Updated prospects for irrigation – Area forecast for 2026

1.Overall irrigation prospects for this summer

The Environment Agency's updated prospects for irrigation across England in 2026 are **GOOD to MODERATE**.

2. Irrigation prospects for individual EA areas

A full irrigation prospects for your area can be found below, in addition to advice on preparing for this year irrigation season and increasing long term resilience.

To select a specific area, 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

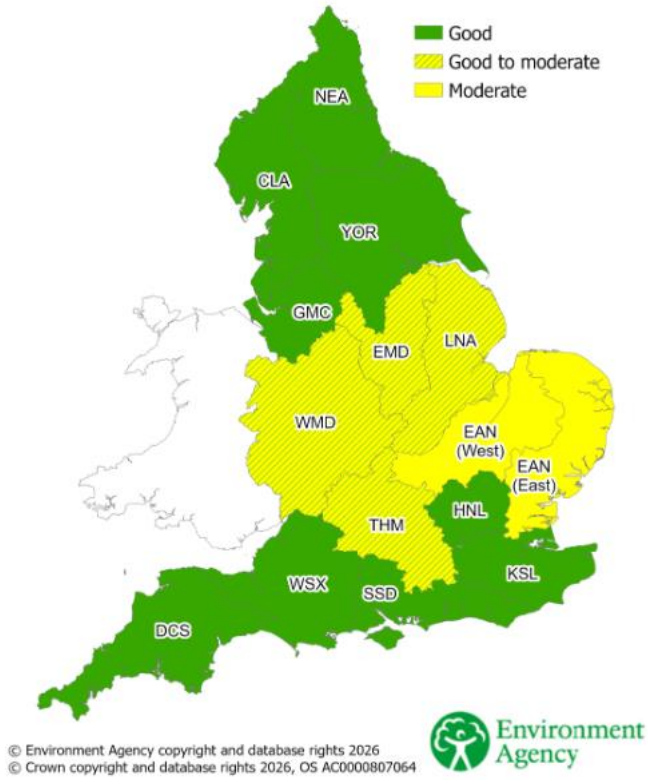
Thames

Wessex

West Midlands

Yorkshire

Figure 1 - Updated Irrigation Prospects spring-summer 2026



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.

Area details

Cumbria and Lancashire

Forward look

The overall summer prospects for water resources availability for irrigation in Cumbria and Lancashire are GOOD. The Cumbria and Lancashire area has quick responding rivers and therefore the surface water situation can change quickly. There are currently no concerns regarding irrigation from groundwater.

Rainfall/Soil Moisture Deficit

Cumbria and Lancashire observed above average rainfall during the 3-month period January to March 2026. Rainfall was 106% of the long-term average (LTA) and was classed as notably high.
Up to 16 April, 15.4mm of rainfall has been observed at Crossens Auto Rain Gauge, this is below average for the time of year.
The main surface water irrigation area in Cumbria and Lancashire is the Crossens, located in the Alt and Crossens catchment, which observed 109% of LTA rainfall during March. Cumulative rainfall over the previous 3 months at the Alt and Crossens was above average with 110% of the LTA. During the drier conditions, the pumping station will aim to maintain water levels able to support irrigation abstraction in the level dependant part of the Crossens catchment.
During the middle of April, soil moisture deficit levels in the Douglas hydrological area were in the normal range for the time of year, between 10mm to 15mm.

River Flows

In the Douglas catchment, the River Yarrow at Croston observed normal monthly mean river flow during March (88% if the LTA for March). River flows can decline quickly if Cumbria and Lancashire experiences periods of below average rainfall over the coming months. River flows up to the 21 April at Croston was classed as normal for the time of year.

For the week ending 12 April, total reservoir storage for North West England was at 94%, compared to 75% this time last year. This is higher than expected for this time of the year.

Groundwater

Groundwater level classification at the end of March was considered in the normal range at most monitoring sites.

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

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 GOOD.

