

DROUGHT WATCH ISSUED FOR FIVE NORTHEAST COUNTIES WITH RESIDENTS ASKED TO VOLUNTARILY CONSERVE WATER

(10/P75)TRENTON- Department of Environmental Protection Commissioner Bob Martin today issued a drought watch for the Northeast region of the State, asking residents of Bergen, Essex, Hudson, Morris and Passaic counties to voluntarily conserve water due to continued hot and dry conditions and increasing concerns about reservoir levels.

The DEP has observed serious drops in some reservoir levels, especially the North Jersey District Water Supply Commission's Wanaque and Monksville reservoirs, and United Water Company's Oradell reservoir. Scattered thunderstorms may provide some welcome relief today and tomorrow but are not expected to appreciably improve the water supply situation.

A drought watch is a response to deteriorating water supply conditions, with a goal of raising public awareness and formally alerting all water suppliers in the region of the situation, to help preserve existing supplies and balance reservoir storage in the region.

The DEP is not issuing a formal drought warning at this time, which could initiate mandatory steps such as water transfers between regional water supply systems. Instead, the DEP is asking residents to be aware of the situation and use water more carefully, especially when it comes to lawn watering and other unessential uses. The goal at this time is to moderate water demand through voluntary conservation.

"We are asking residents in these five affected counties to keep watch on their water use, to voluntarily reduce unessential water use due to a rapid decline in some reservoir levels," said Commissioner Martin. "Using water responsibly by voluntarily taking steps such as limiting lawn and landscaping water, and cutting back on at-home car washing, could save millions of gallons of water daily."

"We have been monitoring this situation very closely and have determined that this course of action, to initiate a drought watch, is now appropriate," said John Plonski, Assistant DEP Commissioner for Water Resource Management.

While water demands are generally below peak levels experienced during the extremely hot July 4th weekend, which prompted Commissioner Martin to issue a statewide water use alert, demand remains higher than normal due to persistently warm, dry weather.

Rainfall has been sporadic, with accumulations varying greatly across the state. For example, some areas received more than an inch of rain last Sunday while others got virtually none.

Here are some suggested water conservation tips:

- *Do not over-water lawns and landscaping. Two times per week for 30 minutes in morning or late evening typically is sufficient. Use a hose with a hand-held nozzle to water flowers and shrubs.
- * To save water at home, fix leaky faucets and pipes.
- * Turn off the faucet while brushing teeth and shaving.
- * Run washing machines and dishwashers only when full.
- * Use a broom to sweep the sidewalk, rather than a hose.

More information on water conservation and water supply status can be found at www.njdrought.org/ideas.html and www.njdrought.org/status.html