

Water Supply Conditions Summary – December 5, 2016

Drought Continues for Much of the State, Short-term Improvements Point to Modest Recovery

The lingering drought continues to constrain New Jersey's drinking-water-supply indicators, although intermittent rain events and reduced water demands are helping to moderate depletion of key water reserves. In some cases, short-term gains have been made in reservoir storage due to increased runoff and the ability to pump and store significant amounts of water.

Current observations reveal an extension of drought conditions stretching south and westward from New England. The National Weather Service's Climate Prediction Center expects drought to persist and spread down the Eastern Seaboard into the deep South.

The 90-day precipitation shortfall is greatest in the northern tier counties, with departures ranging from 10%-45% below normal. The general lack of rainfall, in turn, continues to adversely impact stream flows and shallow ground water levels.

Because of these impacts, a Drought Watch was issued for 12 northern New Jersey counties on July 25, 2016. The Drought Watch was later expanded on October 5, 2016, to six additional counties – Burlington, Camden, Gloucester, Monmouth, Ocean and Salem. Then, on October 22, 2016, a Drought Warning was designated for 14 counties – Bergen, Essex, Hudson, Hunterdon, Mercer, Middlesex, Monmouth, Morris, Ocean, Passaic, Somerset, Sussex, Union and Warren. Currently, only Atlantic, Cape May, and Cumberland counties remain in the "normal" category.

Following designation of the Drought Warning, NJDEP Commissioner Martin issued Administrative Order 2016-10 (<http://www.njdrought.org/docs/ao2016-10.pdf>), through which a range of non-emergency water supply measures were instituted. These measures include modified reservoir releases/stream passing flow requirements, water transfers between systems, and leak detections assessments, among others.

The above actions are aimed at preserving and balancing water supplies within the affected regions, and the effect, thus far, has been positive. Nevertheless, the concern moving forward is the possibility of a persistent drought, especially one that extends through the winter and hampers the ability of reservoirs and other water resources to recover before the next high-demand season.

It remains critical that all residents and businesses use water sparingly, both inside and outdoors. Cooperative efforts to save water can 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. To find out how you can help, visit the Water Conservation web page:

<http://www.nj.gov/dep/watersupply/conserv.htm>.