**What are DROUGHT TRIGGERS?**

**DROUGHT TRIGGERS** are threshold values of a drought indicator or index that initiate or terminate responses to drought conditions as part of a drought management plan.

1. **They are based on drought indicators**

**Popular Drought Triggers**

- **Physically-Based Triggers:**
  - Lake or Reservoir Elevation
  - Depth to Groundwater
  - Stream Stage or Streamflow

- **Index-Based Triggers:**
  - Surface Water Supply Index
  - Palmer Drought Severity Index
  - Percent of Normal Precipitation
  - Standardized Precipitation Index

**Drought Indices** are computed numerical representations of a drought’s intensity and are drought indicators themselves.

We give special thanks to...

**Triggers conserve water during drought and transition back to normal use at its end.**

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Look for our other factsheets and educational modules on drought.gov and aaes.auburn.edu/wrc.
3. THEY PRIORITIZE AND RESTRICT WATER USE AS A CRITICAL PART OF A DROUGHT MANAGEMENT PLAN

A hypothetical drought management plan is shown below with actions initiated and terminated by drought triggers, which correspond with drought severity. The ‘Trigger Levels’ in this example could be tied to one or more drought triggers as decided by the governing authority of that area. Generally, triggered responses to drought go from voluntary to mandatory, less restrictive to more restrictive, and narrow to widespread impact on water users.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drought Severity</th>
<th>Trigger Level</th>
<th>Restriction Level</th>
<th>Example Water Restrictions / Actions</th>
<th>Most Affected Water Users</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No Drought</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Standard Conservation</td>
<td>Normal Waste Eliminating Practices</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mild</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Voluntary</td>
<td>Encouraging Car Washing or Lawn Irrigation on Specific Days of the Week; Communicating Water Saving Practices</td>
<td>Progressive and/or Drought Conscious Persons and Entities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Severe</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Mandatory</td>
<td>Forbidding Residential Car Washing and Lawn Irrigation; Temporarily Hiked Water Cost Structure During Drought</td>
<td>Residential and/or Non-Essential Heavy Water Users</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extreme</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Mandatory</td>
<td>Forbidding Recreational Water Use; Reducing Water Use to Permitted Withdrawals During Drought</td>
<td>Industrial, Commercial, and Some Essential Water Users</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exceptional</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Mandatory</td>
<td>Forbidding All Non-Essential Water Uses; Imposing Major Penalties on Restriction Violators; Rationing Water Supply</td>
<td>All Water Users</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. THE TWO MOST POPULAR EXAMPLES ARE LAKE / RESERVOIR LEVELS AND DEPTH TO GROUNDWATER

WATER LEVELS OF A LAKE / RESERVOIR

Water levels measured here... correspond to trigger levels... that initiate or terminate responses in the drought management plan.

DEPTH TO GROUNDWATER

Likewise, groundwater levels measured here... correspond to similar trigger levels... affecting similar responses.