



NEWS RELEASE

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Report ready as effects of "Drought of 2016" linger Council making steady progress on regional solutions,

As the worst drought in many years continues to impact Maine and the northeast United States, public water systems in the southern part of the state have released an updated report that significantly advances the opportunity of mutual aid between them.

"The current drought highlights the reality that water utilities in southern Maine can benefit in many ways from sharing water resources," said Norm Labbe, President of the Southern Maine Regional Water Council (SMRWC). "We continually work to identify opportunities for regional cooperation that can lower costs for customers, and reduce the impact of environmental events and man-made events."

The update issued by SMRWC follows a report the organization originally released eight years ago. The purpose of SMRWC's 2008 study was to examine the region's water supplies, and "to create a framework for a combined distribution and supply system for southern Maine." It identified Sebago Lake and the Saco River as bodies of water "that might be expanded as regional supplies are integrated into a regional supply system in the future."

While the previous report addressed interconnections between water systems to serve the growing population of southern Maine, the update is a more specific technical review of how to accomplish that goal. To effectively use connections between public water systems from Portland to Kittery, a number of issues needed to be considered, including existing demands, distribution system capacities, hydraulic gradeline elevations, existing water treatment infrastructure and water chemistry. The updated study examines the most important of these issues, and concludes that other than expansion of certain infrastructure components, the most significant operational challenge to interconnecting the water systems is the differences in water treatment chemical regimens used by the different water systems.

Labbe said the new report is timely. Late last month, the federal Department of Agriculture classified five counties in southern Maine as disaster areas due to the continuing drought. This month, the Maine Public Utilities Commission voted unanimously to open an inquiry into how water utilities should manage responses to drought conditions.

The Council has made significant progress since it formed eleven years ago. Its members have collaborated on bulk purchasing of chemicals and other supplies, they've standardized specifications to make cooperation easier, shared GIS information, collaborated on how to lower costs to customers, and for the first time ever, all the member water utilities are now working from the same hydraulic master model of the southern coast region. Labbe said these are important steps toward advancing the mission of teamwork and mutual aid.

"In addition to easing the impact of a major drought, there are many other issues to think about when exploring regional connections, including population growth, future environmental concerns, climate change, firefighting capacity and cost efficiencies. This study is a key part of the roadmap for how to move forward," he said.

The Southern Maine Regional Water Council includes Maine Water Company, Kennebunk, Kennebunkport & Wells Water District, Kittery Water District, Portland Water District, Sanford Water District, South Berwick Water District,

and York Water District. It was formed in 2005 as a result of utility-sponsored legislation to encourage regional solutions for public water delivery. By sharing knowledge and enhancing cooperation, the Council aims to improve service to the region's public water customers. Combined, these seven utilities serve approximately 300,000 people in 23 communities, or 25% of Maine's population.

On the web: Southern Maine Water Regional Council, www.smrwc.org Tata & Howard, www.TataAndHoward.com Portland Water District, www.pwd.org Kennebunk, Kennebunkport and Wells Water District, www.kkw.org Maine Water Company, www.MaineWater.com York Water District, www.yorkwaterdistrict.org Kittery Water District, www.kitterywater.org Sanford Water District, www.sanfordwater.org South Berwick Water District, www.sbwd.org

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