Due to the nature of the geology and landscape across Devon, Cornwall & Isles of Scilly, the situation can change quickly. The availability of water for abstraction will depend on rainfall and temperatures during the season. We therefore expect abstractors to be prepared and encourage applications for winter storage reservoirs. We do not anticipate implementing any section 57 restrictions on abstraction for irrigation. However, a lack of rainfall may naturally reduce the volumes available for abstraction.

Rainfall/Soil Moisture Deficit

Devon and Cornwall received higher than average rainfall during the five-month period from October 2025 to February 2026. Rainfall over this period reached 145% of the long-term average (LTA) and was exceptionally high for the time of year. March received 68% LTA rainfall and up to 21 April rainfall has been 35% of the LTA.
At the end of March 2026 and into April, most of the area recorded an increase in soil moisture deficit between 11 and 40 millimetres, indicating conditions were becoming drier

River Flows

Monthly mean river flows for March 2026 ranged were normal for the time of year. Daily flows for the end of March 2026 were normal for the time of year except for the River Taw at Umberleigh, which recorded below normal flows. River flows up to the 21 April were in the range of normal to below normal for the time of year.

Groundwater

Groundwater levels were healthy as of March 2026, with our indicator monitoring boreholes recording between normal and exceptionally high status. Groundwater levels at all sites have reached their seasonal peaks and most are now in recession. Starting the year at these high levels means that it is unlikely that very low levels will be reached in the summer and autumn.

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

East Anglia (East)

Forward look

General prospects for irrigation are considered as generally MODERATE. Warm, dry conditions extending into the late spring, early summer alongside high demands for direct from river irrigation could require demand reduction measures. Therefore, within this group of catchments surface spray irrigation is considered at moderate risk but for groundwater abstractors the prospects remain good.

Rainfall/Soil moisture Deficit

Winter rainfall totals were near normal north of the river Waveney, but with a notably wetter zone further south and east with east Essex the wettest, recording over 150 % LTA rainfall.
Rainfall in March has seen geographic variations with normal totals along the North Norfolk coast, but with a drier zone between the Yare and Stour in Essex. In the last 6 weeks to 21 April a few gauges have recorded less than 20 mm. Most notably the lowest totals have been across the Stour catchment and in the very southern parts of Essex.
The recent change to very dry weather has resulted in a rapid drying of the soil. Soil moisture deficits are notably high for the time of year, between 50-60mm, and it is unlikely that there will be any further recharge or significant river flow response.

River Flows

Flow rates during April have declined rapidly in most rivers in response to the dry conditions. The groundwater fed catchments of Norfolk, north of the Yare are normal for the time of year in addition to the rivers of mid and south Essex, which experienced a strong recovery of groundwater levels over winter. Elsewhere the interflow (seasonally groundwater fed) catchments between the Yare and Stour are mostly categorised as below normal due to the lack of usual late winter / early spring runoff.

Groundwater

An assessment of underlying groundwater baseflow suggest these rivers are slightly below the long-term average for April. Resources in this group of rivers is very similar to April 2022. Dry conditions in March and April can limit recharge and extend the seasonal recession particularly where natural storage is limited.

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

East Anglia (West)

Forward look

The overall summer prospects for water resources availability for irrigation in East Anglia (West) are MODERATE.

Rainfall / Soil Moisture Deficit

The area has received above average rainfall (136% LTA) during the winter. Initially rainfall reduced the exceptionally high soil moisture deficit caused by the dry spring-summer season and recharge season started one or two months later in October-November, depending on the catchment. During March, the area received below normal rainfall (57% LTA) and April so far has been very dry (2% LTA). The soil

moisture deficit across the area has built up to around 55 mm, indicating an end of the groundwater recharge season.

River Flows

River flows across East Anglia (West) at the end of winter were normal or above, with only the North Norfolk coast in below normal conditions. Spring started dry and after a month and half of below average rainfall, river flows have reduced to normal and below normal conditions. Flows are similar to those in spring 2025, hence with similar rainfall deficit of last year (extremely dry) some abstraction restrictions can be expected this summer.

The flow of the Ely Ouse to Denver, which supplies the South Level Internal Drainage Boards (IDB) 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.

