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DEP URGES RESIDENTS TO CONSERVE WATER

(12/P51) TRENTON – Due to ongoing concerns about below normal precipitation, Department of Environmental Protection Commissioner Bob Martin today encouraged residents across New Jersey to take steps to conserve water, both inside the home and outside.

While recent rainfall has helped ease this year's precipitation deficits somewhat, the effects of an unusually dry winter and spring are starting to be felt across the state.

“Overall our major water supplies, including reservoirs and deep aquifers, remain in good shape,” Commissioner Martin said. “But after too much precipitation last year, we’ve now swung in the opposite direction, with months of below normal precipitation. Most concerning is that our stream levels and shallow groundwater supplies are severely stressed. Our goal is to begin moderating demand by asking residents to voluntarily conserve water before peak summer use begins.”

The DEP's water team has been meeting weekly to assess water supplies, demand, climate data, and weather forecasts. Recent rain and cooler weather have reduced wildfire threats, but the New Jersey Forest Fire Service cautions that risks can rise quickly after just a few days of dry and windy weather.

The recent rainfall also cut into statewide precipitation deficits. From a longer term precipitation standpoint, however, New Jersey is considered severely dry. Deficits range from 3.2 inches below normal in Cape May County to 5.8 inches below normal in Morris County.

As a result, streams and rivers, critical for replenishing reservoirs, are rated as severely to extremely dry.

Shallow unconfined aquifers across the state are also rated as severely to extremely dry. Many private well owners and some municipal water supplies utilize these shallow groundwater supplies. Groundwater is important for replenishing streams, rivers and lakes.

Commissioner Martin is urging residents to use water wisely and efficiently, particularly since outdoor consumption is expected to increase going into the summer due to lawn and landscape irrigation, agricultural use and other outdoor water-related activities.

“Conserving water always makes sense for the environment and saves you money,” Commissioner Martin said. “Using water responsibly by voluntarily taking steps such as reducing lawn and landscape watering, limiting car washing at home, and turning off the faucet while brushing teeth and shaving, can save millions of gallons of water daily.”

Here are some suggested water-saving tips:

- Do not over-water lawns and landscaping. Watering two times per week for 20-30 minutes in early morning or early evening ensures that plants receive the most water while developing strong, healthy root systems. Make sure sprinklers and irrigation systems do not water during or immediately after a rain and are set to avoid wasting water on the street, driveway and sidewalk.
- Use a hose with a hand-held nozzle to water flowers and shrubs.
- Turn off the faucet while brushing teeth and shaving.
- To save water in the home, fix leaky faucets and pipes.
- Run washing machines and dishwashers only when full.
- Install high-efficiency, water saving toilets, faucets and shower heads.
- Use a broom to sweep the sidewalk, rather than a hose;
- Use mulch and native plants to conserve water in the garden;
- Use a rain barrel to capture water from a downspout to use later for watering gardens and plants;
- Use soaker hoses or drip irrigation to water trees, gardens and flower beds.

More information on water conservation and water supply status in all of New Jersey’s drought regions can be found at www.njdrought.org

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