

The Need to Heed Drought Warning and Conserve Water



By [Sandy Perry](#) | October 20th, 2016

SPRUCE RUN RESERVOIR IN DROUGHT CONDITIONS

All around us, we can see the effects of scarce rainfall during the past year: river and reservoir levels well below normal, parched soil, and autumn leaves looking crispy and less colorful than usual.

What we can't see is just as worrisome: less "recharge" of underground aquifers that supply most of the drinking water to residents of the 470-square-mile Raritan Headwaters region in Hunterdon, Somerset and Morris counties.

The National Weather Service has estimated that precipitation during the past 12 months is between 7.4 and 10.7 percent lower than average in these three counties.

"We're well below our average annual rainfall this year," said Bill Kibler, Director of Policy for Raritan Headwaters, "and last year was a dry year as well. Our streams have been incredibly low most of 2016."

On Thursday, Oct. 20, the state Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) declared a water supply drought warning for northern, central (which includes Readington Township) and northern coastal New Jersey. The warning, which gives the DEP greater authority to order transfers between water systems, is more serious than the drought watch put in place in July but not as severe as a water emergency.

"Spruce Run Reservoir is holding just 35.5% of the water it can hold,"

Kibler said. "Drive by the reservoir and have a look if you want a real eye-opener." The New Jersey Water Supply Authority website shows

Round Valley Reservoir is at only 69.4% capacity.

“The largest reservoir in our state is nearing the lowest level it’s ever been,” said Kibler. “That gives you a good perspective on how dry we are in the Raritan Headwaters region.”

Water use restrictions are still voluntary, but Raritan Headwaters – the watershed watchdog for the North Branch and South Branch of the Raritan River – urges local residents to take the situation seriously and use water wisely.

Here are some easily implemented water-saving tips:

- Stop watering your lawn! Grass is about to go dormant for the winter, so there’s no need to keep watering it this time of year.
- Run your dishwasher and washing machine only when they’re full.
- Turn the faucet off when brushing your teeth or shaving.
- Fix leaky faucets, pipes and toilets, and install low-flow showerheads.
- Take your car to a car wash instead of hosing it down at home. Most car washes recycle their water, using less than folks who wash their own cars.
- Keep a pitcher of drinking water in the refrigerator instead of running the tap to get the water cold.
- Opt for showers instead of baths, and keep your showers as short as possible to save thousands of gallons per month.
- Use a broom to sweep leaves off the sidewalk, rather than a hose.
- Collect the water you use while rinsing fruits and vegetables, and use it for watering houseplants.

By the time you read this our area may have received some much-needed rainfall ... but don’t be lulled into a false sense of complacency. The drought didn’t happen overnight, and it won’t end overnight. We will need months of above-average precipitation to recharge our groundwater and bring our river and reservoir levels back to normal.

Thank you for doing your part to help conserve our water resources!



READINGTON TOWNSHIP ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION - November 2016

Be mindful that the well-water serving your property comes from an aquifer that also serves hundreds of other wells and families around you. Respecting and conserving water is a common responsibility we share as a community. Together we can make a real difference.

For more information please visit: www.RaritanHeadwaters.org

or <http://www.nj.gov/dep/drought/> (NJ Dept. of Environmental Protection)

and

<http://digital.olivesoftware.com/Olive/ODE/StarLedger/Default.aspx?href=StL%2F2016%2F11%2F12&pageno=2&view=document> (Star Ledger story on Round Valley Reservoir 11.12.16)
