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News Release

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Needed Rain Helps Avert a Drought in May

Streamflow levels declined in early May across Maryland and Delaware and in the Chesapeake Bay, but were improving at the end of the month because of heavy rain, according to hydrologists at the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) in Baltimore, Maryland. The National Weather Service reported 5.34 inches of precipitation during May at BWI Airport, which was 1.62 inches above normal. This rainfall has helped to recharge the ground-water levels and to maintain water storage in the Baltimore reservoir system at 99 percent of capacity, but seasonal rainfall is needed to keep streamflow levels from declining again.

Streamflow entering the Chesapeake Bay averaged 33.1 bgd (billion gallons per day) in May, which is 46 percent below the long-term average for May, and streamflow from the Susquehanna River into the Bay was the lowest since May 1941 (see graphs at http://md.water.usgs.gov/monthly/bay.html). Streamflow in May represented a 48-percent drop from April, and continued a year of having below average streamflow into the Bay for every month except April. Low streamflow has resulted in increased salinity levels in the Bay. The higher salinity levels may cause oysters to suffer because of greater incidence of diseases Dermo and MSX, which are prevalent in high salinity years. The low flow may also mean lower amounts of nutrients entered the Bay during the spring. This would be beneficial since high amounts of nutrients and sediment can lead to poor water-quality conditions for many of the Bay's living resources.

Streamflow of the Potomac River near Washington, D.C., also decreased from April, and was 45 percent below the long-term average for May. The monthly streamflow levels at five USGS index stations were all below normal in May; however, streamflow on the Choptank River near Greensboro, Maryland, on the Eastern Shore was only 5 percent below normal.

Ground-water levels in water-table wells at the end of May were mostly in the normal range for Delaware and Maryland (see graphs at http://md.water.usgs.gov/groundwater/). Ground-water levels in

water-table wells typically decrease in the spring and summer as more water is consumed by evapotranspiration from growing plants and increase air temperatures.

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