

Water Supply Outlook



Interstate Commission on the Potomac River Basin (ICPRB)

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April 9, 2015

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The ICPRB, through its Section for Cooperative Water Supply Operations on the Potomac (CO-OP), coordinates water supply operations during times of drought and recommends releases of stored water. These operations ensure adequate water supplies for the major Washington metropolitan area water users and for environmental flow levels. The water supply outlooks are published by CO-OP on a monthly basis between April and October. They are meant to provide an update on the possibility of low flow conditions in the Potomac basin.

Summary/Conclusions:

There is below normal probability of releases from the Washington metropolitan area's back-up water supply reservoirs for the 2015 summer and fall seasons. Generally, the use of Jennings Randolph and Little Seneca reservoirs is triggered by low flows brought about by a combination of low summer precipitation and low groundwater levels. According to MARFC's Water Resource Outlook for the southern portion of the Middle Atlantic there has been enough precipitation to offset some of the developing dry weather conditions in the Potomac basin. If precipitation continues to be below normal, however, degradation in the outlook may occur. At present, there is sufficient flow in the Potomac River to meet Washington metropolitan area's water demands without augmentation from upstream reservoirs. In the event that low-flow conditions do develop, the metro area is well-protected from a water supply shortage because of carefully designed drought-contingency plans.

ICPRB's Low Flow Outlook:

There is a 5 to 10 percent conditional probability that natural Potomac flow will drop below 600- to 700-million gallons per day (MGD) at Little Falls through December 31 of this year; at these flow levels, water supply releases from Jennings Randolph and Little Seneca reservoirs may occur. Releases occur when predicted flow is less than demand plus a required flow-by. Demand ranges from 400 to 700 MGD during the summer months and the minimum flow-by at Little Falls is 100 MGD. Note that natural flow is defined as observed flow at the Little Falls gage plus total Washington metropolitan Potomac withdrawals, with an adjustment made to remove the effect of North Branch reservoir releases on stream flow.

