

# Water Supply Outlook



## Interstate Commission on the Potomac River Basin (ICPRB)

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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 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 a below normal probability of releases from the Washington metropolitan area's back-up water supply reservoirs for the 2018 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. Potomac basin average precipitation in the month of April has been above normal and groundwater levels are near normal or below normal. According to the Middle Atlantic River Forecast Center, the outlook for water resources and water supplies is fair in the Potomac Basin. At present, there is sufficient flow in the Potomac River to meet the Washington metropolitan area's water demands without augmentation from upstream reservoirs. In the event that low-flow conditions do develop, the Washington metropolitan area is well-protected from a water supply shortage because of carefully designed drought-contingency plans.

### ICPRB's Low Flow Outlook:

**There is a four to nine 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 environmental flow. Drinking water 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.

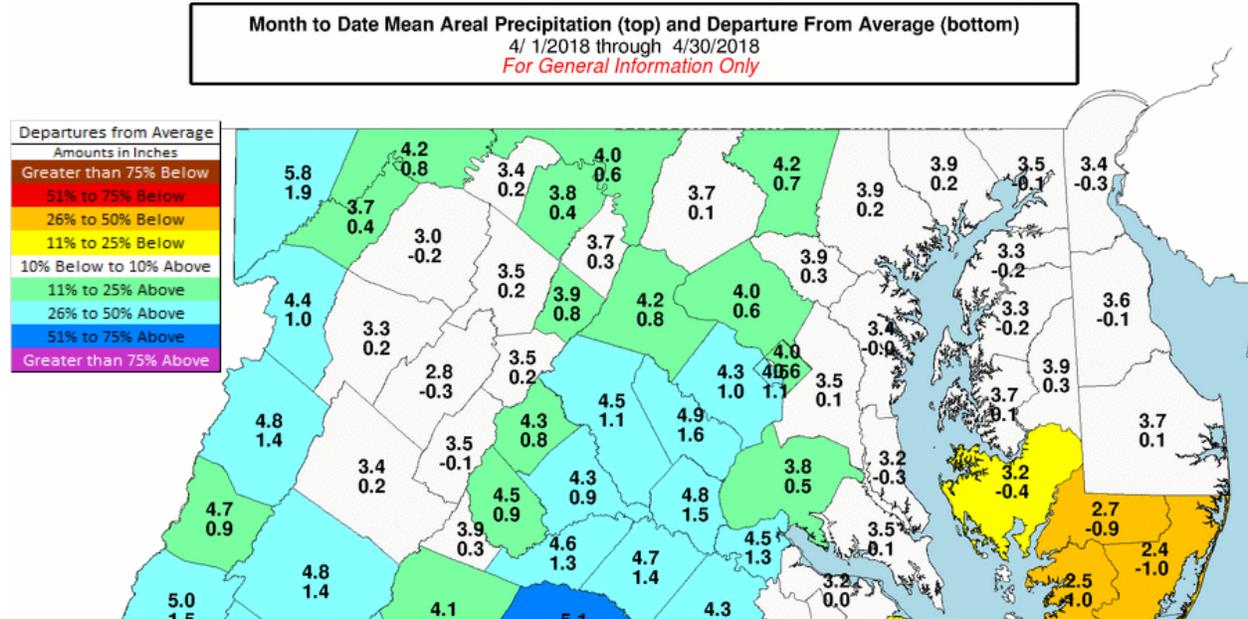
The conditional probability is estimated by analyzing the historical stream flow records and giving consideration to recent stream flow values, precipitation totals for the prior 12 months, current groundwater levels, and the current Palmer Drought Index. Past years in which watershed conditions most 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 weighing for current conditions. The four to nine percent current conditional probability compares to the 8 to 15 percent historical probability and is considered the more reliable indicator.

