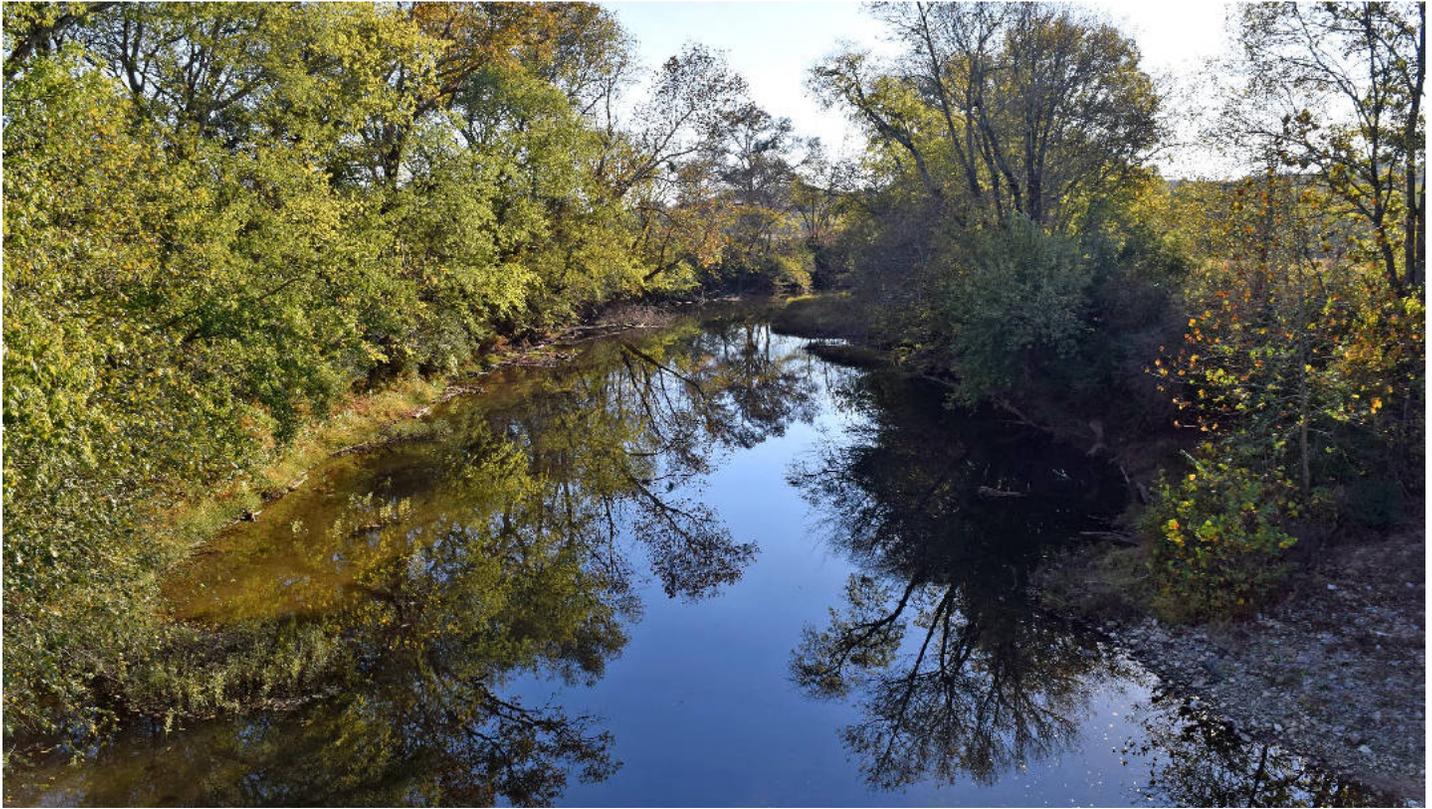


Water shortage could leave some Cumberland Plateau residents dry by December

October 29th, 2016 | by [Ben Benton](#) | in Local Regional News | Read Time: 5 mins. |



The Sequatchie River meanders past the location of the in-takes of the Dunlap Water System east of Dunlap. The Dunlap Water System takes its water from the Sequatchie River near the Old York Highway Bridge east of Dunlap. October 21, 2016.

Photo by Robin Rudd /Times Free Press.

Even if they start conserving now, customers of the Fall Creek Falls Utility District in Van Buren County, Tenn., could be without water by the first week of January unless torrents of rain fall or another solution is found, experts say.

That's 1,700 taps, including the one at Fall Creek Falls State Park, that will run dry.

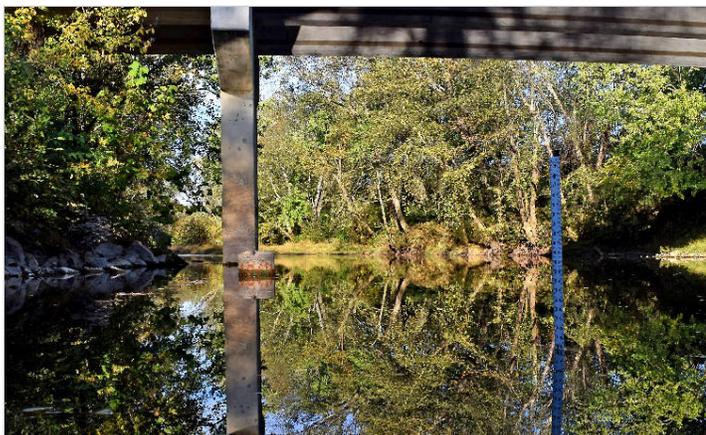
The water emergency has been building on the Cumberland Plateau during the ongoing drought. The U.S. Drought Monitor map issued Thursday shows the bright red splotch of extreme drought now spreads as far north as Cumberland and Roane counties in Tennessee.

