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Small drop in water use Upcountry after drought is declared

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WAILUKU - Upcountry water use dropped from an average of 8.7 million gallons per day a week earlier to 8.23 mgd in the week following the Department of Water Supply's declaration of a drought watch for the region.

The June 25 declaration led to a request for Upcountry residents and businesses to voluntarily reduce their water consumption by 5 percent.

"Upcountry usage remained stable, with a small drop in usage," Water Director Jeff Eng said Thursday.

The Upcountry water use the previous two weeks was lower than the 9.78 mgd and 9.05 mgd average usage in June and July 2008, respectively.

Overall, Eng said, water demand was "reasonable, given that we are now in the dead of summer."

"The light rain this week helped reduce water production demand by a small amount," he said. "Normally, at this time of year, we see the average only rise. I am glad to see it decrease."

According to the National Weather Service's drought information statement, the east-facing slopes of Maui and Molokai remain in a moderate drought because of below-normal trade wind rainfall. Also, West Maui has deteriorated into a severe drought, the service said.

For the week of June 26 through Thursday, Upcountry reservoir levels fell from a high of 83.9 mg to a low of 77.5 mg.

On Friday, the reservoirs had 77.9 mg available. The 30-mg Waikamoi Reservoirs were empty. The 100-mg Kahakapao Reservoirs held 30 mg, and the 50-mg Piiholo Reservoir had 47.9 mg.

In the seven-day period ending Thursday, the Wailoa Ditch ran at a high of 60.8 mg, or 30.4 percent, on June 27 and fell to a low of 35 mg, or 17.5 percent, on Thursday. The ditch has a capacity of 200 mgd. The ditch channels water captured from streams and is a strong indication of the amount of rainfall in the East Maui watershed.

For the week of June 25 to Wednesday, water use in Central and South Maui averaged 25.44 mgd. A week earlier it was at 25.23 mgd. Other areas of Maui had similarly stable levels of water usage. On Molokai, water use dropped from an average of 940,000 gallons per day to 610,000 gallons per day in a one-week period.

The drop in water usage followed a request for conservation from the water department for residents of Kaunakakai and Kalae to use water for health and safety purposes only while the department replaces a pump and motor at the Kualapuu Well, the county's only source of water for the area. The pump-replacement project was expected to be completed Friday.

The National Weather Service reported that Kualapuu Reservoir levels have been slowly dropping, and a mandatory 10 percent reduction in irrigation water remains in effect.

Fact Box

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- Jeff Eng, water director