all abstractors respond to requests for information to support our approach to abstraction management.

All reservoir stocks have been decreasing in recent weeks and are just below average for the time of year.

Groundwater

Groundwater levels vary across the North East area with all indicator sites within the normal or higher ranges during March. There have been decreases since the start of the year however levels remain healthy for the time of year. At the Fell Sandstone indicator sites levels are normal however these may require further observation if the current trend of below average rainfall continues through the year. The Magnesian Limestone indicator sites are normal and higher, with decreased levels in the confined and semi-confined parts of the aquifer since the start of the year and a relatively stable level in the unconfined section of the aquifer.

Please contact for more information: water.resources.northeast@environment-agency.gov.uk

incident hotline 0800 80 70 60



Environment Agency - Solent and South Downs

Forward look

The overall summer prospects for water resources availability for irrigation are currently **GOOD** for groundwater dominated catchments and **MODERATE** for more responsive catchments for 2025 depending on weather conditions over the next few months.

Rainfall / Soil Moisture Deficit

Overall winter 2024-2025 has been close to average so far in terms of the main rainfall statistics (95% long term average) September was very wet (239% LTA) which helped to start the recharge process. October (121%) and November (102%) were around average, but December was largely dry with only 66% of LTA. This interrupted the recharge process. January was wet overall (146%) but had a drier period in the middle of the month. Rainfall during February was close to average (112%) but March has been extremely dry (12%) which has meant that soils are now drier than normal.

River Flows

At the end of March 2025, the groundwater dominated catchments had normal or above monthly mean flows. The more responsive rivers dominated by impermeable geology had either below normal or notably low monthly mean flows at the end of March. These rivers are more dependent on the immediate weather conditions so can fluctuate quickly.

Groundwater

It is also important to note that the current situation has been aided by most groundwater levels ending summer 2024 higher than average. The area is heavily dependent on groundwater so prospects for summer rely on the extent to which the Chalk and Greensand aquifers are replenished. Groundwater levels for the majority of reported sites are normal or higher than normal during April Rainfall to date has meant that this has remained the case despite some drier periods that have interrupted recharge. However, groundwater levels are not as high as the last two winters, although this is not a cause for concern in terms of prospects.

Please contact for more information: <u>HydrologySSD@environment-agency.gov.uk</u>

Environment Agency - Thames

Forward Look

The overall summer prospects for water resources availability for irrigation in Thames area are currently **GOOD**.

While groundwater and surface water conditions are currently good across much of the area, recent dry conditions have resulted in groundwater levels and river flows declining. Should an extended period of hot, dry conditions persist, the prospects for irrigation may deteriorate.

Rainfall / Soil Moisture Deficit

Despite an exceptionally dry March, the winter experienced normal rainfall meaning water resources are currently in a resilient position. River flows and groundwater levels are currently supportive of abstraction, apart from the Inferior Oolite aquifer in the Cotswolds area.

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Thames area received 153% of long-term average effective rainfall over the hydrological winter period (October to March) resulting in a good hydrological position coming into spring.

Soil moisture deficits increased through March ending the month at 31mm, exceeding the long-term average of 8mm for the time of year.

River Flows

As of the end of March, most flow indicator sites were classed as normal or above normal for the time of year. The river Wye at Bourne End, and the river Kennet at Marlborough measured as above normal band despite decreases in mean flow. River flows in chalk influenced catchments are likely to continue to experience some groundwater support into the summer. River flows in chalk influenced catchments are likely to continue to experience some groundwater support into the summer. The river Wye at Bourne End, and the river Kennet at Marlborough measured as above normal band despite decreases in mean flow. River flows in chalk influenced catchments are likely to continue to experience some groundwater support into the summer. The river Wye at Bourne End, and the river Kennet at Marlborough measured as above normal band despite decreases in mean flow. River flows in chalk influenced catchments are likely to continue to experience some groundwater support into the summer.

Some abstractions restrictions may still come into effect later in the summer, particularly if early summer conditions are hot and dry. However, early and widespread restrictions are unlikely. Individual abstractors will be notified if restrictions associated with their licences come into effect.