Fall Creek Falls Utility District gets its water from the Department of Correction-owned and operated Taft Water Treatment Plant, which taps tiny Bee Creek near the prison.

On Wednesday, officials with local governments, the state Department of Correction, Department of Environment and Conservation and the Tennessee Emergency Management Agency joined state lawmakers Sen. Paul Bailey, R-Sparta, Rep. Cameron Sexton, R-Crossville, and Rep. Ron Travis, R-Dayton, in a meeting with Gov. Bill Haslam and Deputy Gov. Jim Henry to discuss a solution, according to a statement from Bailey's office.

Bailey, Sexton and Travis spoke in the statement about how well the discussion went and how Haslam was willing to commit state resources "on an emergency basis" to address the problem. TEMA's Drought Task Force plans to convene as well, the statement said.

But the only solutions mentioned so far were long-lasting gully-washers, continued conservation by water customers and switching the state



A guage marks the level of the Sequatchie...

Photo by [Robin Rudd](#) /Times Free Press.

park's water supply from the Taft plant to the park's own reservoir, Fall Creek Falls Lake. Water from the lake would have to be treated by a mobile

UTILITY CUSTOMERS ASKED TO CONSERVE

The Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation is asking people in Southeast Tennessee to conserve water and not use it unnecessarily during the ongoing extreme drought. Residents who receive water from the following public utilities are included in the advisory:

Fall Creek Falls Utility District in Bledsoe and Van Buren counties

Pikeville Water System in Bledsoe County

Dunlap Water System in Sequatchie County

Cagle-Fredonia Utility District in Sequatchie County

Tennessee American Sequatchie Valley Water System in Marion County

Griffith Creek Utility District in Marion County

Big Creek Utility District in Grundy County

Tracy City Water System in Grundy County

Monteagle Public Utility Board in Grundy County

Sewanee Utility District in Franklin County

Source: Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation

CONSERVATION TIPS

State officials issued a request Friday asking Cumberland Plateau public water customers to cut back on or stop:

- watering lawns, gardens, trees, shrubs
- watering athletic fields
- washing sidewalks, driveways, parking areas, patios or any other hard surfaces except for sanitary or safety purposes
- noncommercial and commercial washing of motor vehicles, trailers or boats
- use of water for dust control or construction compaction
- firefighter training

Source: Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation

FORECAST: DROUGHT

Tennessee's southeastern counties have been classified by the U.S. Drought Monitor as experiencing either severe, extreme or exceptional drought conditions. The National Weather Service says precipitation in these areas is as much as 16 inches below normal, and no significant rain is predicted for the rest of the year. The lack of rainfall has resulted in declining surface water and groundwater levels across the region.

Source: Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation

HISTORIC TEMPS

The region is expect to see historic highs in the next few days.

TODAY

86

Previous Record: 82 degrees, 1998

Record low: 26 degree, 1976

SUNDAY

85

treatment station.

That switch could happen two to three weeks after a decision is made, officials said, but no time line was offered on other ideas for the rest of the utility's customers.

On Friday, TDEC issued a statement asking residents in Southeast Tennessee to start cutting back. The drought is affecting water utilities in almost every plateau and Sequatchie Valley county.

Among them is Big Creek Utility District in Tracy City, where utility manager Allen Joslyn said local mandatory water restrictions take effect Tuesday.

"We're down about six feet, and for us that's a pretty significant drop in water level. So it triggers our phase 2 restriction level for everybody to restrict water use to essential purposes," Joslyn said.

He said customers responded to a **conservation notice issued in September** by saving more than 1 million gallons of water in the past month.

Billie Beauregard, a 22-year Bledsoe County resident who lives south of Pikeville on College Station Mountain Road, says her supply ran out on Sept. 23.

She went without water for six days straight, then began getting water for only two hours a day as the city of Pikeville's water utility diverted pressure to fill a water storage tank, she said. The heating element in her dry water heater burned up, and the new water heater has barely any water to heat and no pressure to push it to her fixtures even if it did.

Beauregard, whose personal drought was in its 38th day on Friday, said officials told her there's not enough pressure to get the water to her house and no one could tell her what was being done to solve the problem.

That might be because a solution isn't obvious or easy on the Cumberland Plateau, where aquifers shift and once-dependable water sources vanish without explanation, especially in drought. To make matters worse, rainfall on the Cumberland Plateau is now 14 to 16 inches below average, officials said.

Bailey said Henry, deputy to Gov. Bill Haslam, has tasked TDEC Deputy Commissioner Brock Hill with "coming up with short- and long-term solutions to the problems we face regionally."

"That doesn't mean that we can relax our efforts to conserve water usage," Bailey said. "To the contrary, we need to step up these efforts and do everything we can to preserve as much water as possible until adequate rainfall replenishes supplies."

He added that part of the problem is a lack of infrastructure.

Bailey said the water shortage could end up before the General Assembly when it convenes in January, about the time Fall Creek Falls Utility District is expected to go dry.

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