

Water Supply Conditions Summary – October 7, 2016

Dry Weather Pattern Continues; Drought Watch Expanded to Eighteen (18) New Jersey Counties

Persistent abnormally dry weather and above-average temperatures continue to degrade New Jersey's drinking-water-supply indicators. Droughty conditions coupled with high water demands threaten a worsening of the situation as we progress through autumn.

As has been the case through much of the year, the northern half of New Jersey has experienced considerably less rainfall than areas to the south. This is essentially an extension of the broader drought conditions that progressively have been expanding southwestward from New England.

The precipitation shortfall over the past three months is growing in the northern counties where recorded rainfall over the period ranges from 15-50% below average. The lack of rainfall, in turn, is having adverse impacts on stream flows, shallow ground water reserves, and runoff into drinking water supply reservoirs. Drier-than-average conditions also have begun to affect the Coastal North and Southwest water supply regions.

Diminished inflow into reservoirs coupled with above-normal water supply demands is causing reservoir storage in key systems to be depleted more quickly than is normal for this time of year. While the reservoirs are acting as designed (being depleted during the high-demand season and hopefully refilled over the winter/spring), the concern moving forward is for the possibility of a long-term drought, especially one that extends through the winter.

Because of the adverse impacts on drinking water supplies, the NJDEP on October 5, 2016, expanded the Drought Watch (already in place in the Northeast/Northwest/Central regions) to six additional counties – Burlington, Camden, Gloucester, Monmouth, Ocean and Salem. As a result, only Atlantic, Cape May, and Cumberland counties are considered to be in the “normal” category.

Moreover, the NJDEP also has scheduled a public hearing to consider the possibility of a Drought Warning condition for affected regions of the state. For more on the public hearing, please see <http://njdrought.org/pdf/publicnotice-161020.pdf>.

It is critical at this point that all residents and businesses cooperate to use water sparingly, both inside and outdoors. Such actions can effectively extend supplies and help avert the possibility of a severe water shortage that could lead to a declared water emergency and the need for more drastic measures.

As always, the NJDEP continues to scrutinize conditions closely. For tips on using water efficiently around the home or office, go to <http://njdrought.org/ideas.html>.