Outlook for natural Potomac River flow at Little Falls – Watershed conditions as of May 1, 2018

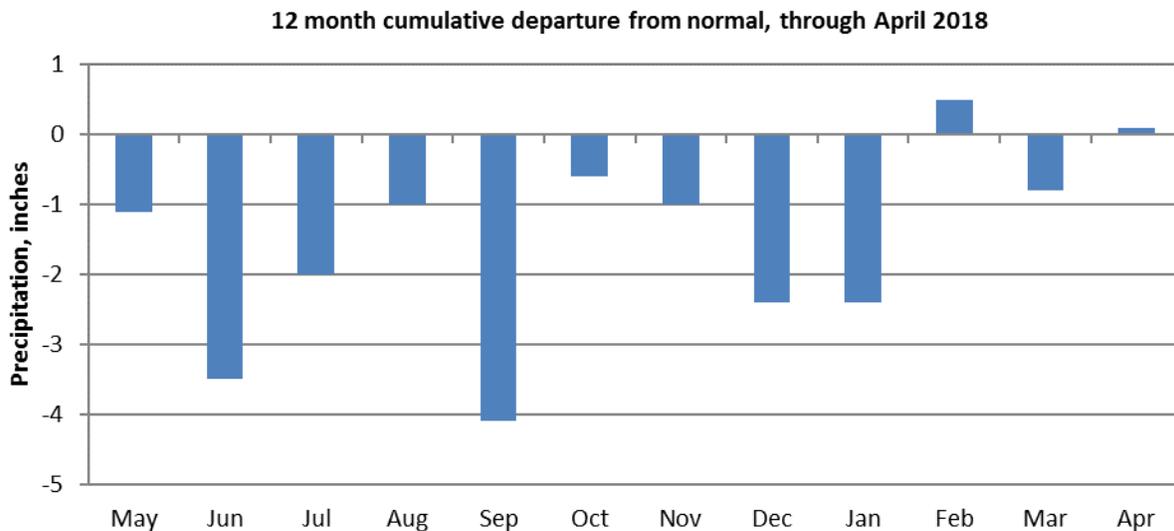
<i>Low flow threshold (MGD)</i>	<i>Low flow threshold (cfs)</i>	<i>Historical probability of lower flow April 1 through December 31</i>	<i>Conditional probability of lower flow April 1 through December 31</i>
1200	1858	68%	66%
1000	1548	49%	46%
800	1238	25%	21%
700	1084	15%	9%
600	929	8%	4%

**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 3.9 inches in the month of April, which is 0.5 inches above normal. The map below shows that March precipitation has been normal to about 26 to 50% above normal in most of the Potomac Basin. The 12-month cumulative basin precipitation has been below normal for most of the past 12 months but is currently 0.1 inches above normal (see graph).

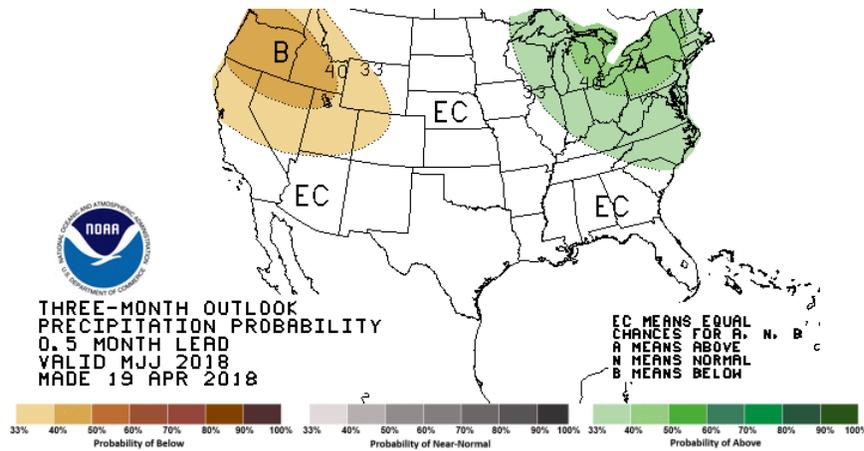
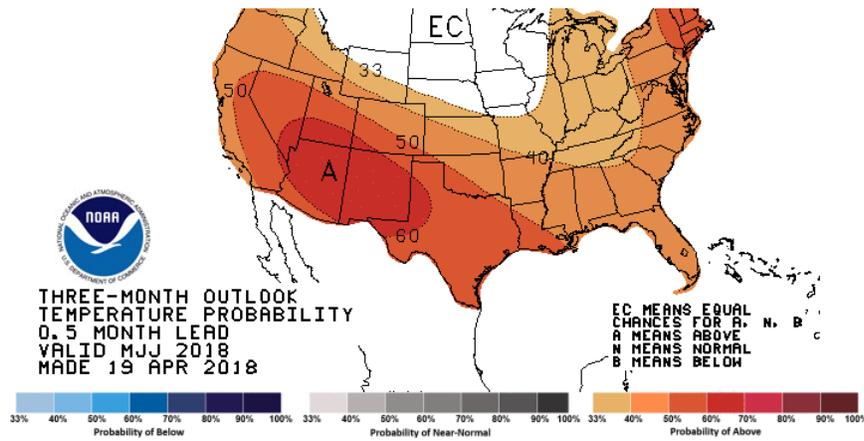


