

Interagency Drought Workgroup (IDW)
Meeting Minutes

May 3, 2017, 2:00 PM
CT Office of Policy & Management
Room 2A, 450 Capitol Ave.
Hartford, CT 06106

CT Agency representatives:

Steve Anderson, DoAg; Jacob Ducharme, DPH; Bill Foreman, DEEP; Doug Glowacki, DESPP (by phone); Michael Hage, DPH; Doug Hoskins, DEEP; Bob Kenny, DESPP; Linda King-Corbin, DEEP-PURA; Dave LeVasseur, OPM; Eric Lindquist, OPM; Ryan Tetreault, DPH; Bruce Wittchen, OPM;

Other attendees:

Nicole Belk, NWS Taunton; John Mullaney, USGS East Hartford

1. Call to order

Dave LeVasseur called the meeting to order at 2:03 PM.

2. Assessment of Existing Conditions

• **2a. Review & evaluation of data**

Precipitation:

Doug Glowacki reported that the wet weather pattern we have experienced appears to be continuing into the foreseeable future. Although there has not been a large weather system to mark a definitive end to the drought with 5-10 inches or more of rain, a series of light to modest rain events have gradually eased drought conditions across much of the state, Doug said. Nicole Belk said that Connecticut has experienced above-normal rainfall over the past month, and now one must look beyond the past 3 months in order to see a cumulative rainfall deficit. Nicole mentioned that May's precipitation is already off to a good start.

Groundwater:

John Mullaney said that groundwater has finally recovered to the normal (25th to 75th percentile) range, with just a handful of wells remaining below normal. Some wells are in the lower end of the normal range but some are in the higher end of normal, with a handful above normal. There was some discussion over how unpredictable some of the monitoring wells have been in recent history, and that groundwater levels in several continuous monitoring wells have shown an unexpectedly rapid – almost flashy – rise and fall.

Streamflow:

John Mullaney said that while average streamflow for the month of March was below or much below normal, the month of April saw much improvement. Streamflow is once again dropping as leaf-out is in full swing, so continued rains are needed to sustain normal streamflow.

Reservoirs:

Jacob Ducharme reported the statewide reservoir capacity. Data for the month of April is extremely positive, with total statewide capacity slightly above normal for the time of year. Most water systems are near 100% of normal except for New Britain and Aquarion's Greenwich and Darien systems, which are recovering nicely but are still below 90% of normal. Michael Hage noted that Aquarion's statistical models show a 15% probability of returning to drought levels this summer, based on current reservoir capacity. However, Aquarion is in the process of deconstructing the temporary inter-basin transfer infrastructure between its reservoirs that was permitted under an emergency order.

Palmer Drought Severity Index (Palmer Index) and Crop Moisture Index:

Steve Anderson overviewed the monthly Palmer Index and Crop Moisture Index reports for Connecticut, which have both shown continued improvement and are at or above the normal range for all of Connecticut's climate zones.

Fire Danger:

Bill Foreman reported fire danger to be in the Moderate range. There was some discussion about the forecasted impacts of gypsy moths leading to an increased forest fire risk during the summer season.

- **2b. Discussion**

David LeVasseur said that while significant improvement has occurred and appears to be continuing, indicators such as groundwater have only just barely recovered and there is still a risk of relapse should the precipitation pattern turn dry again. He recommended that the group downgrade the Drought Watch to a Drought Advisory in the six westernmost counties, and maintain the Drought Advisory as-is in the two easternmost counties.

Several participants expressed verbal agreement with David's recommendation. David asked if anyone was opposed to maintaining the Drought Advisory, to which there was no objection.

3. Course of action

The Interagency Drought Workgroup, acting through the Office of Policy and Management, will make the following recommendation to the Governor:
The Drought Watch is to be downgraded to a Drought Advisory in Fairfield, New Haven, Middlesex, Litchfield, Hartford, and Tolland counties. The Drought Advisory

is to continue in New London and Windham counties. Thus, there will be a Drought Advisory in effect statewide.

4. Old Business

- **4a. Drought Task Force**

Eric Lindquist reported that no progress has been made on this front since the last meeting. He explained that it is important to establish the Drought Task Force even though it is not as time-critical as it once was. Most agencies have already designated one or more staff persons to serve on a workgroup to address this issue as well as revisit the revised drought plan. Eric said he would be in contact with these individuals in the coming weeks.

- **4b. Revised Drought Plan**

David LeVasseur informed the group about a proposed bill under consideration at the legislature that would require mandatory water conservation during droughts and set thresholds by drought stage. In addition, the Water Planning Council would be required to submit a report to the legislature each year on drought related matters. David indicated that the bill is unnecessary and poorly thought out. He said that he is using OPM channels in an attempt to stop the bill. The Revised Drought Plan continues to be on stand-by until a workgroup is assembled to peruse comments received during the public comment period and make recommendations to the Water Planning Council on how to proceed.

5. Next Meeting

The next meeting will be in approximately one month, to be schedule via email.

6. Adjournment

Dave LeVasseur adjourned the meeting at 2:45 PM.

Minutes prepared by Eric Lindquist, OPM