

# Governor Phil Murphy and DEP Commissioner Shawn M. LaTourette Give Update on New Jersey's Record-Breaking Dry Spell and Wildfire Response

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*State Elevates Drought Watch Status to Drought Warning*

*Directive Activates DEP Authority to Closely Manage Water Supplies; Public Strongly Urged to Reduce Water Use*

**TRENTON** – As New Jersey continues to experience historically low precipitation, above-average temperatures, and deteriorating water-supply conditions, Governor Phil Murphy and DEP Commissioner Shawn M. LaTourette today announced the State is declaring a Drought Warning and gave an update on the significant increase in wildfires over last year. As New Jersey enters the next stage in severity of water-storage conditions, officials strongly encouraged the public to reduce water use during a virtual press conference.

Firefighters across New Jersey are battling a number of wildfires during a record-breaking dry spell that is affecting the entire Northeast. Since early October, the New Jersey Forest Fire Service has responded to 537 wildfires, a more than 1,300% increase in wildfires over the same period last year. The New Jersey Office of Emergency Management has deployed the State's All-Hazards Incident Management Team to supplement operations. The Jennings Creek wildfire, burning along New Jersey's border with New York, claimed the life of New York State parks system employee Dariel Vasquez as he fought the fire on Saturday.

Since the start of the year, nearly 1,300 wildfires have burned over 11,000 acres. The average number of fires per year since the year 2000 is 1,071 wildfires and 4,000 acres burned. As a result of the extremely dry conditions, mandatory statewide Stage 3 fire restrictions remain in effect. These restrictions prohibit all fires unless they are contained in an elevated stove using only propane, natural gas, or electricity. No wood or charcoal fires are allowed, and the use of kerosene or gas torches of any kind is prohibited while this level of restriction is in place.

Commissioner LaTourette today signed an Administrative Order authorizing the Drought Warning designation, which is the next stage of drought after a Water Supply Drought Watch. DEP announced Drought Watch status in mid-October, following a period of prolonged dry conditions. A Drought Warning enables the DEP to more closely manage water systems by directing water transfers among systems, controlling releases from reservoirs, and modifying the rate of flow in streams and rivers in order to balance ecological protection and needs of water suppliers.

"New Jersey is experiencing unprecedented weather conditions—as a result of climate change—that require us to take these precautionary measures now," **Governor Murphy said**. "It can be challenging to adjust our daily habits, but it is imperative that we all work together, heed the guidance to conserve water, and use the utmost caution outdoors to reduce the risk of wildfire as dry conditions continue statewide."

"Climate change is driving our record low precipitation and above-average temperature recorded statewide in September and October," **Commissioner LaTourette said**. "This combination of events has resulted in decreased streamflow and groundwater levels, which harms our available water supplies. Taking these measures now and encouraging reduced water use will help provide some measure of protection from the weather uncertainty we face entering winter."

# 10 SIMPLE STEPS TO SAVE WATER THIS FALL



Reduce usage by 65% and use a commercial car wash instead of washing your car at home.

1



Install low-flow showerheads, faucets and toilets.

6



Postpone water intensive yard work, like reseeding your lawn, until conditions improve.

2



Take five-minute showers.

7



Sweep patios, driveways, and sidewalks. Never hose paved surfaces.

3



Turn off water while brushing teeth.

8



Fix leaks around your home and with your irrigation system.

4



Run your washing machine and dishwasher only when full.

9



If you are still watering your plants, lawns, gardens, they require less water in the fall, and use a rain barrel or watering can.

5



Raise lawnmower blades to at least three inches to promote deeper grass roots, which hold water better.

10

The public is encouraged to follow these common-sense water conservation tips. For additional water conservation tips, visit [dep.nj.gov/conserves-water/](http://dep.nj.gov/conserves-water/)

For updated information about the status of New Jersey's water supplies, visit [dep.nj.gov/drought](http://dep.nj.gov/drought)



## **Drought Warning Explained**

The goal of a Drought Warning is to preserve and balance available water supplies in an effort to avert more serious water shortages in the future.

The Administrative Order designating Drought Warning status comes a day after the DEP held a hearing to update water suppliers and the public on water supply conditions, receive their input, and assess all available water supply management options. The state last entered Drought Warning status in October 2016, which persisted in some parts of the state until August 2017. The Administrative Order establishes a formal process for the DEP to work with water suppliers in affected regions to ensure no single water supplier or region faces a significant shortfall if dry weather and high customer demand continue. In consideration and preparation for Drought Warning status, DEP has been consulting with water suppliers to assess conditions, ensure they are fully aware of the situation, and that they are able to work cooperatively with the DEP.