Source: Middle Atlantic River Forecast Center, National Weather Service



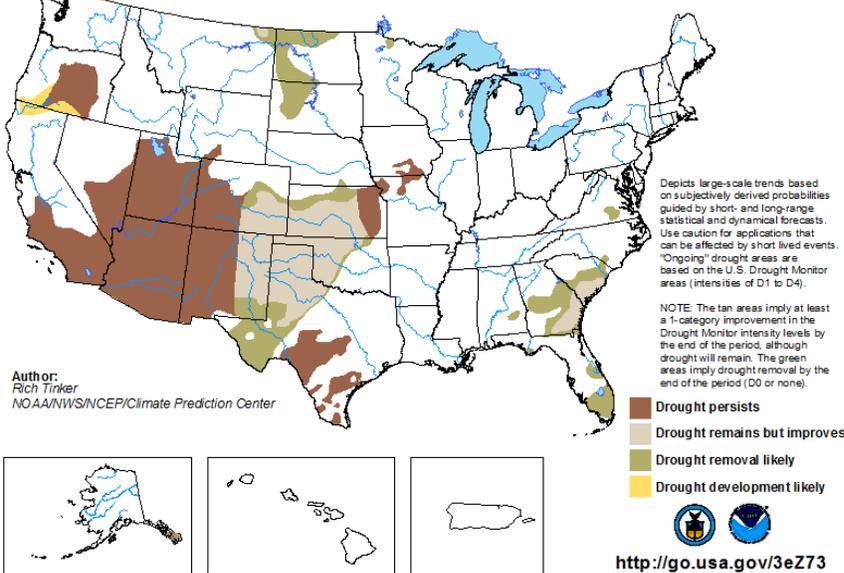
Information provided by the USGS, the Middle Atlantic River Forecast Center, and the National Weather Service.

