



News

> [Local News](#) > [News](#)

[Print this Page](#)

[←--back to story](#)

Drought watch is declared Upcountry

Residents asked to voluntarily cut water consumption 5 percent

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WAILUKU - The county Department of Water Supply declared a drought watch Thursday for Upcountry, requesting residents and businesses from Haiku to Kanaio to voluntarily reduce water consumption by 5 percent.

The action followed ongoing dry conditions and Upcountry reservoir levels falling as demand continues to exceed supply. The department previously had an Upcountry drought watch in place from May 2008 to March, when seasonal rains filled Upcountry reservoirs.

The voluntary cutback affects residents of Haiku, Makawao, Olinda, Haliimaile, Pukalani, Kula, Omaopio, Pulehu, Keokea, Ulupalakua and Kanaio.

On Thursday, the 50 million-gallon Piiholo Reservoir held 48.1 million gallons, although that's an improvement from June 18, when it had only 39 million gallons. Most of the inflow to that reservoir has been coming from costly pumping uphill from the Kamole Water Treatment Facility in Haliimaile.

The 100-million gallon Kahakapao Reservoirs contained 33.4 million gallons, and the 30-million gallon Waikamoi Reservoirs were nearly empty at 1.4 million gallons.

On Thursday, the Wailoa Ditch was running at 150.6 million gallons, or at 75.4 percent of its nearly 200-million-gallon capacity. The ditch channels water captured from streams in East Maui and serves as an indication of the amount of rainfall in the watershed. In the past 10 days, the flow has fluctuated, falling as low as 20 million gallons on June 16 and hitting its high point for the period Thursday.

Jacky Takakura, the water department's administrative officer, said recent rains have increased the amount of surface water in the watershed, but the amount has not been enough to reverse the long-term effects of the drought.

The Board of Water Supply recommended the declaration of a drought watch Thursday, she said. The board will revisit the issue in July.

The water department will continue to monitor weather forecasts and Upcountry water flows. If the situation worsens, the department could issue a drought warning, which would lead to a mandatory water consumption cutback of 10 percent.

The Central Maui water system, which includes South Maui, also is in a drought. In August 2007, residents were asked to voluntarily reduce water consumption by 10 percent.

Water officials recommend residents check in and around their homes for leaks and install water-saving devices where possible. Low-flow fixtures are available at no charge from the water department. The devices can be picked up from the department's Planning Division at the Hokama Building at 59 Kanoa St. in Wailuku. Its office number is 244-8550.

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