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# MURPHY ADMINISTRATION RELEASES INNOVATIVE 2024 STATEWIDE WATER SUPPLY PLAN TO MODERNIZE WATER POLICY AND ENHANCE CLIMATE RESILIENCE

## *Plan for First Time Assesses Challenges Presented by Climate Change*

**(24/P039) TRENTON** – Kicking off Climate Week, Environmental Protection Commissioner Shawn M. LaTourette today announced the release of the final 2024 New Jersey Statewide Water Supply Plan, which for the first time assesses water supply challenges resulting from climate change and offers climate resilience solutions. Climate Week provides an opportunity for the public to learn about the many ways climate change is threatening the planet and the steps that can be taken to become more resilient and mitigate its impacts.



The water supply plan concludes that, under normal conditions and in most regions, New Jersey has adequate volumes of source water supply and is well-positioned to address water supply challenges as long as the state continues to take actions to mitigate the threats of climate change, aging infrastructure and emerging contaminants.

“The Statewide Water Supply Plan plays a critical role to inform local water supply management decisions by presenting the newest science to better prepare us for the challenges brought on by our changing climate,” **said Commissioner LaTourette**. “In addition to upgrading our aging infrastructure, a healthy water supply is dependent on constant reevaluation of how we can use water more efficiently to protect it for future generations.”

Consistent with the state’s comprehensive approach to making New Jersey resilient to the worsening impacts of climate change, the 2024 plan seeks to assess the threats of climate change to the state’s water supply. Of particular concern are temperature, precipitation, and sea-level changes, which will significantly impact water quantity, where and when it is available, and its quality. The plan also examines how emerging contaminants may impact water supply.

“New Jersey’s climate is changing. From increased temperatures to sea-level rise, these climate impacts can pose a threat to our water supplies if not properly addressed by proactive planning, management, and permitting,” **said State Geologist Steven Domber**. “By conducting comprehensive monitoring that factors in climate impacts such as increased temperatures, we can develop models and identify trends that will help local water users make informed decisions to ensure New Jerseyans have access to reliable and safe supplies of water now and in the future.”

A 60-day public comment period followed the release of the draft plan on February 26, 2024. The DEP then held two public meetings (one in-person and one virtual) and reviewed and incorporated comments from those meetings before finalizing the plan. Both the plan and a summary response to comment report are available at [dep.nj.gov/water-supply-plan](https://dep.nj.gov/water-supply-plan).

The DEP has also developed a new interactive website that outlines key information from the plan for specific audiences, including residential users, water professionals and others to summarize key plan topics, such as climate change and environmental justice. The website can be found at [dep.nj.gov/water-supply-plan/storymap](https://dep.nj.gov/water-supply-plan/storymap). The site will be updated as additional data and plan updates become available.

### **Water Supply Planning**

The Water Supply Management Act (N.J.S.A. 58:1A-13) directs the DEP to prepare the New Jersey Statewide Water Supply Plan, analyze water supply data, examine associated risks, study projections, and make recommendations for effective management of the state’s water supplies.

The initial version of the plan was adopted in 1982 and updated in 1983, 1985, 1987, 1991, and 1993. Major revisions occurred in 1996 and 2017. The 2024 plan will be updated again in five years, but some aspects may be revised sooner.

The plan must carry out its assessments and recommendations from both statewide and regional perspectives to pursue comprehensive management addressing the diversity of water supply issues faced in different areas of New Jersey.



Drafted to align with the DEP's related water regulations and policies, the plan provides guidance for state and regional groups making decisions concerning water supply. One of the primary goals of the plan is to put forward defined, actionable steps that the DEP can take to ensure water supplies are sufficient, in quality and quantity, to meet existing and future needs.

### Water Supply Challenges Assessed

New Jersey has repeatedly faced a confluence of water resource challenges that have tested both infrastructure and responsiveness. Extremely low precipitation and streamflow in summer 2022 led the DEP to declare a Drought Watch, the first in more than six years. During the same period, aging infrastructure failed, resulting in massive water main breaks; water systems were required to address sources contaminated with per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), and harmful algal blooms were worsened by extremely warm temperatures. Additional challenges occurred in 2023, with four months experiencing near record temperatures and the state having its wettest December on record.

The combination of these challenges in 2022 and 2023 severely tested the resilience of New Jersey's management of water resources. Such conditions are expected to persist or worsen in the future, requiring the DEP and its partner institutions to delicately balance the management of water resources by carefully administering planning, regulatory, investment and incident response initiatives.

### Recommended Action Areas

The availability of surface water, unconfined groundwater, and confined aquifers, the use of which varies geographically, was modeled to investigate potential shortages. Although not evenly distributed throughout the state, total natural water resource availability (including reservoirs) remains about the same as the 2017 New Jersey Statewide Water Supply Plan determined. However, current and forecasted use change, and a few regions showed potential shortages. The plan provides details and recommendations to address these areas.

To meet requirements and ensure that New Jerseyans continue to have ample, reliable, and safe supplies of water now and in the future, the following action areas are covered in the plan, with greater detail on each found in Chapter 8, and elsewhere throughout the plan:

- **Hydrologic Data, Monitoring, Models, and Assessments:** The availability of long-term and real-time hydrologic datasets are critical pieces of information the DEP uses to quantify trends, characterize current conditions, and to build and calibrate models. This information is used to ultimately make informed decisions and to update future water supply plans.
- **Climate Change – Water Availability Research and Modeling:** This plan and its recommendations benefit from the availability of sound and reliable climate change science. This science continues to evolve, and the DEP will remain committed to monitoring new developments, with a particularized focus on the regional and local impacts of climate change upon New Jersey and its natural resources. As new and additional climate change data becomes available, it will be utilized to improve DEP water supply models and monitoring methods to more effectively mitigate and manage climate change impacts to water resources.
- **Climate Change – Infrastructure Resilience Recommendations:** The DEP develops recommendations and establishes criteria to improve the resilience of water infrastructure and mitigate the adverse impacts of climate change upon the state's water supply, including through actions to reform relevant DEP policies, protocols, statutes, or regulations pertaining to water infrastructure assessments and modifications.
- **Regional and Statewide Water Supply Planning and Protection:** Water supply planning is a critical element to ensure that the state continues to have adequate supplies of acceptable quality to meet all current and future needs, and to balance human uses with ecological needs. Regional and statewide planning is adaptive and evolves as new information becomes available or issues emerge. The plan prioritizes regions of New Jersey where future planning efforts should be focused.
- **Water Policy Modernization:** The DEP is obligated and empowered to improve and protect water supply resources and water system infrastructure to ensure water availability and the delivery of safe drinking water to homes and businesses. In some cases, the federal and state laws and regulations that give rise to these obligations are fit for modernization to better position the state and its water providers to confront new and evolving water supply challenges.
- **Asset Management and Resilience:** Maintenance and improvement of infrastructure is key to effective and successful water supply management, and critical to ensure the state has access to clean and plentiful drinking water. Proper asset management can reduce water incidents and emergencies, limit disruptions to customers, and reduce long-term costs.
- **Policies and Priorities for Efficient Water Use:** The plan identifies key policy priorities for the DEP as it continues to regularly re-evaluate new technologies and research to ensure the responsible and efficient use of the state's water resources.
- **Public Outreach:** DEP is committed to continuing public education and engaging with people and communities it serves on key water supply issues and initiatives.



The DEP's [Our Water's Worth It](#) campaign works to draw attention to the importance of clean water in our lives, from drinking water to supporting vibrant ecosystems and health places for recreation. An important focus of the campaign is educating the public on reducing potential lead exposure in drinking water.



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