**Precipitation and Drought Outlook for May, June and July 2018**



**U.S. Seasonal Drought Outlook**  
Drought Tendency During the Valid Period

Valid for April 19 - July 31, 2018  
Released April 19, 2018



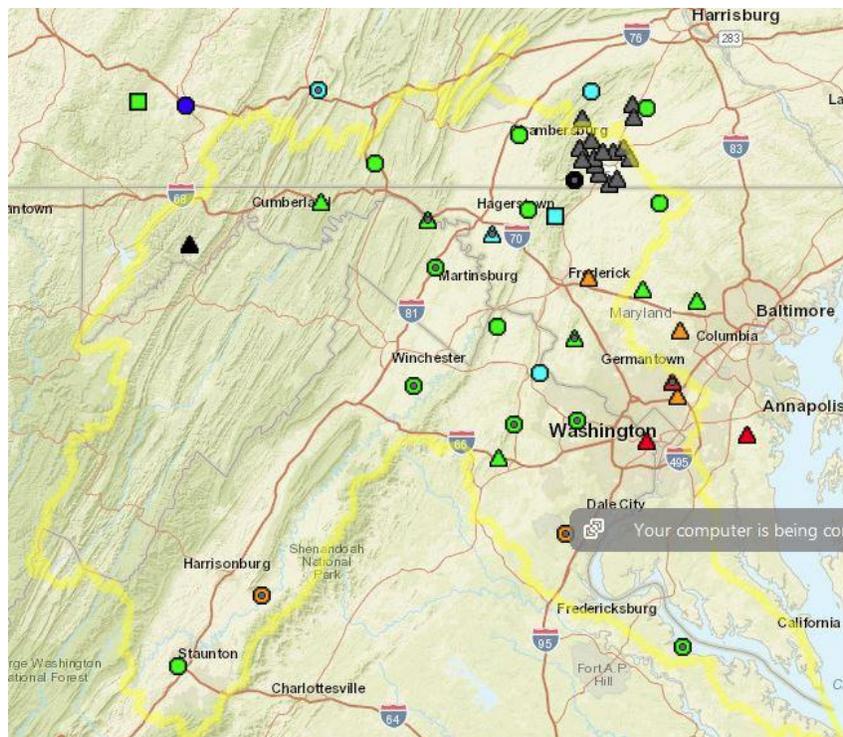
MARFC's Water Resource Outlook for the southern portion of the Middle Atlantic calls for near or below average precipitation for the next couple of weeks. Temperatures are expected to be average.

The National Weather Service Climate Prediction Center's 30-day outlook for May calls for near or below average rainfall along with above normal temperatures. The 90-day outlook for May through July calls for above average rainfall and temperatures.

As of April 19, the Climate Prediction Center's U.S. Seasonal Drought Outlook reports no drought development in the Potomac basin.

**Groundwater – Current Conditions:**

MARFC’s Water Resource Outlook for the Southern portion of the Middle Atlantic reports that groundwater is mostly near or below normal. The groundwater map below, by the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), Pennsylvania Water Science Center, shows that current water levels in monitoring wells in the Potomac basin range from “Much Below Normal” to “Above Normal”. Wells with a gray dot inside the symbol identify Water Supply Outlook wells, the majority of which fall in the “Normal” category. In this map, the USGS defines “Normal” as between the 25<sup>th</sup> and 75<sup>th</sup> percentiles.



**Wells with a gray dot inside the symbol identify water supply outlook wells**

Explanation - Percentile classes (symbol color based on most recent measurement)							Wells			
● Low	● <10 Much Below Normal	● 10-24 Below Normal	● 25-75 Normal	● 76-90 Above Normal	● >90 Much Above Normal	● High	● Not Ranked	○ Real Time	◻ Continuous	△ Periodic Measurement

**Reservoir Storage – Current Conditions:**

No water supply releases from the CO-OP shared system have been made this year. Triadelphia Reservoir is low and will remain so for the next year because of rehabilitation work being done at the dam. Triadelphia Reservoir is one of the two Patuxent reservoirs.

A whitewater release from Jennings Randolph Reservoir is scheduled for the weekends of May 5 to 6 and May 19 to 20, 2018. Releases from Jennings Randolph and Savage reservoirs are made for a variety of purposes. The flow values reported for whitewater and artificially varied flow (AVF) come entirely from water quality storage and may be increased or decreased without prior notice, depending on changing climatic and hydrologic conditions. Information provided by the USGS, the Middle Atlantic River Forecast Center, and the National Weather Service.

Reservoir storage as of April 5, 2018

Facility	Percent Full	Current usable storage, BG	Total usable capacity, BG
WSSC's Patuxent reservoirs <sup>4,5</sup>	45	4.7	10.3
Fairfax Water's Occoquan Reservoir	100	8.1	8.1
Little Seneca Reservoir <sup>1</sup>	99	3.8	3.9
Jennings Randolph water supply <sup>2</sup>	100	13.1	13.1
Jennings Randolph water quality <sup>2</sup>	100	16.3	16.3
Savage Reservoir <sup>3</sup>	90	5.6	6.3

<sup>1</sup> Usable capacity consistent with Ortt, *et al.* (2011).

