

Drought update - River Mole catchment partnership

August 2026

Drought update

The Environment Agency declared Drought status for Surrey on 10 August. The situation has deteriorated since declaring Prolonged Dry Weather on 29 July. We are continuing to experience progressively low river flows which has been brought about by the prolonged period of low rainfall and higher temperatures.

Surrey recorded exceptionally low rainfall in July, around 1-2% of the long-term average, with monthly mean river flows decreased at all indicator sites. There has been an increase in the number of algal blooms and other heat-related incidents, and temporary use bans remain in place for parts of the county where supplies are delivered by South East Water and Thames Water. We are closely monitoring river flows, groundwater levels, environmental impacts and climatic conditions.

River Mole Fish rescue operation, Norbury Park, Leatherhead

Prolonged dry weather and high temperatures have led to significantly reduced river levels and a loss of flow across the River Mole catchment. Current forecasts indicate that hot, dry conditions are set to continue over the next few days, increasing the risk of fish mortality.

Approximately 3.5 km of the River Mole between Pressforward Bridge and Norbury Park has ceased flowing, leaving isolated pools. Water levels have fallen significantly, and oxygen levels are deteriorating, creating increasingly challenging conditions for fish.

We have been closely monitoring this section of the River Mole for over a month. While the preferred approach is always to leave fish within their natural habitat, rapidly declining water levels and shrinking pools meant intervention was necessary to help protect vulnerable fish populations.

Fish rescue operation

As a proactive measure, we carried out a fish rescue operation at Norbury Park on 12 and 13 August. Our officers worked together to rescue fish stranded in isolated pools and relocate them to areas of the River Mole with higher water levels and improved conditions.



Environment Agency officers rescuing fish from the River Mole. Source: Environment Agency 2026.

How many fish were impacted and saved?

More than 2,000 fish were considered at risk due to the loss of flow and deteriorating water quality. During the operation, several hundred large coarse fish and at least a couple of thousand smaller fish were successfully rescued and relocated. Similar numbers of fish were rescued on both days of the operation. Encouragingly, large numbers of juvenile fish were present, indicating successful recent spawning. The team also encountered several specimen-sized fish, particularly chub and perch, which are highly valued by anglers.

Total number of fish species recorded

Chub	Perch	Minnow	Barbel
Dace	Bream	Stone loach	Gudgeon
Roach	Carp	Stickleback	Bullhead
Pike			

Why the rescue was necessary

Water levels continued to drop significantly overnight during the operation, reducing the size of the remaining pools and increasing pressure on fish populations. Rescuing as many fish as possible helps ensure the survival of larger mature fish while also improving the survival chances of smaller fish that remain, as reduced numbers place less demand on the limited oxygen and habitat available.

Who are we working with?

- Surrey County Council
- Mole Valley District Council
- Leatherhead and District Angling Society
- Dorking Angling Society
- River Mole River Watch
- Local MPs Chris Coghlan and Helen Maguire

Representatives from the local angling clubs and River Mole River Watch attended both days of the rescue operation to observe and support the work being carried out.

How are we letting people know?

We have been actively engaging with local stakeholders and we had a media spokesperson available on site to respond to public and media interest.

A recent Environment Agency South East post on X generated almost 1,500 impressions, helping raise awareness of the challenges facing the River Mole and the actions being taken to protect local fish populations.

Please encourage partners and the public to report any environmental incidents through the Environment Agency's 24-hour Incident Hotline on 0800 807060.

Further information

There are resources online for further information, with a drought overview and area-specific reports which are updated monthly: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dry-weather-and-drought-in-england-2026-summary-reports> and <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/water-situation-local-area-reports>.

