



ENVIRONMENTAL NEWS

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VIRGINIA ISSUES ‘DROUGHT WATCH’ ADVISORY FOR APPOMATTOX RIVER BASIN

RICHMOND, VA. – Precipitation deficits and above-average temperatures have continued to cause drought impacts in the Appomattox River basin in south-central Virginia. In response to existing conditions and to increase public awareness of the potential for a significant drought event, the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality has issued a “drought watch” advisory for the Appomattox basin.

The affected localities and public water suppliers include Amelia County, Appomattox County, Buckingham County, Chesterfield County, Cumberland County, Dinwiddie County, Nottoway County, Powhatan County, Prince Edward County, Prince George County, Colonial Heights, Hopewell, Petersburg, and the towns of Appomattox, Blackstone, Burkeville, Crewe and Farmville.

A drought watch advisory is intended to increase awareness of conditions that are likely to precede a significant drought event and to facilitate preparation for a drought.

This advisory is being issued because drought indicators in the state’s Drought Assessment and Response Plan have been met. According to the Virginia Drought Monitoring Task Force, an interagency group representing state and federal agencies, the primary factors contributing to the declaration of the drought watch advisory are:

- Precipitation deficits are 8 to 12 inches since October 1, 2011, throughout much of the river basin, and there are deficits of 6 to 8 inches in the rest of the basin.
- Stream flow is lower than 95 percent of recorded flows in the area, indicating a severe hydrologic drought – a period of below-average water content in streams, reservoirs, ground water aquifers, lakes and soils.
- Ground water levels are lower than 75 percent to 90 percent of previously recorded levels.
- Levels at Lake Chesdin are down 38 inches. Public water supply impacts have been reported by Farmville and the Appomattox River Water Authority.
- According to the National Weather Service, conditions in the area are designated as “moderate drought.”

DEQ is sending notifications to all local governments, public water works, and private-sector water users in the affected area, and is requesting that they prepare for the onset of a drought event by developing or reviewing existing water conservation and drought response plans. Through the drought watch advisory, Virginia is encouraging localities, public water suppliers and self-supplied water users in the Appomattox basin to voluntarily take these steps to help protect current water supplies:

- Minimize nonessential water use.
- Review existing or develop new local water conservation and drought contingency plans and take conservation actions consistent with those plans.
- Include water conservation information on local websites and distribute water conservation information as broadly as possible.
- Continue monitoring the condition of public waterworks and self-supplied water systems in partnership with the Virginia Department of Health.
- Impose water use restrictions when consistent with local water supply conditions.
- Aggressively pursue leak detection and repair programs.

The next stage after a drought watch would be a “drought warning,” which would be issued if conditions warrant. Drought warning responses are required when the onset of a significant drought event is imminent. Water conservation and contingency plans that have been prepared during a drought watch stage would begin to be implemented. From the perspective of the Commonwealth, water conservation activities at this stage would generally be voluntary. This does not preclude localities issuing mandatory restrictions if appropriate.

Statewide information on the current drought status is available on the DEQ website at www.deq.virginia.gov.

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