

NEWS RELEASE COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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DEP EXPANDS DROUGHT WARNING TO INCLUDE 12 MORE COUNTIES IN OHIO RIVER BASIN

59 counties now under drought warning; eight remain under watch

HARRISBURG (June 18) – On behalf of Gov. Tom Ridge, the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) today added 12 Western Pennsylvania counties in the Ohio River Basin to the drought-warning declaration due to continued deteriorating conditions. The counties upgraded to a drought warning today are Allegheny, Armstrong, Beaver, Butler, Clarion, Fayette, Greene, Indiana, Jefferson, Lawrence, Washington and Westmoreland.

Fifty-nine counties now are under a drought-warning declaration. The remaining eight counties – Crawford, Erie, Elk, Forest, McKean, Mercer, Venango and Warren – remain in a drought watch.

"Record and near-record low stream flows were recorded this week in the 12 counties placed under the drought-warning declaration today," DEP Secretary James M. Seif said. "Low stream-flow levels are indicative of below-normal groundwater levels which could lead to water-supply problems later this summer."

At the direction of Lt. Gov. Mark Schweiker, who chairs the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Council, a working group of the state's Drought Task Force met yesterday afternoon to discuss drought conditions. The working group is made up of representatives from numerous state agencies, including the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency; the departments of Agriculture, Environmental Protection, and Conservation and Natural Resources; the State Police; and the Public Utility Commission.

On June 10, DEP upgraded 47 counties in the Delaware, Susquehanna and Potomac river basins to a drought warning. On June 11, the Susquehanna River Basin Commission declared a basin-wide drought-warning declaration, including portions of Pennsylvania, Maryland and New York.

A drought watch is the first and least severe of the three declarations under the state's drought-operating plan. It calls for a voluntary 5 percent reduction of non-essential water use.

A drought warning, the second stage of the three drought declarations, calls for a 10 percent voluntary reduction in water consumption.

A drought emergency, the third and most severe stage, imposes mandatory restrictions on water use. Gov. Ridge must declare a drought emergency.

The state's drought declarations are based on five parameters: precipitation deficits, groundwater levels, streamflows, soil moisture and reservoir levels.

The latest drought information, including a video on saving water in the home and other water-conservation tips for homes and businesses, are available through the Pennsylvania homepage at www.state.pa.us or directly through DEP's website at www.dep.state.pa.us (choose Drought Information Center).

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