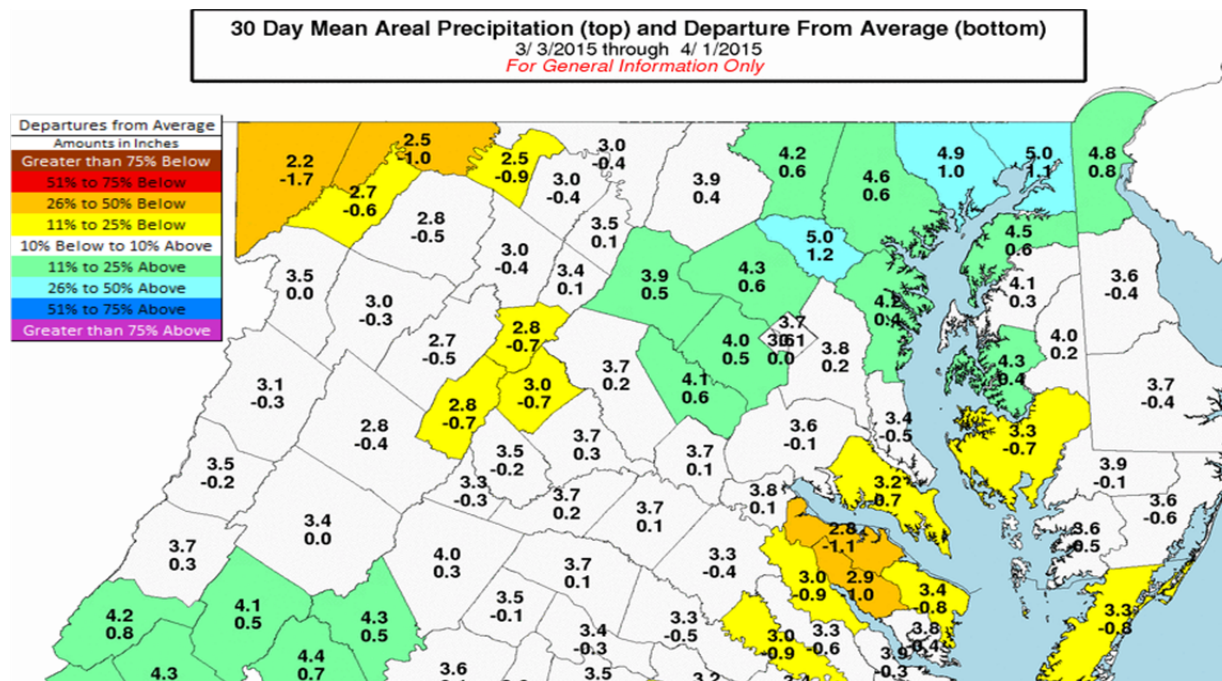
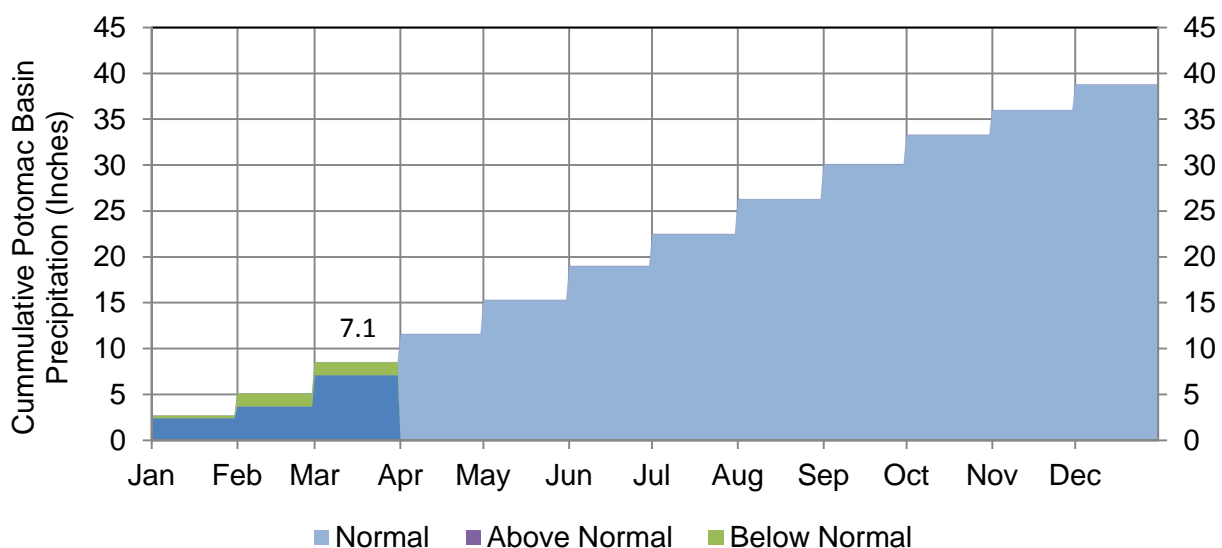
The conditional probability is estimated by analyzing the historical stream flow records and giving consideration to recent stream flow values, precipitation totals for the prior 12 months, current groundwater levels, and the current Palmer Drought Index. Past years in which watershed conditions most closely resemble current conditions are weighted more heavily in the determination of conditional probability. The historical, or unconditional, probability is based on an analysis of the historical record without weighting for current conditions. The conditional probability of 5 to 10 percent compares to a historical probability of 8 to 15 percent and is considered the more reliable indicator.

Outlook for Potomac River at Little Falls – Watershed conditions as of April 9, 2015

<i>Low flow threshold (MGD)</i>	<i>Low flow threshold (cfs)</i>	<i>Historical probability of lower flow April 1 through December 31</i>	<i>Conditional probability of lower flow April 1 through December 31</i>
1200	1858	68%	63%
1000	1548	49%	45%
800	1238	25%	22%
700	1084	15%	10%
600	929	8%	5%

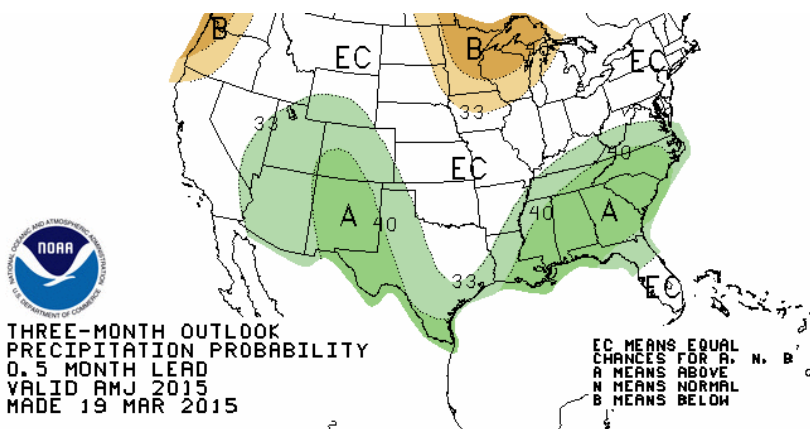
Past Precipitation:

Data from the National Weather Service's Middle Atlantic River Forecast Center (MARFC) shows that the Potomac basin upstream of Washington, D.C. has received a precipitation total of 3.4 inches for the month of March, which is 0 inches from normal. The cumulative basin total precipitation is 7.1 inches for the year to date (January 1 to March 31), which is 1.4 inches below normal (see graph). The map on the bottom of the page shows that March precipitation has been below normal in the upper portions of the basin and above normal for Washington, D.C. and its suburbs.



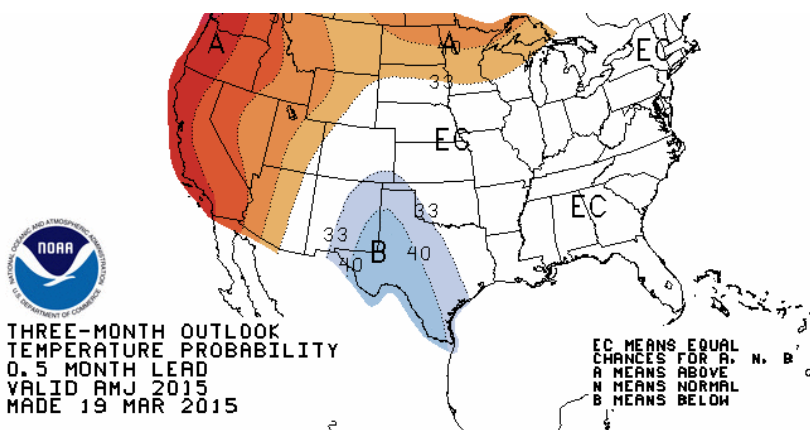
Source: Middle Atlantic River Forecast Center, National Weather Service.

Precipitation and Drought Outlook for April, May, and June 2015:



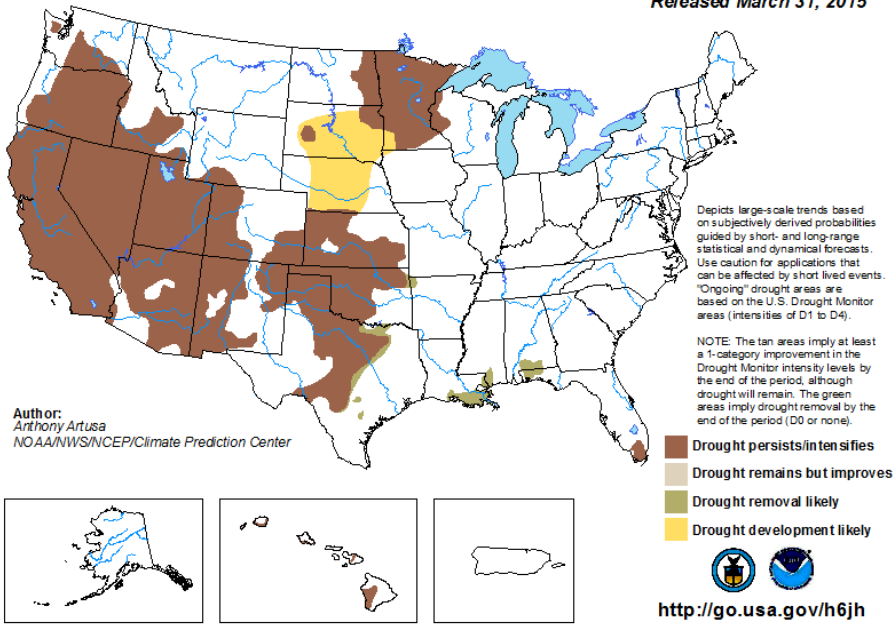
MARFC's Water Resource Outlook for the southern portion of the Middle Atlantic calls for near or above normal precipitation and above normal temperatures for the next couple of weeks.

The NWS Climate Prediction Center's 30 day outlook for April calls for above average precipitation and near or above normal temperatures. The 90 day outlook for April through June calls for near or above average precipitation and near normal temperatures. The 90 day outlook is shown in the first two maps on the left.