Groundwater

Groundwater levels largely decreased across Thames area in March. Levels of the Oolites dropped considerably. Whilst some groundwater level monitoring sites in the Oolites recorded normal levels for the time of year, one of our indicator sites dropped from normal to notably low levels by the end of March.

Despite the decline, groundwater levels of the Chalk aquifers remained above the levels we would expect them to be for this time of year.

If you require more information, please contact: Drought THM@environment-agency.gov.uk

Environment Agency - Wessex

Forward Look

The overall summer prospects for water resources availability for irrigation in Wessex area are currently **GOOD** to **MODERATE**. Groundwater levels are currently normal. However, if we experience a long period of dry and warm weather, rivers without significant groundwater and spring inflows will quickly fall and licence restrictions may be enforced.

Rainfall/Soil Moisture Deficit

March 2025 was very dry (the driest March since 1961) and rainfall was only 11% of the long-term average. Rainfall amounts were slightly below long-term average for the winter period (November to March) at 97%.

Soil moisture deficit has increased (i.e. become drier) significantly over the past month and by the end of March, was the highest on record for this time of year.

River Flows

By the end of March into April, flow sites on the Chalk were reporting normal daily mean flows while daily mean flows in other geologies were largely below normal. Sites in Chalk catchments typically record higher flows than in other geologies as these flows are supported by strong baseflow from the aquifer.

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Groundwater

For most of the month, groundwater levels across all sites were decreasing in response to the very limited rainfall. The majority of groundwater monitoring sites across the south of Wessex, including sites monitoring the Chalk aquifer ended March reporting normal levels. In the north of Wessex, Allington was out of service and Didmarton (monitoring the inferior Oolite) recorded notably high levels at the end of March.

Please contact for more information: aepwessex@environment-agency.gov.uk

Environment Agency - West Midlands

Forward look

The overall summer prospects for water resources availability for irrigation in West Midlands Area are currently **MODERATE**.

March was a particularly dry month, with it being the 8th driest March since 1871 for the Midlands. However, with sufficient rainfall leading up to March, all catchments in the West Midlands still received normal cumulative rainfall totals for the 6-month period between October 2024 to March 2025. Surface water flows and soil moisture respond quickly to rainfall, and so normal status will be expected if average rainfall is received. Therefore, if conditions become dry, particularly if temperatures become warmer than usual, irrigation prospects may change.

Rainfall / Soil Moisture Deficit

Overall, West Midlands received above average rainfall totals during 2024. This means that 2025 began with saturated soils at field capacity, normal or above river flow status and higher than average groundwater levels for the time of year. However, conditions became drier towards February and continued into March.

Due to a particularly dry March, soils are drier than average and the majority of flows recorded are below average for the time of year. Although there have been some dry periods during 2024 where below average rainfall was recorded, soil moisture was eventually replenished. With plenty of rain from September 2024 onwards, soils by the end of February 2025 were saturated at field capacity. However, due to a particularly dry March, soils became drier than expected for the time of year across all catchments in the West Midlands.

River Flows

Surface water flows recorded from October 2024 onwards were in normal or above status. This continued into January where flows recorded were in normal or above status, relative to the LTA, in response to a few winter storm events. Although there were drier conditions in February 2025, the majority of the sites in the West Midlands still recorded normal flows due largely to saturated catchments. However, with March 2025 being a particularly dry month, the majority of flow sites in the West Midlands recorded below normal, notably low or exceptionally low flows. Only 3 sites recorded normal flows in March 2025 in the West Midlands. The recent drier conditions from February onwards, in more impermeable river catchments of clay/ shales not fed by groundwater, will experience river flows starting to tail off and dry faster without that groundwater baseflow support.

The **Spray line service** for abstractors in the River Wye catchment has resumed for the summer season, and letters informing abstractors that it has begun have already been sent out. We will contact licence holders when these thresholds and trigger levels for the Wye have been crossed to safeguard flows. New abstractors will also be receiving a booklet explaining the Spray line system.

