

Water Supply Conditions Summary – September 23, 2016

Drought Pattern Continues; Watch Continues for Twelve New Jersey Counties

Continued abnormally dry, warm weather through August and much of September is degrading the drinking water supply indicators monitored by the DEP. This development reverses the recovery caused by July's abundant rainfall. The persistent drought conditions coupled with high water demands threaten a worsening of the situation as we transition into autumn.

July's precipitation brought much-needed relief and dramatically reduced the 90-day precipitation deficit that was in place for the state's northern tier by the end of June. The rainfall and resultant runoff/aquifer recharge resulted in moderate, if short-lived, improvements to stream flow and shallow ground water levels.

Despite the rainfall, a Drought Watch was issued on July 25, 2016, for the Northeast, Northwest and Central Drinking-Water-Supply regions. The affected drought regions include Bergen, Essex, Hudson, Hunterdon, Mercer, Middlesex, Morris, Passaic, Somerset, Sussex, Union and Warren counties.

With the renewed dry weather pattern in place, reservoir storage in key systems has been dropping steadily, with some dropping more steeply than normal. While the reservoirs are acting as they are designed (being depleted during the high-demand season and refilled over the winter/spring), the concern is for the possibility of a long-term drought. Reservoirs are a critical water source in the Northeast, Central, and Coastal North regions, so continued sparse rainfall, high temperatures, elevated customer demands, and evaporation may warrant future administrative action by the DEP to balance regional supplies.

These concerns can be alleviated by abundant rainfall in key areas over the coming weeks as well as cooperative efforts by the public to use water sparingly. Such actions can effectively extend supplies through the autumn when cooler temperatures and reduced water usage can be expected.

As always, the NJDEP will continue to scrutinize conditions closely. It is important to stress that being mindful of water use, both in and outdoors, is critical to stretching supplies and possibly avoiding the need for restrictions being put in place later. For tips on using water efficiently around the home or office, go to <http://njdrought.org/ideas.html>.