River flows are expected to reach notably low conditions by mid-summer if the weather remains dry. Under these conditions management actions using existing licence would be required, this is particularly the case for the Wissey and North-Norfolk catchments.

Groundwater

The groundwater recharge season started one or two months later than normal due to the high soil moisture deficit from last year. However, majority of sites recovered to normal conditions by mid-April, except the North Norfolk coast that are below normal. Groundwater levels are similar to last year, with the lowest levels in the North Norfolk catchment. If conditions are dry this summer groundwater levels are expected to reach below normal conditions. 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

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

East Midlands

Forward look

The overall summer irrigation prospects in East Midlands are currently GOOD to MODERATE. The hydrological situation is normal, despite the drier conditions in March and April, so some abstraction restrictions cannot be ruled out if the dry weather continues.

Rainfall /Soil Moisture Deficit

The area received exceptionally high rainfall during the winter, with totals well above average across most catchments, including an exceptionally wet February. As a result, soils were fully wetted and widespread recharge occurred across the area. During March, rainfall across the area was mostly average, ranging between 64% and 100% of the LTA, while the first 12 days in April ranged between 5 –11% of LTA. Soil moisture deficits increased through the month and now range from approximately 10 mm to 40 mm. The build-up in soil moisture deficit indicates progressive seasonal drying and suggests that the groundwater recharge season is ending as we transition into spring.

River Flows

River flows across the East Midlands at the end of winter were normal besides North Muskham and Worksop with above normal and notably high conditions respectively. Most river flow sites record normal flows for the time of year, ranging from 108% to 163% of the LTA. Overall, flows have begun to recede seasonally but remain broadly normal across the area.

Groundwater

Groundwater levels in key indicator boreholes are currently recording above normal to notably high levels. after receiving significant recharge during the wet winter.

The Permo-Triassic Sandstone principal aquifer of Nottinghamshire provides a high level of storage, supporting water supplies and river baseflows. The storage properties of the aquifer means that it is slow to respond, making it more resilient to drought over one or two seasons but also taking longer for recharge to effect groundwater levels. Groundwater levels are currently responding to sustained winter recharge, with levels expected to continue to rise. The lag in groundwater response within the sandstone means that a sustained period of dry weather would be expected to impact on groundwater levels towards the end of the summer and into the autumn.

The Carboniferous and Magnesian Limestone principal aquifers provide significant support to rivers and water supplies in East Midlands area. The fractured nature and low storage properties of these aquifers means that groundwater levels recovered rapidly during the winter recharge season. However, a sustained period of dry weather this summer would result in a corresponding decrease in groundwater levels.

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

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. River flows in the area are normal for the time of year and groundwater level remain between normal to exceptionally high.

Rainfall /Soil Moisture Deficit

Rainfall during the last three months, January to March 2026 was classed as above normal. During March the area received 110% of long-term average whilst April to date has been drier with 73% of LTA rainfall to 21 April.

Soil moisture deficit at the end of March was 10mm or less across the area indicating near-saturated conditions in the catchments. This is within 5mm of the LTA for this time of the year.

River flows

Latest river flows up to the 21 April in the area were classed as normal for the time of year.

Groundwater

Groundwater levels at the end of March were healthy with our indicator boreholes recording the levels between normal and exceptionally high status.

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

Hertfordshire and North London

Forward Look

The overall summer prospects for water resource availability for Hertfordshire and North London are currently GOOD.

Rainfall / Soil Moisture Deficit (SMD)

Rainfall through January to March was overall above average during the winter. Winter storage reservoirs have refilled sufficiently and correspondence with abstractors indicate volumes are adequate to meet the summers irrigation need. Rainfall totals have declined towards end of March and into April resulting slight increases in SMDs. Soils could continue to dry if insufficient rains occur over the summer period.

River Flows

Flows in April in the area were recorded within the normal range across the area. Our chalk rivers are likely to maintain flows over the summer due to the groundwater contribution, but clay and urban rivers will continue to require rainfall throughout the summer to maintain similar flows.

