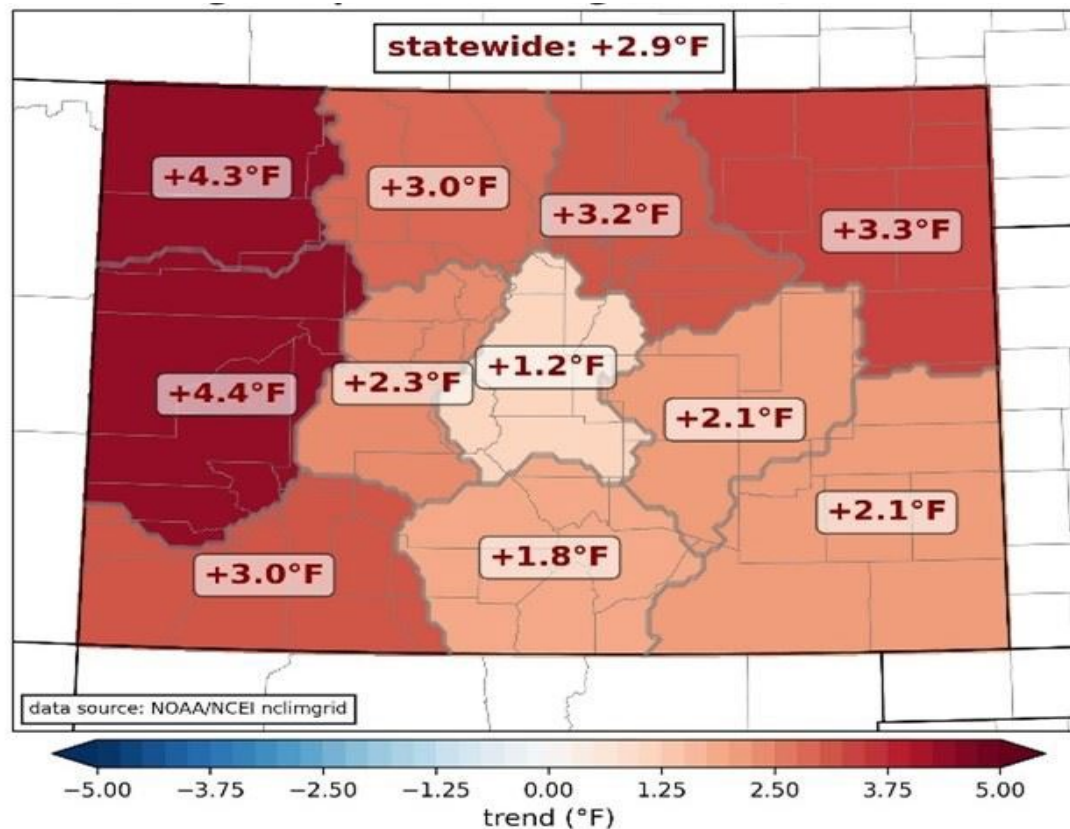
