

Subject: Cold Weather & Drought
October 30, 2023

The picture says it all. The water is just going over the Lake Sequoyah Dam. Highlands has not had significant rain for some time, and I don't see any in the immediate future.

Are we in a drought period? Yes, indeed, but we are not at a point where the mayor has to declare a water emergency or institute a burning band. At least not yet.

But to illustrate where we are, our water plant operators routinely pump water from a weir just below the plant to make a daily supply of water. They can't do it right now because the water flow is so low that their pumps could literally dry up Big Creek. Fortunately, the town has a pump station at Big Creek next to US 64 and a major intake station about 50 yards away from Sequoyah Dam.

Low levels and slow flow of our water resources make the treatment process at the plant take somewhat longer. The fresher and cooler the water, the better. In summary, the town is ok for now, but prayers for rain would be appreciated.

I also hope folks will exercise caution in burning outside fire pits and fireplaces during the dry fall season. By ordinance, burning leaves and vegetative matter in an unconfined space and unmanned is prohibited. Also, as always, the construction practice of grub burning a building site is not permitted in Highlands. Our fire department will be on the lookout for violators. If you have any questions, please call the fire department for information at (828) 526-3645.

This week, we saw the first significantly below-freezing temperatures. Don't forget to turn off and drain outside water faucets or lines. Every year, we have reports of broken outside yard lines that result in high water bills.

Also, if you plan on being away from your home in Highlands for some time, please cut off and drain your interior waterlines. Last year's Big Freeze caught a lot of folks off guard, and the town had many residences and businesses gushing water all at once. At one point, our water department folks were concerned about maintaining adequate pressure and supplies.

If the lines in an unoccupied house cannot be drained, two things can be done, either separately or together. First, do not turn off the heat or turn it down so low that pipes can freeze. An overall warm house helps keep pipes from freezing. Second, if one is away for a short time, keeping a faucet slightly dripping helps prevent frozen lines. Just a slow movement of water is a preventative freezing measure.

Finally, in the case of a power outage or a water line rupture, please call Town Hall at (828) 526-2118. During business hours, personnel will answer calls. After hours and on weekends, we have a system of prompts that can be followed to report a problem. One of our staff will be on call at their home, monitoring the incoming calls. The staff member will have a radio and contact the appropriate crew to respond. If the lines are busy, it is probably because other folks are calling in the same outage. Everyone's patience will be appreciated.

In bad weather situations, I will do my best to post information on my AskmayorPat.com website. As always, please do not call 911 for a residential outage. Those lines need to be kept open for life-and-death situations.