



DROUGHT AFFECTING THE DELAWARE RIVER

Not since the 1963 "Drought of Record", has the salt line moved as far up in the Delaware River as it is now. Precipitation in the lower portion of the Delaware Basin is now 20 to 25 percent below normal, and the salt line is near the Philadelphia Airport. Important water intakes lie above the Ben Franklin Bridge for both the City of Philadelphia and for South Jersey. The line has moved up three miles since October 20th, when it was already thirteen miles further upstream than is normal for this time of the year.

Although the drought is not severe in the lower part of New Jersey, the river flow reflects the overall rainfall throughout the Delaware River Basin. The Delaware River Basin Commission, working with the Army Corps of Engineers are watching the situation with some concern. At the Beltsville Reservoir in Pennsylvania in the Upper Basin, the water level is 68 percent below capacity, and the level is below the drought water line.

Enough water must be released or rainfall must occur to keep the salt line from moving further up the River. Although at this point, the salt front is well below the water intakes, as was the case in 1963 when the drought was more severe in South Jersey, it will be important to be sure that the salt line stays below the Ben Franklin Bridge.

(Philadelphia Inquirer - 11-13-2016)

We at RT have seen substantial declines in groundwater levels in many parts of New Jersey. Some groundwater levels have fallen at sites we monitor as much as seven to ten feet. One fortunate thing that has not yet occurred is forest fires. There were extensive forest fires throughout South Jersey and in many areas of the Pinelands in 1963 which were persistent and widespread. At that time, there were fewer houses in the Pinelands and less overall development. Similar fires now would cause much more damage, given the higher number of commercial facilities and residential dwellings present in the Pinelands.

- Gary Brown, P.E., L.S.R.P.



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