



DROUGHT



The local scoop

New Mexico experienced some of its **WORST DROUGHT CONDITIONS** during the 1950s. A half-century later, the year **2000** was one of the hottest and driest on record (and coincidentally also the year of the 47,000-acre **CERRO GRANDE WILDFIRE** that displaced more than 400 Los Alamos families). Another severe drought year occurred in 2002, followed by a multi-year drought that began in 2011 and continues today (as of July 2018 Northern New Mexico remains in either Extreme or Exceptional Drought conditions).

In Los Alamos County, drought severely impacts **PONDEROSA PINE** and other fir trees. Between 5 and 10 percent of the ponderosa and douglas fir trees along major roads are dead or are showing signs of severe stress.

LIKELIHOOD OF FUTURE OCCURRENCES: Medium. According to the New Mexico Office of the State Engineer, droughts occur on average every 10 years within the state.

BEFORE:

Strategies for drought preparedness focus mainly on water conservation.

- Never pour water down the drain when you might be able to use it again.
- Retrofit all household faucets by installing aerators with flow restrictors, and repair dripping faucets by replacing washers. One drop per second wastes **2,700 GALLONS** of water per year.
- Check plumbing for **LEAKS** and have any repaired by a plumber.
- Install an instant hot water heater on your sink.
- Insulate water pipes to reduce heat loss and prevent bursting.
- Install a water-softening system only when minerals in the water would damage pipes. Turn the softener off on vacation.
- Choose appliances and irrigation devices that are more energy and water **EFFICIENT**.
- Consider purchasing a **LOW-VOLUME TOILET**, or install a toilet displacement device to cut down on the amount of water needed to flush.
- Replace your shower head with an ultra-low-flow version.
- Start a **COMPOST PILE** to dispose of food waste (garbage disposals require a lot of water to operate properly).
- Plant native and/or drought-tolerant plants. Group plants together based on similar water needs.
- Use **MULCH** to retain moisture in the soil. Mulch also helps control weeds that compete with landscape plants for water.
- Avoid purchasing recreational **WATER TOYS** or installing ornamental water features unless they use re-circulated water.
- Consider rainwater **HARVESTING**.
- Position sprinklers so water lands on plants—not paved areas.
- Check **SPRINKLER SYSTEMS** and timing devices regularly to be sure they operate properly.
- Raise lawn mower blades to the highest level. A higher cut

encourages grass roots to grow deeper and holds soil moisture.

- Turn irrigation down in fall and off in winter. Water **MANUALLY** in winter only if needed.
- Invest in a weather-based irrigation controller that automatically adjusts watering time and frequency.

DURING:

- Observe state and local **RESTRICTIONS** on water use.
- Avoid **FLUSHING** the toilet unnecessarily. Dispose of tissues and similar waste in the trash rather than the toilet.
- Avoid baths; take **SHORT SHOWERS**, and only use water to get wet and rinse off.
- Avoid letting the water run while brushing your teeth, washing your face, or shaving.
- Place a **BUCKET** in the shower to catch excess water for watering plants.
- Avoid rinsing dishes before placing them in the dishwasher, and operate dishwashers only when they are **FULLY LOADED**.
- Hand wash dishes by filling two containers— one with soapy water and the other with rinse water containing a small amount of chlorine bleach.
- Clean vegetables in a pan filled with water rather than running water from the tap.

- Store **DRINKING WATER** in the refrigerator. Do not let water run waiting for it to cool.
- Avoid wasting water waiting for it to get hot. Capture it for other uses, or heat it using the stove or microwave.
- Avoid using running water to thaw **FROZEN FOODS**. Defrost food overnight in the refrigerator or by using the microwave.
- Operate automatic clothes washers only when they are fully loaded, or set the water level for the size of your load.
- Use a commercial **CAR WASH** that recycles water.
- If you wash your own car, use a shut-off nozzle on your hose that can be adjusted.
- Check soil **MOISTURE LEVELS**. You don't need to water if soil is still moist.
- If your lawn requires watering, do so early in the morning or later in the evening when temperatures are cooler.
- Water in several **SHORT SESSIONS** rather than one long one, in order for your lawn to better absorb moisture and avoid runoff.
- Use a broom or blower instead of a hose to clean debris from your driveway or sidewalk.
- In extreme drought, allow lawns to **DIE** in favor of preserving trees and large shrubs.