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

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

<sup>4</sup> Bathymetric study conducted December 2015 with revisions in December 2016, and unusable storage corrected June 2017.

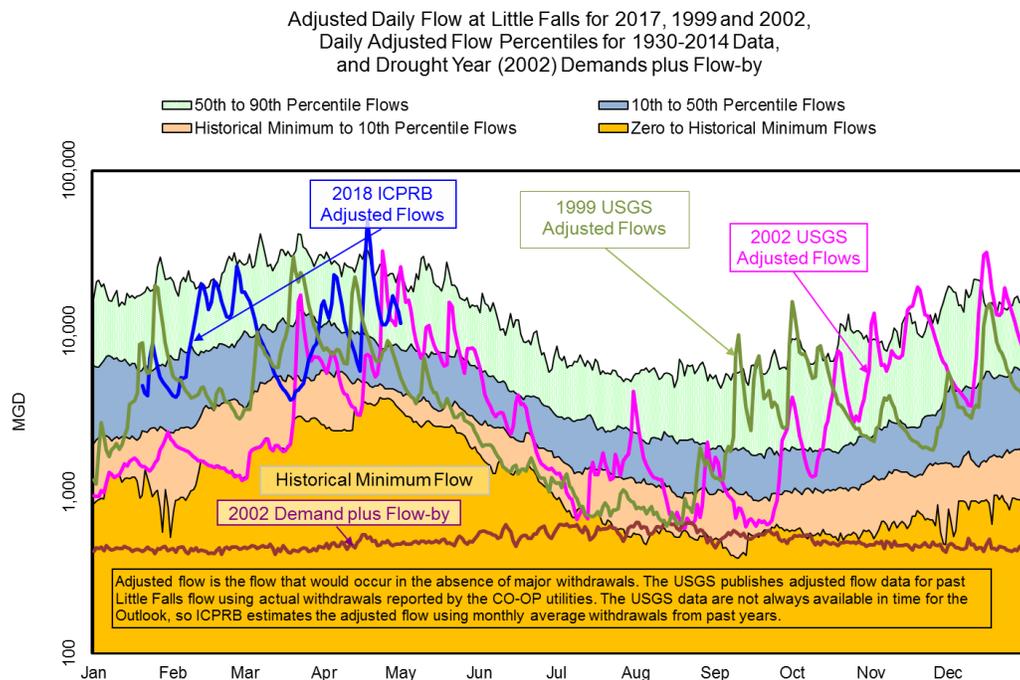
<sup>5</sup> Patuxent usable storage currently reduced to approximately 6 BG due to the Brighton dam rehabilitation project

**Potomac River Flow:**

The estimated adjusted Potomac flow at Little Falls on May 1 was 11.3 billion gallons per day (BGD). For this day of the year, this value was above the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile flow value of 7.7 BGD and below the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile flow value of 24.9 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 11.5 BGD for the first three months of the year and 15.9 BGD in April.

**Environmental Flow-by:**

Average observed Potomac flow at Little Falls in March was well above the minimum 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.