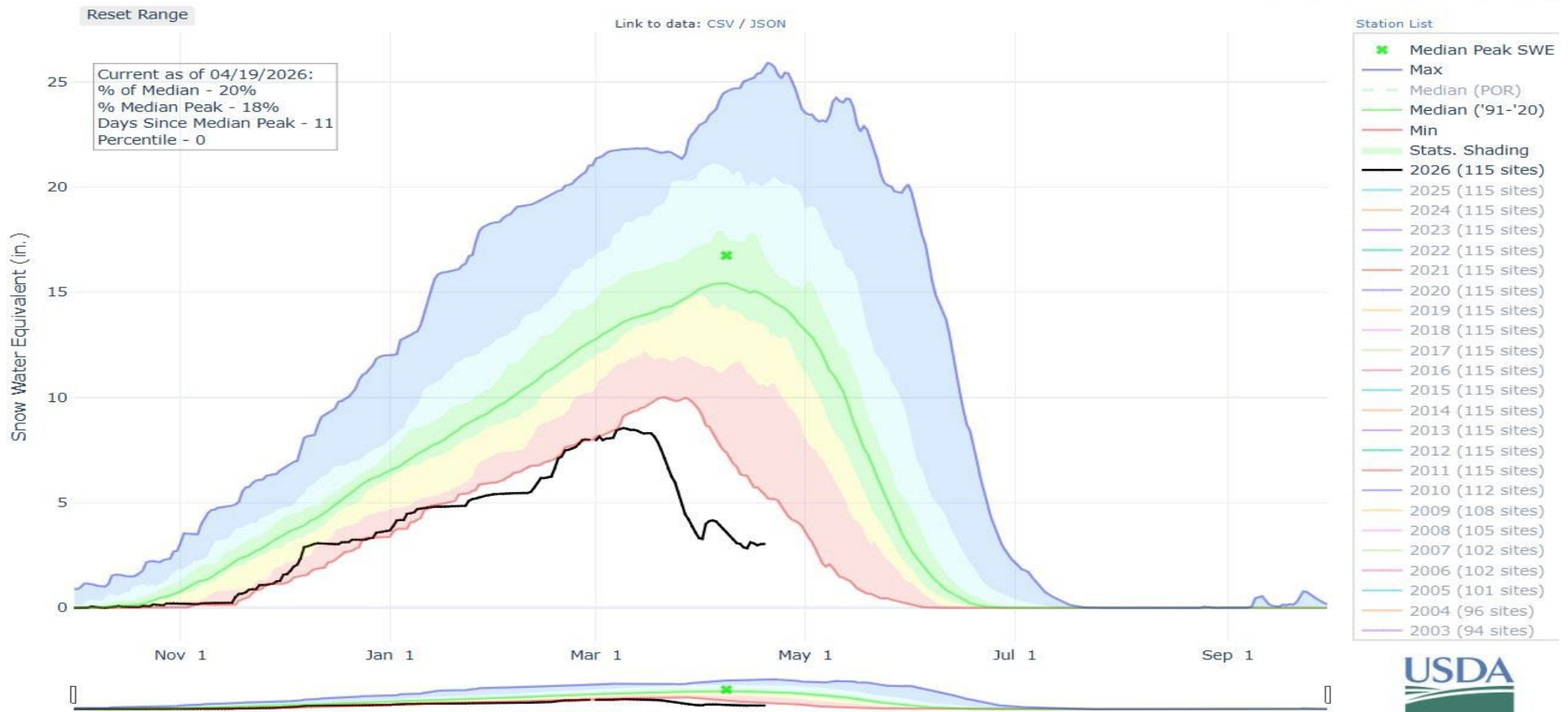