Groundwater

Groundwater levels across our monitoring sites are all within their normal range and recent data indicate levels are starting the seasonal decline. Projections would infer chalk groundwater levels should remain within their normal range for most of the summer period. Within the clay and urban areas, the groundwater resources are separate from direct rainfall events. Such resources need to be monitored over a much longer timeframe and are reported on separately.

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

Kent, South London and East Sussex

Forward Look

The overall summer prospects for water resource availability for the 2026 irrigation season are currently GOOD.

As a result of above average winter rainfall, water resources across all catchments are in healthy position heading into the irrigation season. Groundwater is normal to above normal and are likely to persist into the summer, providing baseflow support to rivers. It is therefore unlikely to expect abstraction constraints, triggered for irrigators, dependent upon ground or surface water sources within catchments of baseflow dominated rivers, such as the Darent and Cray, mid to lower Stour in North Kent and chalk streams within the area of South London.

Rainfall sensitive, impermeable catchments are more susceptible to drier conditions as experienced in March and April, with abstraction constraints developing due to the drier start to the season. Constraints within the Medway catchment are already or soon to be imposed should dry conditions continue. Water level dependant marsh areas are heading into this irrigation season, in a healthy position. There is a possibility of constraints being applied should prolonged dry weather occur but, no earlier than normal.

Rainfall / Soil Moisture Deficit

Rainfall during the October 2025 to March 2026 winter period was above average for the area with 115% of the LTA rainfall. During the early part of winter period there were drier conditions and due to the extended hot dry summer saw large Soil Moisture Deficits (SMD), delaying the onset of groundwater recharge. The latter half of winter experienced well above the average rainfall, resulting in a rapid and steep rate of recovery for groundwater levels. Drier conditions became established into March and April leading to below average rainfall and SMD's starting their seasonal increase.

River Flows

Following a wet winter with a drier March and April, flows are normal across most catchments and remain sufficient to support stable abstraction conditions. Impermeable clay catchments will typically be more susceptible to the impacts of recent drier conditions, as a result flow constraints have started to apply in catchments such as the Medway.

Water level–managed areas, including the Stour and Rother marshes, have moved to operating at higher summer water levels in response to the recent dry conditions and anticipating early irrigation demands. Water resources are in a favourable situation with constraints only expected to apply towards the end of summer should hot dry weather persist.

Groundwater

Groundwater levels in the Chalk and Lower Greensand aquifers range between normal and above following the wet winter. Groundwater levels have reached their peak and have started their seasonal decline. Groundwater levels are likely to remain normal to above normal for some time over the coming weeks. Therefore, within groundwater supported catchments abstraction constraints are not expected to be applied this summer to abstraction irrigators.

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

Lincolnshire and Northamptonshire

Forward look

The summer prospects for water resources availability for irrigation in the Lincolnshire and Northamptonshire area are GOOD to MODERATE. In the north of the region, where rainfall has been higher and rivers are more groundwater dependant, prospects remain Good based on the high groundwater levels for the time of year and normal river flows. If the dry weather persists over the next few months there is a risk that the prospect forecast will deteriorate. In the south of the region, where rainfall levels have been lower and river flows are less groundwater dependant, prospects are now Moderate

following two dry months and river flows declining to normal to below normal levels. Wetter weather from May could see an improvement in the spray irrigation prospects.

Rainfall / Soil Moisture Deficit

An exceptionally wet November to February saw 389mm of rainfall in Lincolnshire and Northamptonshire, the wettest on record. As a result, Soil Moisture Deficits (SMD) returned to normal and lower levels, where they remained throughout the winter. March saw below normal rainfall, with less falling in the south of the area than the north and as such soil moisture deficits built slightly towards normal levels for the time of year. A dry April across the whole region has seen SMD increase rapidly and are now at above normal levels for the time of year.

River Flows

An exceptionally wet November saw river flows recover quickly to normal to above normal status and following a wet winter, resulted in above normal to exceptionally high river flows throughout the winter. Several sites broke records for highest monthly mean flows in February. A relatively dry March saw river flows decline but still at normal or higher classifications. With a dry April, river flows have declined further with most sites now around normal and some sites below normal classifications.

