



Debra A. McCarty, Water Commissioner

Philadelphia Water Department and Regional Water Agencies Monitoring Streamflow and Reservoir levels

October 31, 2016 - The Philadelphia Water Department, other regional environmental agencies and the Delaware River Basin Commission (DRBC) are monitoring streamflow and reservoir levels in the Delaware River watershed amid a lack of substantial recent rainfall.

The DRBC, which represents the four states located in the Delaware River Basin and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, **will hold a hearing on November 9 to accept public input** on the persistent dry conditions and how to address them. **The hearing will take place at 1:30 p.m. at the Washington Crossing Historic Park Visitor Center, 1112 River Road, in Washington Crossing, Pa.**

During dry weather conditions like those currently being experienced in much of the Delaware River Basin, the DRBC's primary drought management objective is to provide for conservation of regional reservoir storage for the purposes of water supply protection and to maintain Delaware River streamflow level.

The DRBC also manages streamflow to control salinity in the tidal freshwater portion of the Delaware River. In the reaches downstream of Trenton, the river naturally becomes saltier closer to the Delaware Bay. Low streamflow conditions observed during drought shift the mixing zone between fresh and saline water, often referred to as the salt line, from locations near Delaware to locations closer to Philadelphia. In order to keep the salt line below drinking water intakes in Philadelphia, the DRBC adjusts the release of water from upstream reservoirs to maintain specific streamflow objectives at Trenton.

According to the DRBC, as of Oct. 24, nearly 7.5 billion gallons of water have been released from the Beltzville and Blue Marsh reservoirs, and an additional 2.7 billion gallons have been released from the New York City-owned upper basin reservoirs. Due to lower than average precipitation all summer, the salt line in the Delaware River is farther upstream than it would be under normal conditions, but is not currently in a position to impact drinking water intakes in Philadelphia.

The DRBC and the Philadelphia Water Department continue to monitor Delaware River reservoirs, streamflow and the location of the salt line. The DRBC will issue a Lower Basin Drought Warning if conditions worsen. A full statement from the DRBC on current conditions is available [here](#). For more information, see the **Frequently Asked Questions** below.

Q: Why is the salt line 13 miles farther upstream than it normally is at this time of year?

A: The location of the salt line is an indication of the below-average precipitation our region has experienced all summer. When this occurs, water with higher salinity from the Delaware Bay moves farther upstream.

Q: Does PWD support DRBC's operation to boost river flows with reservoir releases?

A: PWD has confidence in the streamflow objectives at Trenton and the policies that have been developed by the DRBC and basin states to best protect our drinking water supply. The Delaware River watershed provides drinking water for 15 million people, and a coalition of water providers collaborate to ensure that this shared resource is protected.

Q: How many reservoirs help to maintain sufficient flows in the Delaware River watershed?

A: There are seven reservoirs in Pennsylvania and three reservoirs in New York that work together to maintain high water quality at Philadelphia and for drinking water suppliers located along the Schuylkill and Delaware Rivers.

Q: What happens if the DRBC issues a Lower Basin Drought Warning?

A: A drought warning would call for voluntary conservation by businesses and residents in the Delaware River Basin. The DRBC streamflow objective at Trenton also decreases during a Lower Basin Drought Warning to conserve water in the reservoirs upstream of Philadelphia in Pennsylvania.

Q: What is the Delaware River Basin Commission (DRBC)?

A: The DRBC is a federal/interstate government agency responsible for managing the water resources within the 13,539 square-mile Delaware River Basin without regard to political boundaries. The five commission members are the governors of the basin states (Delaware, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania) and the commander of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' North Atlantic Division, representing the federal government.