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GOVERNOR GLENDENING ISSUES DROUGHT WATCH, OPEN FIRE BAN FOR CENTRAL AND WESTERN MARYLAND

ANNAPOLIS, MD (November 9, 2001)- Faced with an extended period of low precipitation and below normal stream flows throughout the region, Governor Parris N. Glendening today issued a drought watch for central and western Maryland. This is the first step in the State's Drought Management Plan. The Governor simultaneously issued a statewide ban on open fires in woodlands or within 200 feet of woodlands, excluding recreational campfires.

"We have been monitoring the rainfall levels all year, and they have been consistently lower than normal," said Governor Glendening. "We are taking these steps to stress the sense of urgency there is to conserve our water. By protecting our resources, we are also protecting our quality of life and we encourage Marylander to take simple steps to reduce water consumption."

The drought watch covers Garrett, Allegany, Washington, Frederick, Carroll, Cecil, Harford, Howard, Montgomery and Baltimore counties, except for areas served by the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission and Baltimore City water systems. Under Maryland's drought plan, these water utilities are authorized to assess and issue advisories based on their own water supply conditions.

"Conserving water is important at any time," said MDE Secretary Jane Nishida, "but it becomes especially important during periods of prolonged reduced rainfall."

Drought status is determined by precipitation, stream flow and ground water and reservoir levels.

Rainfall has been below normal for the past 12 months for the western and central regions. Ground water levels have remained within normal ranges for most wells throughout the State but stream flow is below normal in the central and western regions. Low stream flow and recent precipitation shortfall, combined with the prolonged rainfall deficit over the past 12 months pushes the status of the central and western regions to the "Watch" phase.

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Due to the precipitation shortfall and the low stream flow, the Governor also issued a statewide open air burning ban. The ban applies to all open air burning in woodlands or within 200 feet of woodlands and prohibits wood fueled campfires within all State forests and parks. The ban also applies to burning in or adjacent to any area where flammable materials could ignite and carry fire to woodlands. The ban does not apply inside the limits of incorporated towns.

“Primarily, this ban is geared at open air burning of items such as leaves, trash and brush,” said Natural Resources Secretary J. Charles Fox. “Until we get a good soaking rain across the State, conditions will remain ripe for fires. We all need to use common sense while out and about, something as simple as flicking a lit cigarette out of your car can start a fire that can quickly endanger lives and property.”

Homeowners, government facilities, businesses and industry should voluntarily implement ways to conserve water, such as reducing outdoor water use and repairing leaking faucets and pipes. Other recommended methods to conserve water may include:

- Turning off water when brushing teeth, shaving or shampooing
- Taking shorter showers
- Using washing machines and dishwashers only when loads are full
- Installing water-saving devices in the home, such as low-flow toilets

Additional water conservation tips may be found on the MDE website:
<http://www.mde.state.md.us/waterconservation>.

MDE will evaluate drought indicators-- precipitation, stream flow, ground water level and reservoir levels--on a bi-weekly basis during this “Watch” stage.

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