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New England Still Experiencing Severe Drought Conditions

By [Sharon Keeler](#)
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November 30, 2001

DURHAM, N.H. -- The drought that has affected northern New England since mid-July has been persistent and is getting worse in some areas, spreading as far south as Georgia, according to Barry Keim, N.H. State Climatologist and associate professor in the University of New Hampshire's Institute for the Study of Earth, Oceans, and Space.

Maine and New Hampshire are being impacted particularly hard, with many areas in the Granite State receiving less than half the normal amount of rainfall since July 18, when the drought commenced.

"Shallow wells are going dry and once the ground freezes it will be difficult to recharge the ground water," says Keim. "During extended periods of this drought, the whole country has been relatively quiet in terms of storm patterns."

Most of the East Coast and mid-Atlantic are experiencing moderate to severe drought conditions, as determined by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the National Drought Mitigation Center. Although recent rainfall moistened topsoils and curbed the threat of wildfires in most areas, subsoil moisture reserves need more precipitation to recover from dryness and these rains have done little to recharge the water table.

Most of New Hampshire and Maine are experiencing severe drought conditions, where three to four inches of rain would be required to dispel the drought.

Rainfall totals since July 18 for parts of New Hampshire:

- Berlin 6.9 inches (17 inches normal), 40 percent of normal rainfall
- Concord 6.6 inches (15.4 inches normal), 43 percent of normal rainfall
- Durham 7.1 inches (16.5 inches normal), 43 percent of normal rainfall
- Lebanon 7.7 inches (15.1 inches normal), 51 percent of normal rainfall

According to NOAA, forecasts do provide some hope for improvement, as a stormier weather pattern developed in late November bringing with it the first significant precipitation in weeks across the eastern half of the country. Forecasters are not sure if this is a lasting change in the dry pattern or just another temporary interruption, but the good news is that long-range outlooks do not show a tendency for below-normal rain and snow through winter across the Northeast, mid-Atlantic states, and the southern Appalachians. This means that probabilities favor some drought improvement this winter.

In contrast, long-range outlooks call for below-normal precipitation during December to February over the Southeast from Florida to southeastern Virginia.

"The good news for us is that the average temperature in November has been 4† F above normal, keeping the ground from freezing," says Keim. "This is important because the ground is still able to absorb any precipitation that falls."

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