

2008: TIME TO IMPROVE DROUGHT RESPONSE

NC Urgently Needs New Tools to Protect Water, Public Health, and the Economy in the Face of Drought



The ongoing drought – the worst in North Carolina’s history – has highlighted the need for better management of our water resources. Substantial spring rains have some reservoirs overflowing, but half the state is still behind in rainfall and groundwater levels. North Carolina’s growing population and changing climate require that we become better stewards of our limited water resources.

As a critical first step towards comprehensive water reform, the General Assembly can act this summer to protect communities across the state from unnecessary economic disruption from drought. North Carolina can upgrade emergency drought response plans, require realistic planning, and promote efficiency and conservation of our finite water resources.

H2499/ S1879 will improve water management to help protect North Carolina from the impacts of drought.

The last year has shown that the cheapest and easiest time to protect against drought is before one starts. **H2499/ S1879, Drought/Water Management Recommendations**, will place North Carolina in a better position to weather future droughts. The bill includes these components:

- **Consistent water withdrawal registration.** Currently, while most users must register with the state if they withdraw more than 100,000 gallons per day (gpd) of surface or groundwater, agricultural users can take up to 1 million gpd without reporting. A flat 100,000 gpd threshold should apply to all users.
- **Minimum water conservation measures.** During the drought, while some responsible systems conserved water aggressively, others were painfully slow to act, threatening their own residents’ supply as well as those of downstream neighbors. North Carolina needs to set minimum conservation measures for water systems in severe, extreme, or extraordinary drought.
- **Realistic local water supply plans.** North Carolina requires local communities to write supply plans, but many plans fail to anticipate or manage drought impacts. These plans must be improved, and the state must have authority to reject plans that are inadequate.
- **Active leak detection and maintenance.** Some water systems in North Carolina waste as much as 30% of their treated drinking water – millions of gallons per day -- through leaks in the pipes. Water systems need state support and direction to detect and repair leaks and eliminate these losses.
- **Accurate water pricing.** Valuing water close to what it actually costs, through tiered water prices (charging higher rates for excessive or wasteful use of water), will give incentives for more efficient and equitable use of this precious but finite resource.

We support H2499/ S1879, but believe the bill can and should be strengthened by the addition of these proposals:

- **Tying growth to resource realities.** State law should require local governments to be sure that existing water supplies will be able to meet expanded demand before approving new development. Permitting development where there is not enough water is a recipe for economic chaos.
- **Water efficiency standards.** Cutting back on water use during a drought entails economic and personal sacrifice – but water efficient buildings can cut year-round water use relatively painlessly.
- **Rainwater capture.** State laws should encourage the collection of rainwater for such purposes as watering gardens and flushing toilets, uses that currently waste treated drinking water.

For information, please contact:

Dan Crawford, Conservation Council of North Carolina, 919-539-1422
Grady McCallie, North Carolina Conservation Network, 919-857-4699 x.101

Christa Wagner, NC Sierra Club, (919) 833-8467
Peter Raabe, American Rivers, (919) 286-2469