

We're all in the same Bucket The Ipswich River Basin



All of our fresh water comes from rainfall within the Ipswich River Basin. It does not come from some great pool or underground river. And it is not ours alone to use as we please. Fresh water is the ultimate renewable resource... except when it isn't. In the past five years, Massachusetts has had two of its worst droughts in history, according to American Rivers. In 2016, more than 90% of the state faced a "severe drought," according to the U.S. Drought Monitor, causing widespread water shortages or restrictions. Despite some recent rains this spring we are already experiencing a moderate drought.

As groundwater recharge is determined by rainfall, our supply is limited. Imagine a bucket of limited supply and few occasions when it will be resupplied. And all the time we are taking our water for drinking and the multitude of purposes we need it for (think fire protection). The water level in that bucket is the Ipswich River. All the water that is withdrawn from the basin is water that does not reach the Ipswich River. We are all in the same bucket; it's a limited common resource. Over consumption leads to everybody's detriment.

We typically have plenty of water for our everyday purposes. It is in the summertime when water is used for "irrigation" that we exceed the yield of the basin. When the Ipswich River water level and flow drops below 52 cubic feet per second at the Willowdale Dam, MassDEP requires water use restrictions. As every drop of water that is withdrawn from the basin, is water that does not flow to and support the water level of the river, this includes water that is taken from private wells. It is important that all consumers of water practice and adhere to water conservation measures. It is a matter of fairness and responsibility to conserve and protect our common resource. Everyone can do their part.

Bylaws are passed to equitably apply general civic practices including conservation measures, like watering restrictions during a drought. A bylaw to apply water restrictions to everyone in the town is an appropriate way to share and protect our common limited resource.

We encourage everyone to conserve water. Let your lawn grow a little longer. Water only when needed, not during the day and not when water restrictions are in effect. Thank you for your consideration and interest in sharing and caring for our limited resource. Please support the Water Conservation Bylaw.

Ernest C. Ashley, P.G. LSP
Hydrogeologist
Chairman, Wenham Water Commission