Drought conditions straining state’s water resources; DNR urges conservation

(Released October 18, 2012)

Drought conditions are straining Minnesota’s water resources. The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is urging everyone to adopt water conservation measures.

“Water is essential to our economy, our natural resources, and our quality of life,” said Tom Landwehr, DNR commissioner. “We are in the second year of a drought, and it is time for all of us to take water conservation more seriously.”

DNR is asking agricultural, commercial and industrial water users to stop outdoor irrigation and to implement conservation measures. Everyone who holds a DNR permit for water appropriation should review and abide by their permit conditions and begin conserving water as soon as possible.

“The drought conditions are sobering and call for a collaborative response,” Landwehr said. “At a time that per capita water consumption is decreasing nationwide, Minnesota’s water use per resident is actually increasing. We will need to work together to meet these challenges.”

Public water suppliers have been contacted by the DNR and reminded to implement appropriate conservation measures contained in their water supply plans. These could include water audits, leak detection, and promoting water conservation to their customers.

Examples of how drought conditions are straining the state’s water resources include:

- Water conflicts between users and uses are emerging in more places.
- Nearly one-half of the state is in severe drought or worse; severe drought is considered a one in 10-year event; extreme drought is considered a one in 20-year event.
- The extent and geographic distribution of the current drought is rivaling the extreme drought event of the late 1980s.
- Large areas of Minnesota have missed the equivalent of two summertime month’s worth of rain.
- Soil moisture levels are at or below all-time low values for the end of September.
- White Bear Lake’s water level has hit its lowest point on record.
- It is a dire situation going into the 2013 growing season.

It is often difficult to see the long-term impact a drought has on the state’s groundwater supplies. It can take many years for groundwater levels to bounce back after a drought, even when the state’s surface waters appear to have recovered.

“Seventy-five percent of the state’s population depends on groundwater for its drinking water, so it is essential everyone start to conserve this vital resource,” Landwehr said.

Examples of how to conserve water are available on the DNR website. The latest information and fact sheets about the drought are available online.