

Water Supply Condition Summary – October 8, 2015

The return of much-needed rainfall over the past three weeks interrupted a protracted dry spell that had been impacting most of New Jersey since July.

Previously, very dry weather and continued high water demands began to adversely affect the regional drinking-water-supply indicators that DEP tracks, prompting a Drought Watch designation in three water supply regions -- the Northeast, Central, and Coastal North -- on September 23, 2015. In the past week, however, a fairly extensive nor'easter brought roughly 2-5 inches of rainfall across the Garden State.

Rainfall over the past thirty (30) days ranged between 5.5 – 6 inches across southern New Jersey and 4.5 – 5.5 inches in the State's northern tier. Thus, measured rainfall in the past month equaled or exceeded that which fell in July and August, combined, when water-supply demands were at their peak.

The regional-drinking-water supply indicators improved for many parameters following the recent rains. Precipitation climbed in all six water supply regions, as the recent rainfall was added to early July rain data that remains in the 90-day backward-looking calculation. Stream flows made a modest recovery in the Northeast and Southwest regions, and ground water levels improved in four of the regions. This recovery, however, may be short-lived without a return to more seasonable rainfall in the coming weeks.

Reservoir storage in the Northeast and Coastal North regions, which had been dropping for months, experienced only modest gains with the recent rainfall, although pumping of excess river flows will help offset withdrawals from critical water supply reservoirs in the near term.

Despite the halted storage declines, reservoir capacity in nearly all cases remains below-normal for this time of year, and DEP water professionals are keeping a close eye on conditions to prepare for next steps if a dry weather pattern resumes. This could include a Drought Warning designation for the three regions in Watch and possibly others.