Groundwater

The exceptionally high levels of rainfall over the winter have resulted in good groundwater recharge this year and most groundwater levels have been at exceptionally high levels other the winter, with some sites even breaking records over the winter for record high levels. A drier March and a very dry April has seen groundwater levels begin to decline, but all remain at normal levels or higher so are currently in good state going into the summer.

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

North East Area

Forward look

The overall summer prospects for water resources availability for irrigation in the North East area are GOOD due to recent above average rainfall.

Rainfall

The area received above average LTA in November, January and February. March received average rainfall across all catchments. Totals ranged from 72% of the LTA in the Tweed catchment to 117% of the LTA in the Tyne catchment. Cumulative 3-month totals ending March are classed as above normal for area with the exception of the Tweed and Northumbria North Sea Tribs catchments, which fell within the notably high range. Cumulative 6-month rainfall totals ending March are classed as notably high for the whole area with the exception of the Seaham and the Wear catchments which fell within the above normal range. Up to 21 April, the north east has seen 48% of the LTA rainfall. All catchments across the North East are saturated with soil moisture deficits less than 10mm.

River Flows

Monthly mean river flows fell within the normal or higher ranges in January and February. March monthly mean river flows fell within the normal range across all indicator sites. Monthly mean flows ranged from 61% of the LTA at Mitford in the River Wansbeck catchment to 113% of the LTA at Rutherford Bridge in the River Greta catchment. During April, river flows were classed as normal for the time of year. Over winter reservoir stocks increased rapidly with many reaching 100% by February. All reservoirs remain above average.

Groundwater

Groundwater levels vary across the North East area with all indicator sites within the range of notably high to below normal at the end of March. 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 stable level in the unconfined section of the aquifer.

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

Solent and South Downs

Forward look

The overall prospects for water resources availability for irrigation in the Solent and South Downs area are currently GOOD.

Rainfall / Soil Moisture Deficit

Rainfall during the winter period October 2025- March 2026 was above average for the area with 129% of the LTA rainfall. Large soil moisture deficits had developed following the dry conditions during 2025 and consequently, recharge was delayed until late into November even though rainfall in September was above average. November saw below average rainfall of 87% and December was close to average (112% LTA). Exceptionally wet conditions were experienced in January (196% LTA) and February (211% LTA) which were well above average. March was below average (60% LTA) which has resulted in soils being drier than average for the time of year. The dry conditions have continued into April with the area receiving below average rainfall.

River Flows

At the end of March 2026, all main reporting sites had normal or above monthly mean flows for both permeable and impermeable catchments. The current status of permeable catchments should mean that these rivers are resilient to the impacts of any dry periods in the coming months. However, the impermeable catchments are more dependent on the immediate weather conditions so can fluctuate quickly. Up to the 21 April the majority of river flows are classed as normal for the time of year.

Groundwater

Solent and South Downs area is heavily dependent on groundwater so prospects for summer rely on the recharge of the Chalk and Greensand aquifers. Despite the late start to the recharge process the exceptionally wet winter months in January and February helped to ensure that groundwater levels for the majority of reported sites ended the winter at normal or higher than normal. At the end of March, groundwater levels ranged from normal to notably high.

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

Thames

Forward Look

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

Rainfall / Soil Moisture Deficit

Over the last 6 months, all catchments in the Thames area have received at least above normal rainfall with the majority receiving exceptionally high rainfall in the last 3 months.
We have however only seen 61% of the LTA during March (38% of the LTA effective rainfall) which has resulted in the soil moisture deficit being only slightly more favourable than for the same time in 2025.
April has experience dry conditions to date with below average rainfall and these are very similar conditions to last year for soil moisture deficit.

River Flows

At the end of March all river flow reporting sites recorded flows that were normal or above. However, it should be noted that all but one site had notably high or exceptionally high flows at the end of February, and therefore the March position is a notable drop and a reflection of the lower-than-average rainfall experienced in March. Still, four sites; the Upper and Lower Wey; River Kennet; and Thames at Farmoor had above normal flow and the River Coln was notably high. River flows at key monitoring sites are around normal during April.