U.S. Monthly Drought Outlook Drought Tendency During the Valid Period

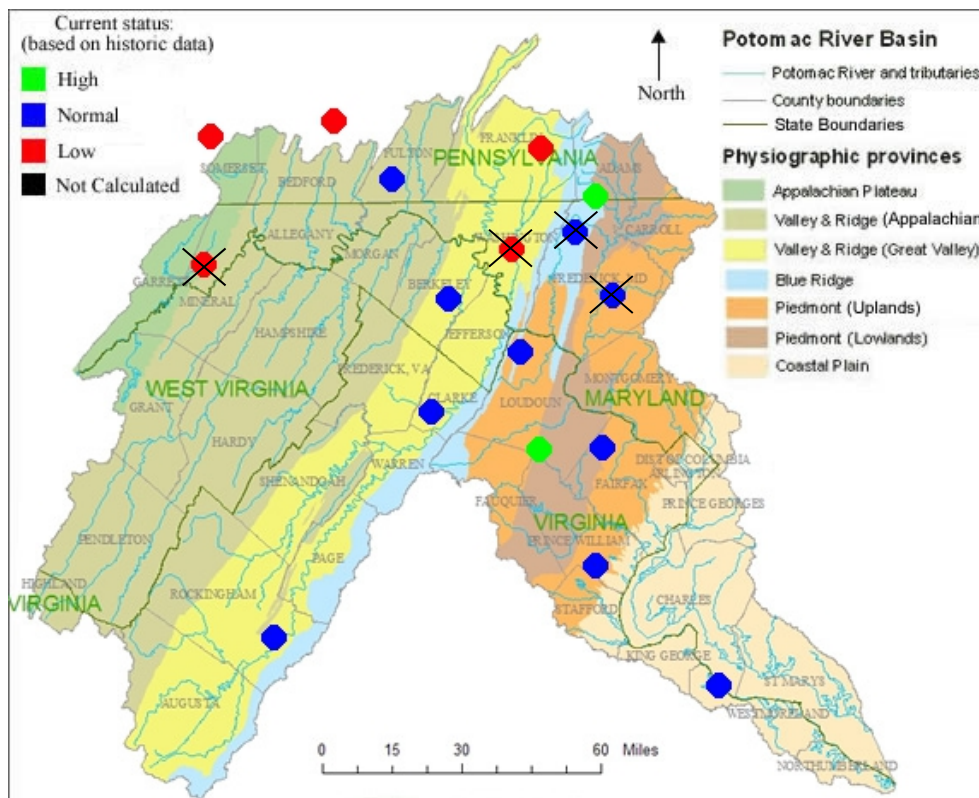
Valid for April 2015
Released March 31, 2015



As of March 31 the CPC's U.S. Seasonal Drought Outlook indicates that drought development is not likely for the Potomac basin.

Groundwater – Current Conditions:

The groundwater map below, created by the U.S. Geological Survey, Pennsylvania Water Science Center on April 1, shows that water levels in monitoring wells in the Potomac basin range from “Low” to “High”, with most falling in the “Normal” or “High” categories. In this map, the USGS defines “High” as greater than 75th percentile, “Normal” as between the 25th and 75th percentiles, and “Low” as less than the 25th percentile. Note that there are a few wells (marked with an X) that do not reflect current conditions and are in the process of being updated on this map.



Reservoir Storage – Current Conditions:

No water supply releases have been made this year. The first Jennings Randolph Reservoir whitewater release (1,000 cubic feet per second) is scheduled for Saturday and Sunday, April 11th and 12th, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. each day. A second whitewater release is scheduled for Saturday and Sunday, April 25th and 26th.

Reservoir storage as of April 9, 2015

Facility	Percent Full	Current usable storage, BG	Total usable capacity, BG
WSSC's Patuxent reservoirs	98	10.0	10.2
Fairfax Water's Occoquan Reservoir	100	8.0	8.0
Little Seneca Reservoir ¹	98	3.8	3.9
Jennings Randolph water supply ²	100	13.1	13.1
Jennings Randolph water quality ²	100	16.3	16.3
Savage Reservoir ³	83	5.2	6.3

¹ Usable capacity consistent with Ortt, *et al.* (2011).

² 2013 revised stage-storage curve provided by Bill Haines, US Army Corps of Engineers, Baltimore District.

