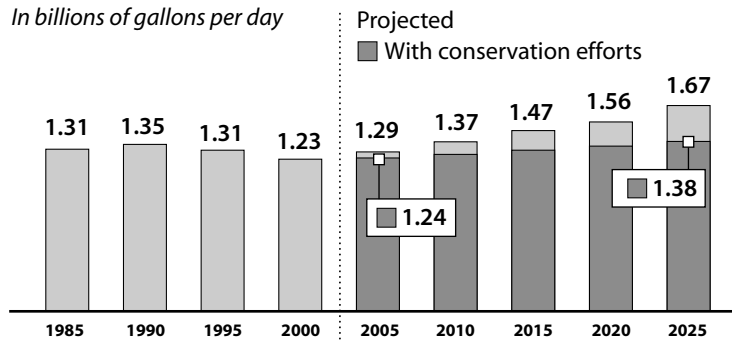


Growing use of water, shrinking supply

As the dry spell in Illinois continues, experts are urging people to use water more efficiently. A recent study shows the effect of conservation.

PUBLIC WATER USE FOR SIX-COUNTY AREA

In billions of gallons per day



Source: Southern Illinois University report "County-level Forecasts of Water Use in Illinois" Chicago Tribune

WATER: Area's usage to increase 28 percent

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

regular part of the landscape.

At the behest of Gov. Rod Blagojevich, state officials will gather Thursday for the first Drought Response Task Force meeting in Springfield, to identify the wide range of problems surfacing because of the dry spell.

The Department of Agriculture is worried about crops. The Department of Natural Resources is worried about wild-

life and habitat. The Illinois Environmental Protection Agency is worried about keeping drinking water free of contamination.

Chicago saw less than an inch of rain in June. Many hoped storms over the 4th of July weekend would ease this year's drought, but a meteorologist with the National Weather Service said the state needs much more rain.

"We only saw a couple hundredths of an inch in some areas," Nathan Marsili said. "It won't really help long-term conditions, and we're not looking for any rain in the next week."

Lessons from a dry spell

In a part of the country where water sometimes seems to be everywhere, the extraordinary spell of dry weather has given Illinois residents a taste of what it might be like to live under a more chronic water shortage.

"People generally tend to appreciate the water situation if they're under pressure," said Derek Winstanley, Illinois State Water Survey chief. "With expected population growth, we need to think about how much we need in the future."

And the first response, officials say, must be conservation. "We forget about these things and go back to our normal lifestyle," said Maggie Carson, spokeswoman for the Illinois EPA. "To me, it's something we should always be thinking about."

Officials don't know exactly how much water lies in the state's underground aquifers. Winstanley said the shallow aquifer system is thin and discontinuous, and the deep bedrock aquifer, which lies 1,000 to 1,500 feet below the surface, has a slow recharge rate.

"We already exceed a safe draw," he said. "We can't take any more."

The Fox and Kankakee Rivers provide some relief. But they won't be able to bear the full burden of 2025's expected increases without putting wildlife habitats at risk.

Even the seemingly vast supply from Lake Michigan has its limits. The U.S. Supreme Court has ruled the state must prove people are conserving and reusing water before asking to take more out of the lake.

Since there is no untapped source for new water, people in Illinois must use less.

"It just makes good sense to meet the growing demand," said Dan Injerd, spokesman for the Illinois Department of Natural Resources' Office of Water Re-

Drought begins to take toll on fish

By Richard Wronski
Tribune staff reporter

How dry has it been this summer? So dry that fish are starting to bite the dust.

State wildlife officials say fish die-offs are being reported across the state after the third-driest March through June in recorded history.

While the dead fish don't pose a serious problem yet—they have mainly been showing up in shrinking shallow backwaters—state conservation officials are monitoring the situation, anxiously watching how events unfold in July, typically the most arid month.

A wide variety of dead fish, including carp, catfish and bullheads, has been reported in the Wilke Marsh in Palatine; in a section of the DuPage River near Naperville; in power plant cooling lakes; and along channels of the Kaskaskia River in southern Illinois.

"Fish are like anything else. They are stressed like a lot of people and plants," said Mike Conlin, director of resource conservation for the Illinois Department of Natural Resources.