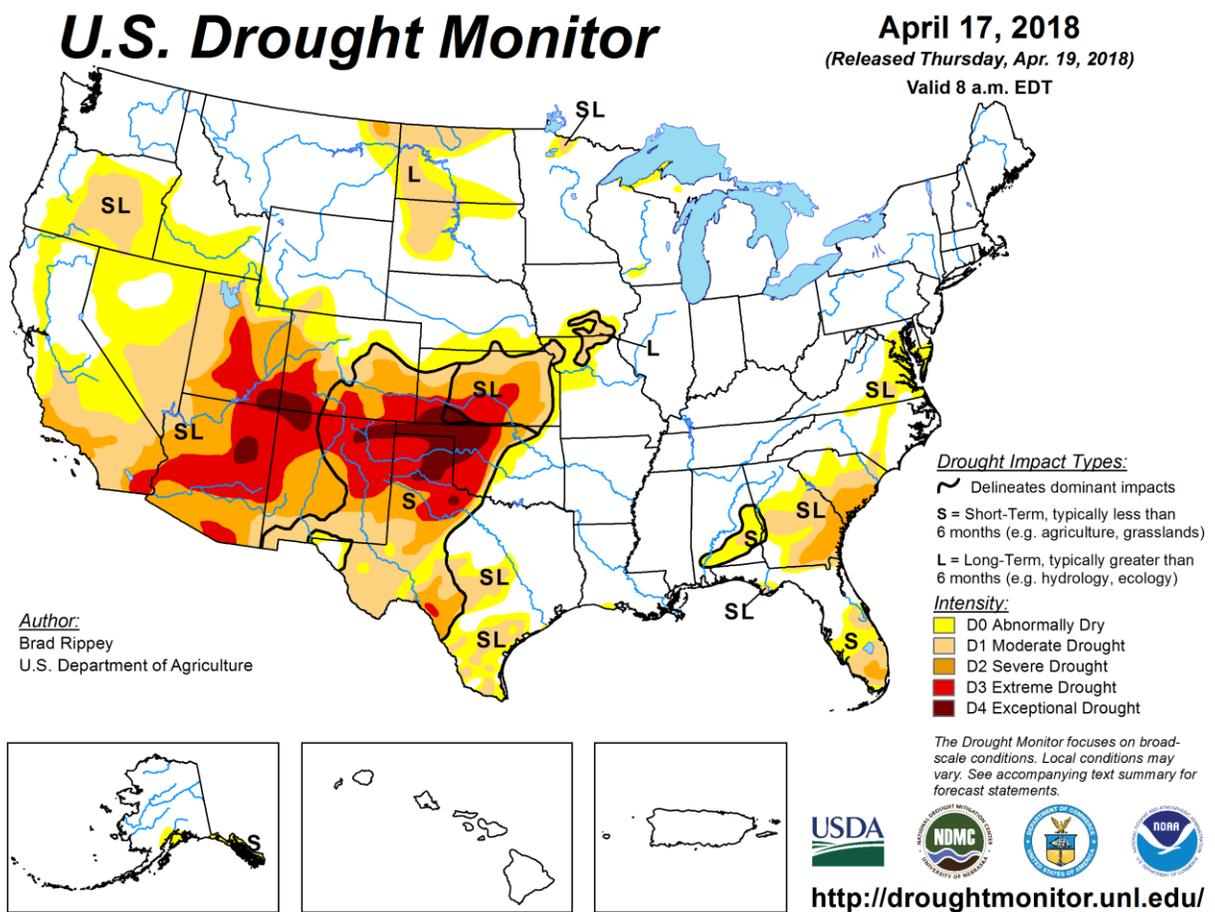
Information provided by the USGS, the Middle Atlantic River Forecast Center, and the National Weather Service.