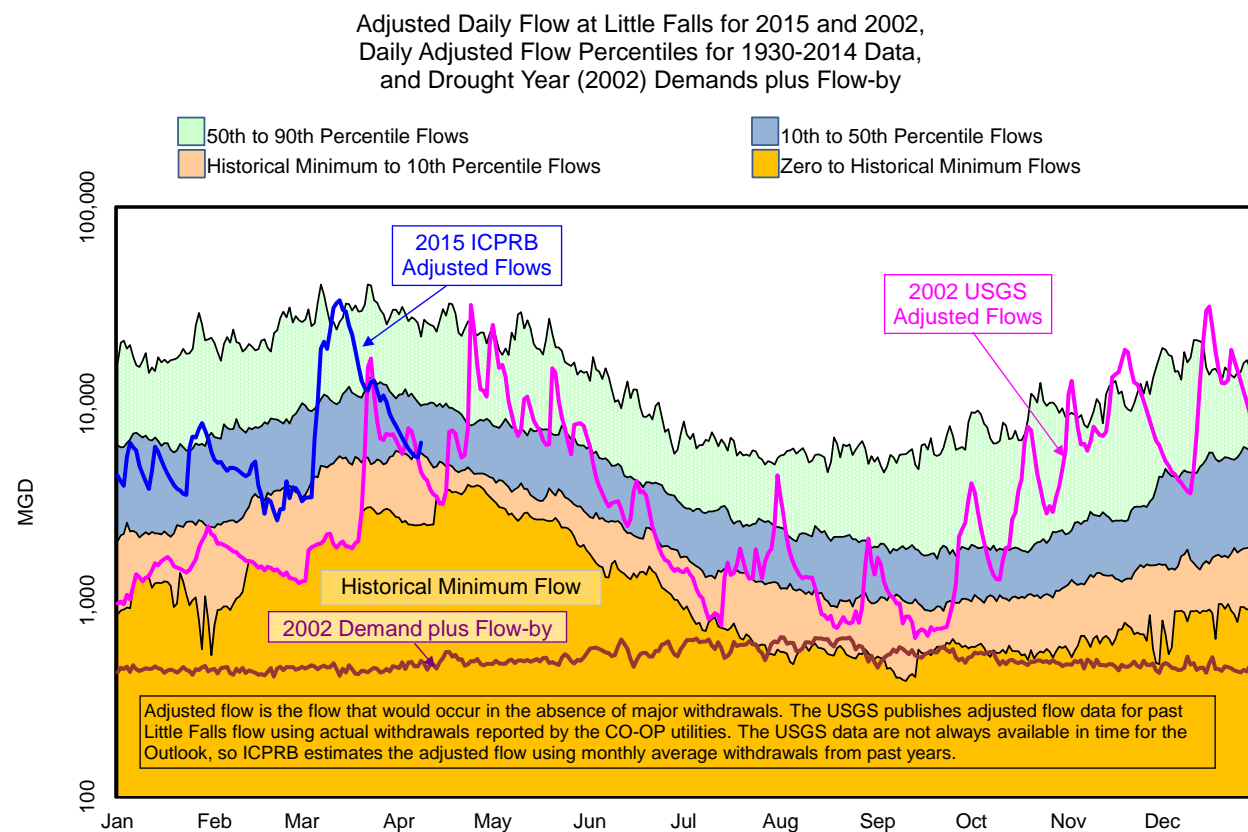
³ 1998 revised stage-storage curve provided by Bill Haines, US Army Corps of Engineers, Baltimore District.

Potomac River Flow:

The estimated adjusted Potomac flow at Little Falls on April 1 was 7.2 billion gallons per day (BGD). This value was below the historical 50th percentile value for this day of the year of 11.1 BGD. Adjusted flow, shown in the figure below, is the flow that would occur in the absence of major Washington metropolitan area withdrawals, but includes releases from upstream reservoirs. Adjusted flow averaged 8.4 BGD for the first three months of the year and 15.5 BGD in March.

Environmental Flow-by:

Average observed Potomac flow at Little Falls in August was well above the minimum flow recommendation of 100 MGD.



