

Press and Local Stories

For Immediate Release – June 26, 2017

The Draft Statewide Water Supply Plan is Missing a Plan

Southampton, NJ – After a 21-year wait and without fanfare, the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) recently released a draft of the long-awaited statewide water supply plan. The last plan was published in 1996. The Save H2O Coalition has been pressing the Christie Administration for a number of years to release an updated Water Supply Plan. But, the recently released plan fails to provide solutions to the current and anticipated water supply challenges described in the document.

“The plan is really not a plan. It is more of a snapshot of existing conditions, with vague references to possible solutions. This is unfortunate since the plan identifies a number of watersheds that are already stressed, or will be shortly,” stated **Ed Potosnak, Executive Director of the New Jersey League of Conservation Voters**.

“In plain and simple language, the Water Supply Master Plan should say up front that regional plans, such as the Highlands Regional Master Plan, control water supply decisions in those areas, rather than burying such policy guidance deep in Appendices where no one may ever find the information. 6.2 million New Jersey residents receive some or all of their water from the Highlands, so this is important information to share immediately.” **Julia Somers, Executive Director, New Jersey Highlands Coalition**.

The plan, a requirement of the 1981 New Jersey Water Supply Management Act, which directs the NJDEP to develop and revise the Statewide Water Supply Plan (NJSWSP) every five years with the goal of improving the management and protection of the State’s water supplies. In general, the goals are to improve water supply capacity, investigate the status of major aquifers, and plan for future water supply needs.

“The plan, as released, is just the start of a serious conversation on ensuring we have enough clean water to meet all of New Jersey’s needs. Even while ignoring the most current scientifically accepted data for the Garden State, the plan identifies where we don’t have enough water and where we know we will have massive deficits in available water before 2020. But it lacks actionable measurable recommendations to protect our water supplies. It also fails to address or acknowledge lead contamination in drinking water, on which the public, legislature,

and media have rightfully called for action.” **Jennifer M. Coffey, Executive Director, Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions.**

Comprehensive Planning is critical since the state’s population is projected to add another 1.2 to 1.4 million people between now and 2040 – less than 25 years from now, and our water supply infrastructure is already aging and in some cases, failing. The Draft Water Supply Plan only considers a period of less than 8 years, up to 2025.

“Among the critical questions that must be addressed are: 1. Will we be able to supply the estimated 10.2 to 10.4 million future NJ residents with water? 2. Will population growth occur where we have sufficient water supplies? 3. How will we address impacts of climate change, which may include hotter summers with greater water demands, as well as excessive rainfall and floods, and sea level rise with potential increased saltwater intrusion into our drinking water aquifers? The Draft Water Supply Plan does not sufficiently address these critical challenges.” **Alison Mitchell, Director of Policy, New Jersey Conservation Foundation.**

The Water Supply Management Act also requires NJDEP to “conduct public meetings in the several geographic areas of the State on the proposed plan.” NJDEP has scheduled three daytime meetings and only one night meeting. This is guaranteed to limit any meaningful public participation.

“The Draft Water Supply Plan fails to recognize the unique role of the Pinelands Commission in water supply planning. With regards to water withdrawals from the shallow Kirkwood-Cohansey aquifer, the Commission through the Comprehensive Management Plan (CMP) is the gate-keeper between balancing water withdrawals to support economic growth, and at the same time protecting the fragile ecosystem that those withdrawals can impact. Recent scientific findings of the Commissions’ multi-year Kirkwood-Cohansey study indicate that the Draft Water Supply Plan is underestimating potential impacts to streams and wetlands in the Pinelands National Reserve from current water withdrawals.” **Richard Bizub, Director for Water Programs, Pinelands Preservation Alliance.**

The draft plan notes that per capita potable water use has decreased from 155 gallons per day in 1990 to 125 gallons per day in 2015. The savings is not due to any major policy decisions by NJDEP, but to more efficient indoor plumbing fixtures such as toilets, clothes washers, showerheads, and faucets. The savings in indoor water use is being overshadowed by the increase in outdoor water use, primarily watering lawns. The situation is compounded by the lack of will of our state and local regulators to rein in the growing problem of excessive outdoor water use. As much as one-third of all potable water is lost during any given month in the summer. This can place a significant strain on water availability not only for people, but on ecological resources impacting streamflow and wetlands. With regards to water conservation, the plan is silent on any meaningful policy recommendations regarding outdoor water use. The draft Plan merely recycles the water conservation element of the 1996 Plan.

The plan identifies four (4) of the State’s 20 watershed management areas as currently being stressed, with fifteen (15) becoming stressed if authorized permits are fully utilized. The problem is actually much worse than noted in the plan, for two reasons: First, Watershed

Management Areas are comprised of a number of smaller watersheds. It is at the individual watershed scale that environmental impacts occur from ground and surface withdrawals. The Plan notes that if the existing water permits were fully utilized, 78 of the State's 151 watersheds would be stressed. Second, the fact that 15 Watershed Management Areas will be stressed at full authorized allocations indicates that NJDEP has substantially over-allocated water beyond what is sustainable. The environment loses out when it comes to withdrawals from the shallow aquifer and streams in watersheds that are, or will become, stressed.

“South Jersey residents deserve an explanation for why, when 14 catchments are predicted to be ‘deficient,’ and 17 catchments ‘stressed’ in the Maurice, Cohansey and Salem Watersheds in 2020, that the Draft New Jersey Water Supply Plan states in its introduction that “statewide water supply resources will be sufficient to meet existing and future needs.” Why does this document not provide a more robust plan for conserving and managing South Jersey’s water supply for the future when farmers, businesses, and residents depend on the Kirkwood-Cohansey Aquifer and the rivers and lakes it feeds for over 47,000 million gallons per year,?” **Emma Melvin, Delaware Bayshore Program Director, American Littoral Society.**

Hearing Dates

Tuesday, July 11 at 1:00 PM, NJDEP, 401 East State Street, Trenton

Tuesday, July 11 at 6:00 PM, USGS, 3450 Princeton Pike, Lawrence Township

Wednesday, July 12 at 3:00 PM, Millburn Public Library, 200 Glen Avenue, Millburn

Thursday, July 13 at 1:00 PM, Stockton University, 101 Vera King Farris Drive, Galloway, Campus Center, Board of Trustees Room

Public comment will be accepted until close of business on Friday, July 21, 2017. For more information: <http://www.nj.gov/dep/watersupply/wsp.html>

About the Save H2O Coalition

The Save H2O Coalition began as a project between the Highlands Coalition and the Pinelands Preservation Alliance to highlight the importance of regional planning and water supply protection in the two regions that provide water to the majority of New Jersey residents. The coalition has expanded to launch a campaign to advocate for the release of the Water Supply Master Plan. Coalition Partners include the Pinelands Preservation Alliance (PPA), the Highlands Coalition, the New Jersey League of Conservation Voters (NJLCV), the American Littoral Society, the New Jersey Conservation Foundation and the Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions (ANJEC).

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