

DRBC ADOPTS EMERGENCY DROUGHT ACTIONS

WEST TRENTON, N.J., Aug. 18-- The Delaware River Basin Commission (DRBC) took emergency actions today to deal with unprecedented drought conditions, including a decision to marshal water supplies in state and power company reservoirs in order to bolster streamflows by coordinating releases from the impoundments.

The DRBC commissioners also agreed to require, at the request of a basin state, large self-supplied users* of ground and surface water in that state to prepare and submit to the commission contingency plans for water curtailment should that become necessary.

The commission noted that while drought warning and emergency indicators based on reservoir storage levels that are set forth in its own operating plans had not yet been triggered, emergency actions were warranted at this time due to the severity of the water shortage.

"The reservoirs benefited from the winter and spring runoff and are masking the true nature of this drought," said Carol R. Collier, the DRBC's executive director.

Deeming it in the public interest, the commission went on record as officially supporting the drought management actions recently taken by the four basin states -- Delaware, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania.

"We want to send a clear message to our constituents that management plans are in place throughout the Delaware River Basin to deal with different aspects of the drought," noted Ms. Collier. "The DRBC's drought operating plans focus on streamflow management and controlling salinity intrusion in basin rivers and streams. The states' plans look at other factors like soil moisture, ground water levels, crop damage, even the potential for forest fires. Municipalities and townships have their own plans to deal with unique local conditions."

The commission will be requesting Pennsylvania Power & Light Co. and the Southern Co. to make releases from two hydro power dams and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to evacuate water from Nockamixon Reservoir, located in Bucks County, to help meet a Delaware River flow target of 2,700 cubic feet per second (cfs) at Trenton. PP&L generates electricity at Lake Wallenpaupack, which straddles Wayne and Pike Counties in Pennsylvania; the Southern Co. (formerly Orange and Rockland Utilities) operates the Mongaup reservoir system located in Orange County, New York. Releases from the Mongaup impoundments also will help meet a flow target of 1,750 cfs at Montague, N.J., located just downstream of Port Jervis, N.Y.

In other action, the commissioners:

-- ratified an earlier July 21 decision to reduce the Trenton flow objective from 3,000 cfs to the current 2,700 cfs to preserve storage in two lower basin reservoirs -- Blue Marsh on the Schuylkill River and Beltzville on the Lehigh River. Releases from the two impoundments also are made to meet the Trenton target, as well as to enhance water quality and protect fisheries.

-- agreed to continue an arrangement with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to store water at the Corps' F.E. Walter Reservoir to provide releases for flow augmentation. The reservoir, located on the Lehigh River near Wilkes-Barre, Pa., normally is used just for flood control, meaning the dammed lake is held to a low elevation so it can capture runoff from storms.

The Delaware River Basin Commission is an interstate/federal agency formed in 1961 that manages the water resources in the 13,539 square mile watershed.

* A self-supplied user has its own source of water (ponds, wells, streams etc.) in contrast to purchasing it from a water company.

SOURCE Delaware River Basin Commission
Web Site: <http://www.state.nj.us/drbc>

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