

Water Supply Conditions Summary/Drought Update

New Jersey is dry and getting drier, with no relief in sight. In the state's central core, some areas have received less than 25% of expected rainfall over the past 90 days (see graphic below). Only a portion of Bergen County (where 4-5" fell over 3 days in August) has seen average rainfall during that period.

While late August rains in parts of the Northeast provided short-term recovery of reservoirs of concern, we are again seeing sharp declines in storage there and in the Coastal North Drought Region. The water supply indicators that DEP uses to assess drought conditions range from moderately to severely dry for most categories, and we are still seeing unseasonably high water demands.

We are also noting increases in private well failures, which are indicative of significant draw-downs in shallow ground water sources. Well impacts are most notable in Burlington, Cumberland, Cape May, Monmouth and Ocean counties, and this is consistent with the range of the precipitation deficit. This trend can be expected to worsen without abundant rains.

The long-range forecast calls for above-average temperatures and little to no rainfall. This developing scenario is similar to 2005 when dry, hot conditions continued into October, threatening a late season water shortage. In that case, an anomalous, multi-day rain event in early October that brought more than ~12" restored water supplies and rescued portions of the state from a potential water emergency.

Since there is no evidence of a return to normal weather, the DEP is considering extending the current Drought Watch designation (in place for the Northeast drought region) to the remainder of the State. Without substantial rainfall in the near future, a Drought Warning declaration may become necessary for some areas.