Drought Management

2026

The Western Slope of Colorado and much of the western United States have been experiencing increased temperatures and many years of prolonged drought. We all enjoy our 250+ days of sunshine each year, but that is a reminder that we live in an arid climate with an annual average of less than 12 inches of rainfall. With so little rainfall, Montrose/Olathe and most western communities are heavily reliant on mountain snowpack and water storage in our reservoirs for municipal drinking water and for irrigation water to supply area farms and ranches.





Snowpack Water Equivalent & Storage

Snowpack within the region is exceptionally low in 2026, one of the worst on record in many places. This has led to early and reduced runoff into our reservoirs, less water available for use, stressed ecosystems, and high fire danger in our area's forests. Current reservoir storage: Blue Mesa 47% (not expected to fill), Taylor Park 74% (not expected to fill), Ridgeway 80% (expected to fill). The lower Colorado river basin reservoirs, lake Powell and lake mead are at historic lows and dropping each year, which may force more water to be drawn from our upper Colorado basin to maintain critical operating levels at Powell and mead. Currently Flaming gorge reservoir in Wyoming is being drained to maintain levels in Powell.



Does the Menoken Water District have enough water?

Yes, but ...

Of the district's various water rights and resources, the district uses less than half of its allocation, and that allocation is relatively secure. The district and most other municipal drinking water suppliers receive their water from the Gunnison River via the Gunnison Tunnel and the Project 7 joint water treatment plant. Although the physical water comes from the Gunnison River, the water rights come from Ridgway Reservoir through a water exchange that allows municipal providers to pull water from the Gunnison River in exchange for allowing water from Ridgway Reservoir to be used for irrigation purposes. Ridgway Reservoir started the year at over 80% full. As a result, even with low snowpack, the district's full allocation of water is available within the reservoir for 2026. These water levels are closely monitored, and management decisions for 2026 and beyond are made in response to snowpack and runoff within the basin. Although water storage within Ridgway Reservoir is currently favorable, it is an exception within the area, and the larger Colorado River system, which we are tributary to, is experiencing major water shortages. These shortages/deficits, wherein demand consistently exceeds supply, have been a recurring reality for the past 20+ years and are coming to a head as water storage within the Colorado River's major reservoirs (Lake Powell and Lake Mead) is approaching critically low

levels. It is uncertain how these shortages will play out for the 40+ million people who depend on the Colorado River as states and the federal government work to develop a sustainable path forward for the river system.



What does this year's drought mean for area farmers?

Farming and ranching are a large part of the Montrose/Olathe economy and way of life, contributing tens of millions to the local economy on an annual basis. Low snowpack has reduced the amount of irrigation water available from local rivers, streams, and irrigation supply ditches. Based on conversations with the Uncompahgre Valley Water Users

Association (UVWUA), it is expected that upwards of 40% of area crops are being fallowed (left unused for the year), and irrigation water deliveries have been reduced to approximately 50% due to a lack of water. Although UVWUA irrigation water reductions are relatively common, this year's shortages are some of the worst on record and will have a lasting impact on local producers. UVWUA has also restricted or eliminated pumping from canals for residential irrigation. This could cause residential customers to depend on the district domestic system for yard watering.



What does this mean for me as a Menoken water customer?

Because the district has its full allocation available within Ridgway Reservoir, the district does not anticipate a need for mandatory watering restrictions or increased usage pricing in 2026. That being said, although the district pipeline

system is robust, excessive outside watering can cause a strain on available system flow and pressure for in home use. Uncertainty surrounding the Colorado River system and the potential for continued drought make water conservation as important as ever. Any water that can be conserved remains as storage within Ridgway Reservoir for use in future years and reduces the risk of shortages or potential watering restrictions in the coming years.



How can I do my part?

We all play an important role in conserving water and protecting our natural resources. At an individual level, the following are meaningful actions you can take:

- Ensure your sprinkler system is avoiding waste: repair broken sprinkler lines or heads, fix leaks in the system, adjust heads to avoid watering non-turf areas (sidewalks, driveways, street, etc).
- Avoid overwatering your lawn: Breen (brown-green) is in! Some brown within your turf will cause no harm. If your lawn is lush or water is running off your yard while watering, that is a sign you may be overwatering. Consider reducing your watering duration and/or frequency to limit waste.
- Avoid watering grass during the heat of the day or during high winds. This will reduce the amount of water lost to evaporation. Late evening, overnight, or early morning hours are best.
- If we are lucky enough to get some rain, skip a watering cycle or two.
- If you are planting a new lawn, think twice about large swaths of turf. Focus on where the turf would be most beneficial for your uses and xeriscape the remainder. For example, it is rare for turf to be enjoyed in front or side yards. As water prices continue to rise and mowing inevitably gets less fun (was it ever fun?), you will be glad you didn't plant too much!
- [Colorado State Extension has some great resources](#) for water-wise gardening and landscaping within our region. Also, swing by the [Montrose Botanical Gardens](#) - entry is free and their volunteers can provide some great planting advice specific to our area.
- Be extremely cautious with campfires or anything that could cause a spark within our area forests. Educate yourself about any fire restrictions that may be in effect within the area.

Where can I learn more?

If interested in learning more about water conservation and water resources in our area, please visit the following:

- [Colorado River District](#)
- [Uncompahgre Valley Water Users Association](#)
- [Project 7 Water Authority](#)
- [Colorado Water Conservation Board - Commissioner's Corner](#)