**Drought Status:**

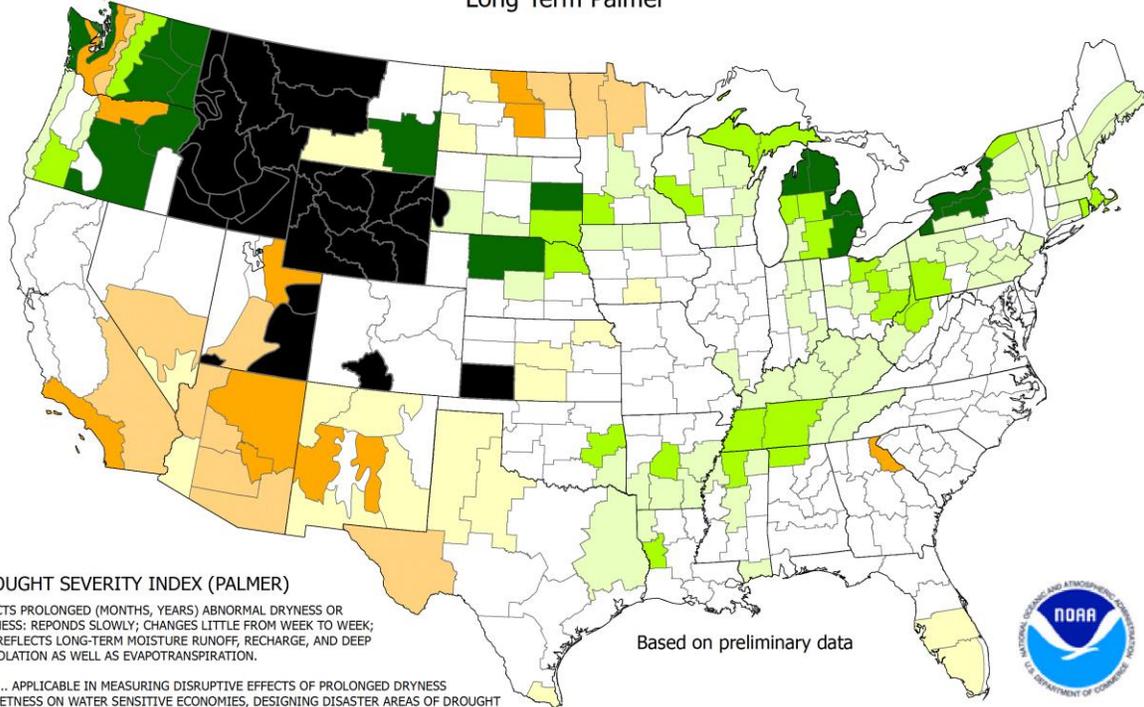
The states of [Maryland](#) and [Pennsylvania](#) have “Normal drought status.” The state of [Virginia](#) has a “Drought Watch” in effect in central parts of the state.

**Drought Monitor and Soil Moisture:**

The NOAA Climate Prediction Center’s U.S. Drought Monitor map (see first figure below) indicates no drought conditions for the Potomac basin. However, the District of Columbia, parts of Eastern Maryland and Virginia remain in abnormally dry (D0) conditions. The Palmer Drought Severity Index by Division map (see second figure on next page) indicates near normal conditions in the Potomac Basin.



Drought Severity Index by Division  
 Weekly Value for Period Ending Apr 28, 2018  
 Long Term Palmer



**DROUGHT SEVERITY INDEX (PALMER)**

DEPICTS PROLONGED (MONTHS, YEARS) ABNORMAL DRYNESS OR WETNESS; REponds SLOWLY; CHANGES LITTLE FROM WEEK TO WEEK; AND REFLECTS LONG-TERM MOISTURE RUNOFF, RECHARGE, AND DEEP PERCOLATION AS WELL AS EVAPOTRANSPIRATION.

USES... APPLICABLE IN MEASURING DISRUPTIVE EFFECTS OF PROLONGED DRYNESS OR WETNESS ON WATER SENSITIVE ECONOMIES, DESIGNING DISASTER AREAS OF DROUGHT OR WETNESS; AND REFLECTING THE GENERAL LONG-TERM STATUS OF WATER SUPPLIES IN AQUIFERS, RESERVOIRS AND STREAMS.

LIMITATIONS... IS NOT GENERALLY INDICATIVE OFFSHORT-TERM (FEW WEEKS) STATUS OF DROUGHT OR WETNESS SUCH AS FREQUENTLY AFFECTS CROPS AND FIELD OPERATIONS (THIS IS INDICATED BY THE CROP MOISTURE INDEX).

Based on preliminary data



- |                                   |                                      |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| ■ -4.0 or less (Extreme Drought)  | ■ +2.0 to +2.9 (Unusual Moist Spell) |
| ■ -3.0 to -3.9 (Severe Drought)   | ■ +3.0 to +3.9 (Very Moist Spell)    |
| ■ -2.0 to -2.9 (Moderate Drought) | ■ +4.0 and above (Extremely Moist)   |
| ■ --1.9 to +1.9 (Near Normal)     | ■ Missing/Incomplete                 |