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Rain, rain can't make limits go away**The Boston Globe**

Most community restrictions on outdoor watering cover "nonessential" usages, such as daily operation of lawn sprinklers. (Barry Chin/ Globe Staff/ File)

By **Matt Rocheleau**

Globe Correspondent / July 26, 2009

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Despite one of the wettest, coolest Junes on record in Massachusetts, the number of area communities with outdoor water restrictions is higher than in both of the last two summers.

The trend runs counter to statewide numbers that show fewer towns and cities imposing restrictions.

As of July 3, 19 area communities had water restrictions in effect, or nearly 40 percent of the 49 communities with limits in place across the state, according to Department of Environmental Protection records.

A year ago, 16 local towns and 70 among the state's 351 communities had restrictions on outdoor water usage. In 2007, the figures were 18 and 55, respectively.

While the reasons vary, officials in most of the towns said the restrictions are kept in place each summer, regard less of the weather.

"Water is a limited resource, and a lot of towns have chosen to say, 'Look, we're a town that wants to conserve water,'" said Richard Friend, a water-supply hydrogeologist for the state's environmental agency.

"You can't throw away conservation practices just because we had a rainy June," said a DEP spokesman, Joe Ferson.

And rainy it was. In the past 115 years, only 12 other Junes have had more precipitation dumped on the state and only nine have been colder than last month, according to Northeast Regional Climate Center data.

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month, according to Northeast Regional Climate Center data.

But communities still are limiting water use.

The rules only apply to “nonessential” outdoor uses, such as watering lawns with sprinklers, washing cars, and filling pools. Though often referred to as bans, the restrictions rarely are complete prohibitions; they do establish specific rules on when residents can use water outdoors, and which activities are allowed.

Most area communities impose water restrictions to meet a state standard, set in 2004, that sets the maximum per-person usage rate at 65 gallons per day. Reaching that goal in the suburbs of Boston can be tougher than other parts of the state because of several factors, officials say.

For one, demand is higher because the area has a larger population than the western part of the state, said Ferson.

However, unlike in other sections of Eastern Massachusetts, many of the local communities are not water customers of the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority, which distributes water from the Quabbin and Wachusett reservoirs and provides sewer services across Greater Boston.

While the Quabbin’s water level is at near-maximum capacity, rainfall does not usually have a major impact on the Central Massachusetts reservoir’s supply, according to Ria Convery, an MWRA spokeswoman. Still, because of its extensive drainage area, it does collect rain quicker than sources used by many area communities, such as wells, Convery said.

“The places with bans are generally places that draw their water from wells,” said Convery. “It takes a long time for places with wells to have their aquifers recharged by rainfall.”

Southborough, which was the only area community receiving MWRA water that had limits in place as of July 3, has instituted a voluntary restriction that will continue through Sept. 22.

Savas Danos, general manager of the Light and Water Department in Littleton, where officials hope to reach the state’s 65-gallon mark by 2013, pointed to another challenge in persuading residents to conserve.

“In the more suburban communities you get people with much larger lawns, and that brings with it more water use,” he said.

However, outdoor-watering restrictions do not necessarily mean supply is low.

Bellingham, Holliston, and Lincoln are limiting water use at least partially because of repairs or maintenance being done to the municipal water systems.

Hudson officials enacted restrictions this year to prepare residents for the limits that the state will impose on area communities as part of an effort to protect the regional watershed. Ashland and Hopkinton already have state-mandated water restrictions, and Franklin’s daily water use is also limited by the state.

In Maynard, restrictions have been set for the first time since 2000 because one of the town’s six wells is off line. Water from the well is discolored but the issue is not health related, said Jerry Flood, superintendent of the town’s Public Works Department. Flood said limits on water usage could become more common as the state and town make a stronger push for conservation.

“In the long run, people are going to have to get used to using a little less water,” he said.

Norfolk has set limits based on a reduction in the amount of water that can be drawn from one of its wells, according to the town’s website.

In Ayer, the water restrictions apply year round as part of a general conservation effort, which has been the case for the past eight years, said the

town's public works office manager, Pamela Martin.

Other area towns with water-use restrictions include Groton, Millis, Pepperell, Shirley, Shrewsbury and Wayland.

Correction: Because of a reporting error, this July 26 article about water-use restrictions in area communities incorrectly described Franklin's limits, which are mandated by the state as part of a conservation program and not the result of low water levels or poor quality. Past water problems in Franklin have been alleviated by the conservation effort and \$20 million in improvements to the town's system. ■

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