

Water Supply Conditions – July 18, 2012

Following an extremely dry, mild start to the New Year, with measured precipitation during the first three-and-a-half months significantly below normal, fortuitous spring rains began to fall in late April bringing welcomed relief. Before the full effect of the rainfall was realized, however, the dearth of precipitation in early 2012 had begun to adversely affect the drought indicators that Department of Environmental Protection staff regularly monitors. Most notably impacted were shallow ground water and stream flows, which at the time ranged from moderately to extremely dry, depending on the drought region.

Abundant rainfall over the next two months led to broad replenishment of water reserves and a gradual improvement in drought indicators. Most beneficial was the marked improvement in stream flows during May and early June that allowed substantial pumping of excess runoff to be stored in critical water supply reservoirs throughout the northern half of the State.

But the return of “normal” rainfall during May and June was short-lived, and we are again facing warmer and drier than normal conditions that are beginning to take a toll on water supplies across New Jersey. The good news is that, while short-term (within the past 45 days) rainfall deficits are most pronounced over the northern counties, combined water supply reservoir levels are just slightly below the long-term average for this time of year. But, because of persistent heat waves and correspondingly high water demands, reservoir storage has begun to drop sharply in the past two weeks, and this development requires continued observation. Looking forward, Department staff will continue to closely monitor the situation and coordinate with water suppliers as conditions warrant.

The latest summary of Drought Indicators, which can be viewed in detail at <http://njdrought.org/status.html>, appear below. Looking ahead, the Department’s attention will be focused on prevailing weather patterns and water demands, among others, as summer continues.

Presently, all New Jerseyans can do their part by being mindful of water use in and outside the home. Our collective efforts to avoid wasting water go a long way toward extending available supplies and avoiding the need for mandatory water use restrictions later. For tips on how you can limit water waste, see <http://njdrought.org/ideas.html>.