Groundwater

With the exception of two sites, all monitoring locations have recorded above normal or higher levels with several dropping at least one band in March, reflecting the trend towards drier conditions. Model Farm dropped to normal levels and Jackaments Bottom, which is very responsive compared to other sites, dropped from above normal to below normal.
Early projections for the coming 6 months to September indicate that the majority of groundwater sites will be in a better position by the end of the summer than those seen in 2025, if we see rainfall scenarios with at least 60% of the LTA.

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

Wessex

Forward Look

The overall prospects for water resources availability for irrigation in Wessex are currently GOOD.

Rainfall/Soil Moisture Deficit

Over the past 3 and 6 months, most areas in Wessex received exceptionally high rainfall. However, in March the area received only 54% of LTA rainfall and most days were dry. The decline in rainfall totals towards the end of March and into April has resulted in soil moisture deficits slightly drier than average for this time of year. Soils could continue to dry if insufficient rains occur over the summer period.

River Flows

At the end of March, all main river flow reporting sites across Wessex had normal or above monthly mean flows. In the north, most sites recorded normal monthly mean flows. In the south, most flows remained above normal due to supporting baseflow from the Chalk aquifer. River flows fell below normal during April in response to the dry weather experienced across the area.

Groundwater

Groundwater levels are healthy with indicator boreholes recording the levels between normal and exceptionally high status. Most recent data indicate levels are starting to fall in response to the lower rainfall. In the north, groundwater levels peaked during March and then began to fall by the end of the month. Groundwater levels in the west and south of Wessex, including in the Chalk aquifer, fell throughout March.

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

West Midlands

Forward look

The overall summer prospects for water resources availability for irrigation in the West Midlands area are currently GOOD to MODERATE

Rainfall / Soil Moisture Deficit

The period November 2025 to February 2026 was the wettest the West Midlands has experienced since records began in 1871. During January 2026, all catchments received more than 100% of LTA rainfall and replenished depleted river flows and soil moisture content. As a result, by February 2026 river flows had increased and soils were saturated. Rainfall received during March was mostly a little below the LTA, but normal for the time of year. However, April has so far recorded less than 50% of the LTA across all hydrological areas. Soils could continue to dry if insufficient rains occur over the next few months.

River Flows

The wet winter meant that high river flows were established by the end of February 2026, but a drier March has reduced flows. River flows have begun a downward trajectory over March and into April following the drier conditions and are still average for the time of year, which is due to the catchments being saturated. However, if conditions continue, then flows in catchments less supported by groundwater will reduce.

River Wye catchment

The **Sprayline** phone service that previously operated for abstractors in the River Wye catchment has now closed. All previous users of the service in the English part of the Wye catchment have been sent letters to explain the change and the new process of notifications. Notifications will now be sent via email or letter (at the abstractors choice) from the abstraction licensing online service. Abstractors are encouraged to sign up to the e-mail option as that ensures fastest resumption of abstraction following a restriction.

River Severn catchment

River flows on the River Severn are being monitored closely as they recede following the recent drier conditions, to ensure that the **River Severn Regulation Alert** is issued when flows fall to the trigger level at Bewdley. Once the alert is issued, we will 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. Licence restrictions are triggered by notification from the Environment Agency of “hands off flow or Level” 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 levels are currently recording notably high to exceptionally high level as of April 2026.The Permo-Triassic Sandstone aquifers are the most important groundwater source in the West Midlands which provides higher level of storage and support water supply and river baseflows. The storage properties of these aquifers mean that they are slow to respond and more resilient to drought over one or two seasons.

Moving out of the recharge season from winter into spring, groundwater levels are currently peaking and will start to recede off into the summer months. In groundwater fed river catchments, watercourses will continue to receive baseflows from high groundwater levels. In more impermeable river catchments of clay/ shales not fed by groundwater, river flows will start to recede and dry faster without groundwater baseflow support into the drier months.