"Everything is under a stress condition right now. If this persists, we'll start seeing some damage."

The fish are succumbing to depleted amounts of oxygen in ponds and other bodies of stagnant water because of high temperatures and low water levels, Conlin said.

"The hotter it gets, the less oxygen the water can hold, and the shallower the water gets, the hotter the fish get," he said.

Recreational fishermen are often the first to report mass fish kills, but they aren't the only ones affected. The effects ripple up the food chain, from mussels in the water to raccoons, minks and otters that feed on aquatic life.

"It's going to affect our entire ecosystem," Conlin said. The phenomenon was last widely noted during the drought of 1988, Conlin said. "We had a large number of fish kills occur."

Throughout the upper Midwest, waterfowl and game birds were deprived of fresh water and nesting cover. Fish trapped in shallow waters died by the thousands across the

central states.

Conservation officials are expected to discuss the problem Thursday when Gov. Rod Blagojevich's Drought Task Force convenes in Springfield.

The 7.3-acre Wilke Marsh is southwest of Illinois Highway 53 and Rand Road. Hundreds of dead carp were recently spotted there by residents after the drought lowered the water level significantly and exposed much of the shore.

"I looked out there and saw some white stuff floating in the pond," said Albert Moreno, who lives in the Clover Ridge East Apartments. "At first I shrugged it off. But as the water continued to recede and more and more of them showed up, I could tell they were dead carp."

Since then, rains have replenished much of the Wilke Marsh, an environmentally sensitive area.

"Common carp are very tolerant [of low oxygen] and can get a lot of air from the atmosphere," Conlin said. "But when carp die, you know things are getting pretty tough."

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sources. "The population forecast is very aggressive, and there's a fixed supply of water available."

Power plants use the most

Home and commercial water

use in Illinois breaks down into several broad categories: Power companies use the most—84 percent—to cool nuclear and coal plants. Municipal water consumers come in second, using 10 percent. The rest goes to

farmers, homeowners with private wells, and miners, according to a Southern Illinois University study.

Many people don't realize there is a problem. Under state law, water is considered a common good; anyone may tap into a water source, such as drilling a well, and take as much as he or she wants as long as it is reasonable. But "reasonable" isn't defined.

People in Illinois also pay little for their water, between \$2 and \$4 per thousand gallons. In Ft. Worth, where people know they lack water, they pay five times that amount.

It's been a long time since most state residents have had to think about water this way. Winstanley said that before this year, Illinois hadn't had a major drought since 1988. Droughts came more frequently during the first half of the 20th Century.

"Most people running our water systems weren't alive then," Winstanley said. "Illinois is generally a water-rich state. We tend to take water for granted."

That doesn't mean people do not conserve water. Chicago recently saved water by replacing its old water main. New apartment complexes use low-flush toilets, and new appliances are more water-efficient.

Chicago workers began installing water meters in all city homes in 2003. Most Illinois cities, though not Chicago, have rules to regulate lawn sprinkling.

"Our conservation requirements are not what I would call extreme," Injerd said. "But for a lot of people, it makes economic sense. If they go nuts sprinkling, their water bill will go up."

There are some examples of good use on a larger scale too, Winstanley said. In Kane County, officials created a 30-year water-use plan based on economic development, population growth and land-use changes. By making water one of the criteria used to evaluate new development proposals, they hope not to exceed the sustainable supply.

"That is the way we have to go," Winstanley said. "We need comprehensive, long-range planning, but a framework does not exist."

He would like to see one organization managing the lake or a watershed and allocating water to cities, rather than local municipalities managing resources, he said.

Household strategies

Meanwhile, he and the others planning to attend Thursday's meeting said people must conserve at home. The average American uses 166 gallons of water a day. In Switzerland, the number is 77 gallons of water a day.

Some conservation strategies are easy: For example, if one person turns off the water while brushing his or her teeth every day for a year, 3,942 gallons of water will be saved. If a person showers for one minute less a day, 2,400 gallons could be saved each year.

And if a person smashes spiders rather than flushing them, 4.6 gallons of water could be saved for every arachnid.

"Anytime anybody uses water, if they're conscious about it, they can reduce it," Winstanley said. "If you implemented conservation practices, we could reduce the amount we're using many, many times."

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