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RE: Continued Drought

Well Recommendations During the Continued Drought

The summer of 2016 is coming to an end and fall is upon us soon. The North Country has received a bit of rain in the last few weeks after the significantly dry conditions this summer, however, don't be fooled. We are not out of the drought yet. According to the Northeast Regional Climate Center Lewis County has now moved from about 50% to 75% in a Moderate Drought or a D1. D1 conditions translate into lower stream, lake and well levels, some crop damage and there may be requests to curb water usage from some local authorities. While a drenching rainstorm seems like the answer to the drought, it is not. After the soils have been dry for so long, intense rain storms result in water running off the ground surface and into waterways instead of percolating into the soil. So, yes your lawns might be green and the last cutting of hay is looking great, but groundwater levels are still low. Groundwater takes a lot longer to recover than surface water. Once infiltration begins it still may take weeks for the water to seep down to become ground water.

So why do we care about groundwater? That's where most of our drinking water supply comes from. During a drought, the quantity and quality your well water may change. If there is a change in the odor, taste, or color of your well water which persists for a significant period of time it is recommended to get your well water tested. This water condition is most likely temporary and will only persist until the groundwater becomes recharged and the drought has ended. You may want to hold off on installing water treatments systems as this condition is most likely as temporary as the drought.

What do you do if you run out of water? During a drought, well owners may deepen wells seeking additional water-bearing fractures. Storage capacity may be increased by drilling wells deeper or by installing tanks in basements. However, there are no guarantees of finding additional water by deepening your well. If you are hauling water, precautions must be taken to ensure its safe to drink from source, to hauling and finally to the storage tank that is used to store your drinking water.

What if my water hauler wants to dump water back into my well to recharge the well? Recharging your well seems like a good idea at first, however, it can result in problems for your well including loss of the hauled water, poor water quality and well pollution. Hauled water that is dumped into a drought-stressed well will flow out the bottom of the well and be lost in the surrounding aquifer. Dumping large quantities of water down a well may also stir up fine sediment inside the well, leading to cloudy water. Finally, chemical or biological contaminants picked up during hauling could cause long-term well or aquifer contamination.

Can I store water above ground? Above ground storage tanks are a safe alternative drinking water supply provided they are clean, disinfected, enclosed and built for food grade storage. Using any old container may result in contaminated water. Local retailers may be able to assist you in purchasing the adequate storage tank and one that it meets the national health effects standard requirements (NSF/ANSI 61.)

Conserving water is as critical to the recharge of your well as precipitation is. Drawing down your well faster than it can recover will result in continued well problems. Water conservation techniques include flushing the toilet less often, taking shorter showers, using buckets from sink or shower water to water your landscape, only washing full loads of dishes or laundry, and collecting water from roof gutters for outside use. You can find more water conservation tips by visiting the Lewis County Soil and Water Conservation District Facebook Page or contact us at (315)376-6122.