Other aquifers in the West Midlands area include the Carboniferous Sandstone, Carboniferous Limestone, Jurassic Limestone aquifers where groundwater levels have responded to the rainfall over the winter and levels have recently recovered to their normal seasonal highs. A return to dry periods in the summer will see a decrease in groundwater levels in these types of fracture flow aquifers as they have little groundwater storage.

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

Yorkshire

Forward look

Prospects for water resources availability for spray irrigation in Yorkshire for 2026 for spring/summer are GOOD. In catchments that are predominantly reservoir fed, stocks are still high and dropping according to

normal conditions. Our previous update was issued after an extremely wet winter with surface and groundwater stocks are all healthy.

Rainfall / Soil Moisture Deficit

There has been no sustained dry or wet weather for the period for February and March; instead, this period falls into the average range. Average rainfall was received in March. Drier conditions have been experienced across the area during April. The geography and geology of South and West Yorkshire make it susceptible to short sharp spells of dry weather, the examples of the heatwaves of 2018 and 2022 are good examples of where healthy stocks and river flows can soon change with the space of a month in these areas. Therefore, the Environment Agency could significantly change its prospects for these areas in the summer should an event similar to 2018 and 2022 occur again

River Flows

Following a wet winter flows in rivers were high and groundwater levels normal or above. Easterly rivers in Yorkshire will maintain flows for much longer even if dry weather returns later in 2026 as levels in the chalk aquifers are normal or higher. The exception is the limestone in the upstream river Derwent where responses to dry weather are quicker than elsewhere in East Yorkshire.

Abstraction in the region is primarily controlled by conditions on licences and licence holders must ensure that they always adhere to these. Some licence holders had already received advance warnings on their licences, and a small number has already received stop notices following the drier conditions in March all were then removed after some rainfall in April. 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). 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 in a healthy position throughout Yorkshire following the recharge over the winter. The only aquifer that may respond to short sharp dry spells is the Corallian limestone which responds similar to surface water in some locations, with this exception it is likely groundwater will have sufficient storage for the irrigation season of 2026. For most of the slower responding aquifers, winter rainfall is a crucial aspect for gauging stocks for the next year. Even in a normal year there will be seasonal recessions in aquifer levels, but this is not unusual for Yorkshire’s aquifers. Groundwater is not expected to receive any further significant recharge at this time of year and will follow normal season recession trends.

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

3.Preparing for the irrigation season

We encourage all irrigators to take actions to minimise the potential impacts of prolonged dry weather on both the environment and their businesses. Planning ahead and managing water proactively are key to keeping irrigation operations resilient throughout the season. If you have any concerns regarding your abstraction activities this summer, we strongly recommend that you contact the Environment Agency as

soon as possible to discuss the options and actions available to you. Early engagement allows us to work with you to manage water resources effectively

If you are unsure who your local Environment Agency contact is, please call our Customer Service Line on **03708 506 506** and ask to speak with your local **Water Resources officer**. Contact details for local Environment Agency teams are also provided within this report.

3.1 Abstraction licence compliance

Please ensure that you comply with all conditions of your abstraction licence. If you have any questions, please contact the Environment Agency, who will be able to provide further assistance.

Licence holders should ensure that they:

- Comply with all licence conditions, including abstracting water only from authorised locations and during authorised periods
- Ensure that abstraction volumes and rates are not exceeded, and that accurate records of meter readings are maintained
- Check for any site-specific or local conditions on the licence, such as hands-off flow restrictions
- Where third parties conduct irrigation activities, ensure that contractors fully understand and comply with the conditions of the abstraction licence
- Where licences include compensation discharge and re-abstraction conditions, you must ensure that water is released within the period of time as specified in your licence before re-abstracting
- Review current and future water needs and, where necessary, apply to vary their water rights to ensure abstraction arrangements are more resilient and fit for purpose

- Register to manage your licences online:

    - The EA has developed a secure Managing Water Abstraction Service on GOV.UK for abstractors, and over 10,000 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 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 enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk 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.