## **Water Conservation Guidance**

The public is strongly encouraged to follow these tips to reduce water use:

- At this time of year, it is appropriate to let lawns go dormant for the season.
- Winterize, and shut off irrigation systems as soon as possible.

- Only use a watering can to water flowers and shrubs or allow them to go dormant for the season.
  - Use a broom to sweep the sidewalk, rather than a hose.
  - Use a commercial car wash that recycles water, as washing your car at home typically results in more water use.
  - To save water at home, fix leaky faucets and pipes. Consider replacing your toilet with a low-flow version; this can save around 11,000 gallons per year.
  - Upgrade your showerhead to low-flow versions, which can save some 7,700 gallons per year.
  - Upgrade your faucets or install faucet aerators; this can save some 16,000 gallons per year.
- 

## **Types of Droughts**

There are different types of droughts. Meteorological drought refers to periods of low precipitation and high heat, like New Jersey has been experiencing for two months. A hydrological or water supply drought refers to reductions in water supplies, like reservoirs, streams, and groundwater. DEP is responsible for monitoring and managing water supplies in collaboration with public and private water providers. A water supply drought determination is based upon a lack of precipitation, rapidly declining storage in the combined capacity of major surface water supply reservoirs, and/or severely depleted groundwater levels and stream flows.

Drought conditions are currently impacting more than half of the United States, with all of New Jersey and Delaware, and large parts of eastern Pennsylvania and southern New York experiencing at least moderate drought conditions, according to the National Drought Mitigation Center's U.S. Drought Monitor.

The DEP uses specific indicators to gauge the impacts that significantly reduced precipitation has had on water supplies. These include reservoir levels, stream flows, and levels in shallow groundwater sources, known as unconfined aquifers, which are important in the longer-term replenishment of streams and reservoirs.

## **Precipitation Deficits and Reservoirs**

The southern half of the state, in particular, has been grappling with below-normal precipitation, with deficits approaching 10 inches below normal over the last three months.

The DEP organizes the state into six regions in its drought monitoring program, sorting geographic parts of the state based on common water supply sources and watershed boundaries. Historically, these regions may experience varying severity of drought, and the DEP may tailor its approach to suit each regions' needs, but in this case, conditions remain markedly dry across the state. These regions are defined using municipal boundaries and details on what municipality is in each region are described here.

Major reservoir systems are below their normal water levels for this time of year and may need transfers of water through interconnected infrastructure to balance storage.

- The Northeast region is primarily served by 12 reservoirs operated by four water suppliers serving the most densely populated region of the state – have dropped to 60 percent capacity, compared to a normal of about 72 percent for this time of year.
- The North Jersey District Water Supply Commission's two reservoirs have dropped to about 54 percent capacity, compared to a normal of about 68 percent for this time of year. The Commission serves portions of Bergen, Essex, Hudson and, Passaic counties, the most densely populated portions of the state.
- The Veolia-NJ system consists of three reservoirs serving Bergen County that have dropped to about 58 percent total capacity, compared to a normal capacity of 63 percent for this time of year.
- The Central region is predominantly served by New Jersey Water Supply Authority's Raritan Basin reservoirs – serving central parts of the state – are at 81 percent capacity, compared to their normal storage level of 89 percent for this time of year.
- The Coastal North region's storage is predominantly created from the combined storage in reservoirs operated by New Jersey American Water and the New Jersey Water Supply Authority serving portions of Monmouth and Ocean counties are 62 percent capacity, compared to their normal level of 86 percent for this time of year.

The remaining portions of the state are not served predominantly by reservoir-backed surface water supplies, but instead have a mix of river-based surface water, or groundwater wells.

- The Northwest region, which encompasses primarily Sussex and Warren counties is experiencing groundwater levels which are extremely dry, while precipitation is severely dry and stream flows are moderately dry.
- The Southwest region – Burlington, Camden, Gloucester and Salem counties -- relies primarily on groundwater, but is supplemented by surface water. Groundwater in this part of the state is severely dry while precipitation and stream flows are extremely dry.

In the southern coastal region of the state – Atlantic, Cape May and Cumberland counties – groundwater is severely dry, while rainfall and streamflow are extremely dry.

For more state water supply status information and to view the Administrative Order, visit [njdrought.org](http://njdrought.org) (<https://dep.nj.gov/drought/>)

For more detailed information on water conservation technologies and interesting facts, visit [dep.nj.gov/conserves-water/](http://dep.nj.gov/conserves-water/) (<https://dep.nj.gov/conserves-water/>)

For more information on water efficient appliances, visit [dep.nj.gov/appliancestandards](http://dep.nj.gov/appliancestandards) (<https://dep.nj.gov/appliancestandards/>)

## Governor Phil Murphy

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