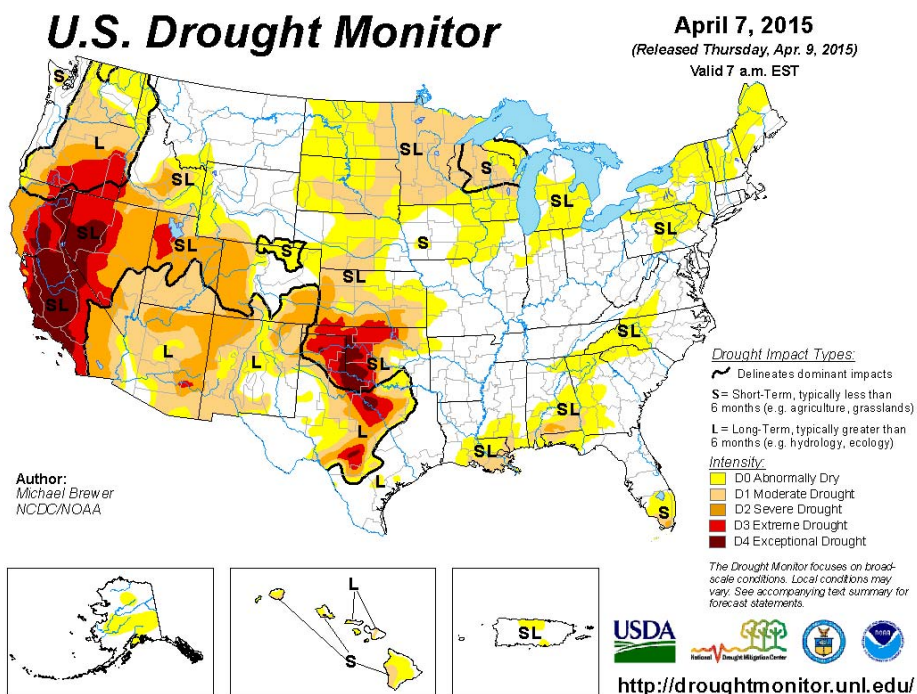
Little Falls flow statistics are based on 1930 through 2014 USGS published gage flow, "USGS 01646502 POTOMAC RIVER (ADJUSTED) NEAR WASH, DC". To create this flow record, the USGS has added historical water supply withdrawals from the Potomac as reported by FW, WSSC, the Aqueduct, and Rockville to the Little Falls gage flow record.

Drought Status:

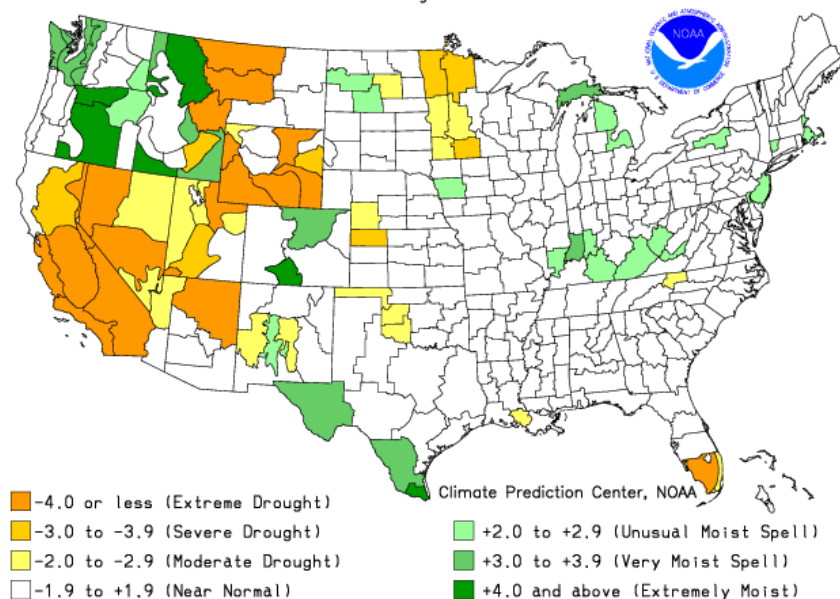
The Metropolitan Washington Council of Government's Drought Awareness Response Plan status is "Normal."

Drought Monitor and Soil Moisture:

The NOAA Climate Prediction Center's U.S. Drought Monitor map (see first figure below) indicates that the Potomac basin is currently free of drought. However, there are some abnormally dry (D0) areas in Pennsylvania and Virginia. The Palmer Drought Severity Index by Division map (see second figure below) indicates near normal conditions in the Potomac basin.



Drought Severity Index by Division
Weekly Value for Period Ending APR 4, 2015
Long Term Palmer



Information provided by the USGS, the Middle Atlantic River Forecast Center, and the National Weather Service.