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The **River Severn Regulation Alert** has also been issued. We will now move to summer operations on the River Severn, monitoring low flows and liaising with abstractors to ensure legal minimum flows are maintained in the river and supporting water supply for the West Midlands. Abstraction and irrigation are primarily controlled by licence conditions associated with river flow and level. Licence restrictions are triggered by notification from the Environment Agency of "hands off flow or Level" (HoF/HoL) or are monitored and managed by the licence holder. During an average year it is likely that some licences will be restricted during dry periods. As we have seen in recent years the situation can change quickly and may result in the need to restrict abstraction licences. Please ensure you plan accordingly and maintain resilience in your water supply.

Groundwater

Groundwater starts in a very healthy position this summer season with groundwater levels recording above normal to exceptionally high. Within the Permo-Triassic sandstone aquifers, groundwater levels entered the autumn and winter at notably high levels even before the winter recharge period started (due in part to the previous seasons high recharge event 23/24). As we move out of the recharge season groundwater levels are currently peaking and starting to recede off into the summer months which is normal for the seasonal trend for groundwater. However, in groundwater fed river catchments, watercourses will continue to receive baseflows from these high groundwater levels. The recent drier conditions from February onwards, in more impermeable river catchments of clay/ shales not fed by groundwater, will experience river flows starting to recede and dry faster without groundwater baseflow support.

Other aquifers in the West Midlands Area include the Carboniferous Sandstone, Carboniferous Limestone, Jurassic Limestone aquifers currently have responded to rainfall recharge over the winter/spring recharge period, and groundwater levels have recently recovered to their normal seasonal highs. A return to dry periods in the summer will start to see a corresponding decrease in groundwater levels in these types of aquifers. However, the notably dry March and April period is likely to have brought forward the seasonal spring/summer recession.

Information on how resilient your catchment is to changes in water availability can be found in the relevant <u>Abstraction Licensing Strategy</u>, by reviewing past restrictions to your licence and by contacting <u>IEP WMD waterresources@environment-agency.gov.uk</u>

Please contact for more information: iep_wmd_waterresources@environment-agency.gov.uk

Environment Agency - Yorkshire

Forward Look

The overall summer prospects for water resources availability for irrigation in Yorkshire are **GOOD** to **MODERATE**. Our previous update was issued after an extremely wet September followed by a winter that was not exceptionally wet but was sufficient to maintain surface and groundwater levels. Since the first week of March rainfall has been very low with some exceptionally low figures recorded in parts of the county. The widespread dry weather since early March is currently impacting Yorkshire. Drier than expected ground conditions are resulting in the need to irrigate early in the season which impacts annual abstraction licence limits. There is a higher risk of early abstraction licence restrictions on some watercourses, which could result in lengthy restriction periods should the dry weather persist. Some licence holders had already received advance warnings on their licences and a very small number have already received stop notices.

customer service line 03708 506 506

incident hotline 0800 80 70 60



Rainfall/ Soil Moisture Deficit

There has been sustained dry weather throughout March and into April with only occasional rainfall. The current short-term forecast shows little sign of rainfall, reminiscent of the summer of 2020.

River Flows

Low flows for the time of year have been seen in the rivers that are sourced from the Pennines or Yorkshire Dales. Lower rainfall impacts are experienced more in rivers in the west, whilst rivers in in the east are still maintaining flows due to groundwater levels. South Yorkshire has received marginally more rainfall in the past months resulting in flows in the Don catchment remaining in the notably low category for the time of year.

It is important to note that rivers in Yorkshire fed by upland moorlands respond very quickly to hot and dry weather as opposed to those fed by groundwater (mostly in the East of the Area). Should dry weather persist into May and June, increased sunlight hours means that flow responses to rainfall becomes muted. We urge all abstractors to check the monthly water situation reports and take note of any warnings of a "Hands Off Flow/Level" being implemented in their catchment.

Groundwater

Groundwater is being affected by the lack of rainfall. The Millstone Grit, Corallian and parts of the Chalk are showing as below normal for the time of year. The rest are at normal or slightly above, except for the Magnesian Limestone which remains high. They are all on a downward trend which will continue if rainfall remains low. Groundwater is not expected to receive recharge at this time of year onwards. This is due to increased evapotranspiration through the spring and summer months.

For the most up to date water situation reports please visit our website: <u>https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/water-situation-report-yorkshire-and-north-east</u>

Please contact for more information: <u>AEPYorkshireandNE@environment-agency.gov.uk</u>