

From: [Sharon Rushton](#)
To: [Terrie Gillen](#); [Jack Gibson](#); [Monty Schmitt](#); [Larry Bragman](#); [Cynthia Koehler](#); [Larry Russell](#)
Subject: Apple News Article: "Utah Town Becomes First in the West to Halt Development Due to Megadrought."
Date: Wednesday, June 16, 2021 5:18:55 PM
Attachments: [hmlkapimkokamijh.png](#)

Quote from the article: " 'Community leaders have a responsibility to ensure that all residents have access to safe, reliable sources of water,' Robert Adler, a law professor at University of Utah's S.J. Quinney College of Law with expertise in environmental and water law, wrote in an email. 'When growth outstrips water supply, that's not possible, and the responsible response is to curtail growth until the balance between supply and demand can be addressed.' "

<https://link.edgepilot.com/s/883701c7/QVz6k2bGK02gDQRsWYScKQ?u=https://apple.news/AkvJGeI4-R2aWDF-HpKbyEQ>

Utah Town Becomes the First in the West to Halt Development Due to the Megadrought

By Dharna Noor 6/15/21



A 2017 Utah wildfire

A small city in Utah is taking an unprecedented step to adapt to megadrought conditions in the West: halting any new construction projects that would tap into the local water. It's the first municipal ordinance of its kind.

Last month, officials from Oakley, Utah—a city of 1,500—finalized a moratorium on new development extending through November. The ordinance prohibits the “erection, construction, re-construction or alteration of any structure” that needs new water connections.

“The city is concerned that the current drought conditions will result in critical water shortages and require further drastic curtailment measures that would be detrimental to the entire city and cause significant public harm,” it says.

Oakley is hardly alone, though. The West's water resources have come under increasing pressure from rising

temperatures tied to the climate crisis. Heat can both melt out snowpack early and cause water stored in reservoirs to evaporate. It can also affect groundwater recharge, particularly in years with low snowfall. Explosive growth in the region has made matters worse since more homes and businesses with more lawns and more farmers with water-needy crops put extra pressure on the water system. What's happening in Oakley is a sign of what could come in other communities if the West is to stave off an even bigger water crisis.

The measure to stop building passed amid a historic drought in Utah that has led to, among other things, the state's governor asking residents to literally pray for rain. Oakley is currently in an "extreme drought," according to the Drought Monitor, while more than 60% of the state sits in the worst category, dubbed exceptional drought.

By taking this dramatic step now, Eric Jones, a regional engineer at Utah's Division of Water Rights, said officials could help ward off the need for more "draconian measures," like restrictions on individual water usage.

"Oakley has a good understanding of their sources and is ahead of the curve," he wrote in an email.

Conserving water will be particularly important since Utah's drought is also creating conditions for catastrophic wildfires, which is shaping up to potentially be the state's worst on record. Low reservoir levels and impacts on pressure could be particularly dangerous.

"If a fire broke out in town, and the fire department came to hook into a fire hydrant to put it out, they would have no water," Oakley Mayor Wade Woolstenhulme told a local ABC affiliate.

Even locations that are dependent on groundwater face issues. Oakley's water sources, which include two springs and a well, are performing at lower levels than average amid the drought.

"Groundwater integrates the effects of temperature and precipitation over multiple years, so as drought conditions persist, [the] water table drops and water becomes more limited," Paul Brooks, a hydrologist at the University of Utah, said in an email. "That makes the current exceptional heat and dry conditions a challenge for utility managers."

The city is scheduled to bring a new well online next year as its first new source in 20 years, which could help ensure residents have more access to water. But the need for water may still outstrip the new additions. The town has seen its population grow in recent years, and it reopened an old school this year. A local city councilperson told local outlet the Park Record that the city received triple its usual number of building permits this year. The moratorium on new water connections could help ensure Oakley has enough for current residents, buying it time.

"Community leaders have a responsibility to ensure that all residents have access to safe, reliable sources of water," Robert Adler, a law professor at University of Utah's S.J. Quinney College of Law with expertise in environmental and water law, wrote in an email. "When growth outstrips water supply, that's not possible, and the responsible response is to curtail growth until the balance between supply and demand can be addressed."

Oakley's new measure is the latest in a string of new drought adaptation policies being considered and passed by Western states and municipalities. Earlier this month, Nevada banned developers from planting new grass on street medians, traffic circles, office parks, and apartment complex entrances. In April, Oakley itself passed another ordinance to stop homeowners from installing water-intensive elements like ponds, outdoor pools, and waterfalls.

Oakley is the first town to put a moratorium in place on new building, but Adler expected more will follow suit as more growing Western cities are forced to grapple with persistent water scarcity. In fact, he said, those future policies could make Oakley's new policy look like kid stuff, especially as they become necessary in cities with more extreme rates of growth.

"The Oakley moratorium is on the mild side of the spectrum. It is temporary, and is supposed to be lifted once a new well comes online. It also does not apply to development permits that have already been issued, and is coupled with stricter water conservation requirements for existing users," he said.

City councilors in Oakley have said just a handful of new development proposals have been affected by the

moratorium, which seems like a small price to pay to keep people safe during punishing heat and drought.

Conditions are expected to worsen this summer. This week, a heat wave has sent temperatures soaring in the West. On Tuesday, Salt Lake City—located about an hour west of Oakley—had its hottest day ever recorded when the mercury hit 107 degrees Fahrenheit (41.7 degrees Celsius). (That’s also now the city’s all-time high temperature for June.) Water resources will surely suffer in the blast furnace, and they’ll only become more precarious as we get further into the dry season.

“Human-caused climate change has absolutely worsened drought conditions in Utah,” William Anderegg, an assistant professor of biology at the University of Utah, said in an email. “A study from last year found that climate change is responsible for about half of the long-term mega-drought severity in the southwest since the early 2000s, and that is absolutely influencing the severe summer drought this year in Utah.”

The West is expected to continue to dry out as the climate crisis worsens. These recent years, then, are a preview of what could come.

“No one wants to be in a situation where water supply is so limited that it needs to be rationed during times of year, especially the hottest, driest times of the year,” said Brooks.

Phone Message:

June 17, 2021 at 10:23 a.m.

An anonymous caller strongly urges the board to get rid of non-essential turf and replace the turf with mulch.