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NJDEP-Division of Watershed Management
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Re: Clean Water Council Hearing on Wastewater Recycling

To the Clean Water Council:

We appreciate the Council's attention to this important topic and the opportunity to provide comment. The following are written comments concerning issues related to the need for and implementation of wastewater recycling in New Jersey.

Beneficial Re-use is an important tool in water resource management. This is particularly true under the circumstances we have in New Jersey, including widespread development, recurring droughts, struggling agricultural uses and two officially recognized "critical water areas" where withdrawals must be limited due to saltwater intrusion. Widespread development has caused an imbalance in the water supply side of the water budget not only because of the needs of a growing population for potable water, but also because it has reduced infiltration and recharge to groundwater and streams. That imbalance probably cannot be recovered by changes to stormwater regulations alone. The growing development and population also uses potable water for purposes that do not necessarily require potable water and no planning for or recognition of that fact has occurred.

Recurring droughts exacerbate and highlight the problems of the imbalanced water budget. There is no complete "answer" for the effects of a drought. Water tables will fall; streams will shrink. However, promoting beneficial re-use to conserve supplies and to encourage aquifer recharge will mitigate those effects to some degree. It may even lessen the need for sudden policy changes (e.g., pool filling allowances.)

Agriculture is a land use we have supported through policy, regulation, acquisition, and education. Some agricultural uses need plentiful water that is inexpensive in order to thrive. An expensive water supply could drive producers in this

state out of the competitive market when that cost has to be added to other marketing costs. While not every crop could use or should use treated effluent, assuring an inexpensive water supply through wastewater re-use would allow a growing population to continue to obtain potable water from more traditional sources and would help to promote and continue agriculture in our state.

We have a critical water area related to the Potomac-Raritan-Magothy aquifer covering most of Burlington County. It is critical to protect that water supply from further saltwater intrusion. Conservation and re-use are the only methods to prevent saltwater intrusion. The State and the County have sought to conserve the supply by limiting withdrawals in the CWA#2. However, as the effects of additional development occur, as droughts occur, as withdrawals continue outside the CWA, we may watch the salt line move up the Delaware River and into the recharge zone regardless of the limits on withdrawals within the CWA.

A growing population demands planning to guarantee potable water for those necessary uses. Certainly, a guaranteed water supply must be one of the defining variables in what can be considered a sustainable future, even if we cannot agree on what all the variables might be. Now, at the springboard to the future where we can see full build-out on the horizon, is the time to plan for and support implementation of the beneficial re-use of wastewater.

If it is the intention of State government to create a statewide beneficial re-use plan, the goals and objectives of that plan should be clearly defined at the outset of its development. Some recommended goals include meeting phosphorus standards by removing effluent from the streams, conserving groundwater and streamflow by reducing withdrawals, recharging aquifers and stream baseflow, and supporting agriculture with cheap water supply, thereby ensuring farms retain some level of economic viability. These goals should be clearly defined so that programs and appropriations match objectives toward goal.

One of the problems with beneficial re-use lies in current regulations for effluent disposal, which discourage rather than encourage re-use. Design standards must have sufficient flexibility to support a wide variety of end uses. Chemical standards must also be appropriate. Applicable standards should seek to balance the costs (both of plant renovations and sludge disposal) for removing phosphorus by encouraging beneficial re-use and/or discharge to groundwater. In other words, if re-use occurs will different standards be applied that are more appropriate to the re-use strategy proposed? NJPDES permits should encourage beneficial re-use, particularly in the State's two Critical Water Areas or in their recharge zones.

Planning, design and implementation of re-use projects is lengthy and costly. Development impact fees; grants; loans and an expedited review process could offset these dis-incentives. The goals of a statewide program should include means to offset the dis-incentives, particularly in areas of need, such as Critical Water Areas and their recharge zones, including development impact fees tied to proposed percentage of

imperviousness, tax credit or other grant recognizing new re-use/recharge in existing developed areas. Based on the State's role in granting water allocation permits, the State must also take the lead in creating the grant/loan/credit program that could be based on a local jurisdiction (utility authority, development authority, county or municipality) taking the initiative to apply for the program and implement a re-use plan.

Planning for wastewater re-use must occur along with planning for smart growth. Planning for growth would recognize the increase in volume of effluent, but also would provide for its re-use in ways that will have the least possible impact on human health concerns. This is particularly true because too often standards require the treatment to meet primary contact standards. If options are determined before the growth occurs, those higher treatment standards may not be necessary. Additionally, installing effluent distribution lines before or at the same time as development occurs will reduce costs that might be doubled or more by installation after development is in-place. This would allow a state incentive program to provide cost sharing in the form of grants and/or loans for both planning and installation.

Re-use of treated effluent is clearly necessary to provide adequate water supply for the future. Work should begin now to lay the framework for the most successful and widespread planning and implementation to occur.

Again, we appreciate your attention to this matter.

Respectfully submitted,

Gina A. Berg
Water Resources Coordinator