3.2 Top tips for successful irrigation

Licence holders and operators should follow these simple measures to improve water efficiency and support abstraction compliance:

- Ensure that meters are correctly fitted, calibrated where required, and kept in good working order
- Inspect irrigation systems before the start of the season and repair or replace any worn, damaged, or inefficient components
- Set up and operate irrigation systems in accordance with an accurate and reliable irrigation scheduling method
- Be prepared to adjust irrigation plans in response to changing conditions, such as weather, soil moisture, or water availability
- Apply water efficiently by ensuring equipment is correctly set up and that no more water than the crop requires is applied
- Plan irrigation timing carefully, for example by avoiding the heat of the day and irrigating at night where practicable to reduce losses through evaporation
- Undertake a water audit to understand water use, costs, and efficiency, including calculating “crop per drop”
- Keep up to date with Environment Agency (EA) dry weather advice, including information published through the prolonged dry weather abstraction guidance.

3.3 Storage reservoirs

To support efficient water use and abstraction resilience, licence holders should:

- Take every practicable opportunity to ensure that high-flow storage reservoirs are as full as possible before the start of the irrigation season
- If you are experiencing difficulties filling your irrigation reservoirs, contact the Environment Agency as early as possible to discuss any available opportunities to maximise reservoir filling to be explored
- Ensure that reservoirs are regularly inspected and maintained, including checks for leaks, structural defects, or cracking

3.4 Voluntary abstraction restrictions

Voluntary abstraction restrictions are measures adopted by licence holders during dry weather such as reducing abstraction volumes, shifting to night-time pumping, or limiting abstraction duration to help protect water resources.

Licence holders are encouraged to:

- **Support voluntary restrictions where these are requested**, as this can help delay or avoid the need for formal regulatory restrictions.
- **Be assured that any voluntary reductions in abstraction will not be taken into account negatively** if you subsequently apply to renew your abstraction licence.

4. Support to improve access to water

If you have questions or any concerns regarding your abstraction activities this summer, we strongly recommend that you contact the Environment Agency as soon as possible to discuss the options and actions available to you, this might include sharing water with your neighbours. However, you can also think about longer term options for example water rights trading, rainwater harvesting, or investing in storage.

4.1 Water Sharing and Trading

Water sharing allows licence holders to share water with others whilst complying with your licence conditions. If you need to change a licence condition to complete a transaction relating to water abstraction, then you need to complete a licence trade which requires our approval.

You can find out more about trading water rights on gov.uk or find abstractors with potential for trade on our water trading map.

4.2 Local Resources Options

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, which can strengthen drought resilience. Further information on case studies can be found on our Engagement page.

We encourage early planning to build long-term water security, and this is a great opportunity to get started. Launch of a third round in 2026-27 is due in June, sign up to hear first by emailing us at WRAgriculture WRAgriculture@environment-agency.gov.uk.

4.3 Water Abstractor Groups

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 water abstractor group to share information, increase knowledge of water regulation and best practices and improve communications with regulators. Find existing local groups at https://www.ukia.org/wags/.

Maintain an awareness of developing guidance from academic institutions and farming organisations (such as e.g. NFU, UKIA, Cranfield University).

4.4 Regional Water Resources Groups

The regional water resources planning groups, (Water Resources East, Water Resources West, Water Resources South East, Water Resources North and West Country Water and Environment), are all working on understanding the demand and supply of water for agriculture in their areas and looking for ways to improve it. Do reach out to your regional group to see what they are working on and how you can collaborate to understand long term water resources resilience.

4.5 Abstraction of floodwater

Our Regulatory Position Statement on abstraction of floodwater outside of licence conditions is in place to support abstractors. The statement applies to the abstraction of water during flooding at times of year that are not included within the licence conditions, or at instantaneous, hourly, or daily rates that exceed the licence quantities. All 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 and cannot be used in more than one flood event. We still expect abstractors to vary your licences if they require additional water or want to change the conditions on the licences.

4.6 Other useful links and guidance

Rainwater Harvesting; Smart Agricultural Water Resources Toolkit by WReN and Planning Farm Reservoirs by WRE and UKIA – both coming in May.

Keep updated on the latest water situation reports at https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/water-situation-reports-for-england (national and area specific reports are available).