

Interagency Drought Workgroup (IDW)
Meeting Minutes

August 13, 2020, 9:00 AM Teleconference

CT Agency representatives:

DEEP: Peter Aarrestad, Corinne Fitting, William Foreman, Helene Hochholzer
DEMHS: Brenda Bergeron, Bob Kenny
DoAg: Stephen Anderson
DPH: Steven Harkey, Lori Mathieu, Ryan Tetreault
OPM: Martin Heft, Eric Lindquist, Bruce Wittchen
PURA: Maria Szul

Federal Agency representatives:

USGS: John Mullaney, Tim Sargent
NWS: Nicole Belk, Nancy Furbush, Britt Westerberg

Other participants:

MA Water Resources Commission: Vandana Rao

1. Call to order

Martin Heft called the meeting to order at 9:01 AM.

2. Approval of minutes: 7/23/2020

A motion was made and seconded to approve the draft 7/23/2020 minutes and the motion was approved unanimously.

3. Update on municipal water coordinators

Brenda Bergeron said regional coordinators are working on this but they had to focus on the recent storm. An update will be provided at the next meeting. Lori mentioned that there was a discussion between DPH and DEMHS regarding what Water Utility Coordinating Committees (WUCCs) are and are not responsible for.

4. Discussion of changes in conditions since previous meetings and weather outlook

Nicole Belk provided an overview of the information she had provided for this meeting's [Drought Conditions Report](#). She highlighted that Fairfield County had above-average precipitation in July and is in good shape. That extends into adjacent areas of Litchfield and New Haven Counties. Others are below normal, although she pointed out a higher total from an isolated storm in the Willington area. She also went through the two and three-month totals and noted the counties reaching the precipitation trigger of <65% of normal across those periods. Nicole also highlighted the role of excessive heat in recent months.

Nicole said that precipitation to date in August declines from west to east across the state and temperatures have been 3-5 degrees above normal. She provided an overview of the two-week outlook, mentioning Doug Glowacki's email about the the state possibly receiving significant precipitation from a storm passing to the south on Sunday. She added that temperatures are coming down in the coming week, but the longer-term outlooks are that temperatures will likely be warmer than normal in the coming months. Precipitation is equally likely to be above or below normal.

Tim Sargent provided an overview of information provided by the USGS. He said statewide stream flows are trending down, but the response by the state's real-time monitoring wells has been mixed. There was a discussion of the distribution of impacts across the state and overall trends. In general, ground water levels have been below normal two months or less.

There was a discussion of the map design hiding some wells and Tim said he would talk with John Mullaney about that. The group also asked if all wells are included in the mapping and Tim pointed out that there can be issues with whether data are available for each well for each of those months and noted that COVID-19 prevented the gaging of all wells in March. Lori Mathieu said DPH will overlay that mapping with drinking water source mapping.

Eric Lindquist commented on the chart listing the number of wells by county that have been below normal for two or more months and there was a discussion of the distribution across the state. There was further discussion of the corresponding stream flow map and chart.

Steve Harkey provided an overview of information provided by DPH. Statewide, reservoirs are at 96.8% of normal and only two systems, Salisbury and Southington, are below 80% of normal. He noted that Southington previously was under a water use restriction but no longer is. That system's restrictions are based on demands. Steve added that the Greenwich, Meriden, and Waterbury systems are also below 90% of normal. Bristol, Manchester, and South Norwalk are approaching their initial drought trigger. There was further discussion of the Southington system and Steve said demands had declined from 6 to less than 1 million gallons per day.

Lori Mathieu said it would be helpful if the state could issue something describing concerns about the current situation. She said some systems haven't issued requests for conservation because their triggers aren't where they should be. Steve Harkey noted that the US Drought Monitor extended the area classified as "Abnormally Dry" all the way to the coast in eastern CT and improved a portion of the area of Litchfield County classified as "Moderate Drought" to "Abnormally Dry".

Steve Harkey showed another map, not included in the handout, illustrating which systems have requested reduced water use. Lori noted that many of the water companies that have not requested conservation would not be pleased if the state did. The state would need to reach out to the industry prior to such a declaration. She noted that, when the Malloy administration issued such a declaration, the MDC issued an announcement that it had plenty of water.

Eric Lindquist proceed to the update from DoAg and said the numbers speak for themselves. Steve Anderson added that more of the state is now classified as abnormally dry or worse and noted the decline in soil moisture exhibited in VegDRI. Helene Hochholzer said the forest fire index is now classified as Moderate in the west and High in the east. Each is likely

to be elevated an additional step without rain in the next four days and any wind will make fires worse. She did not know the exact number of fires so far, but there have been at least eight in the east and DEEP responded to five. One in Thompson has been smoldering for weeks. There was further discussion of these data.

5. Review of [State Drought Plan](#) and recommended course of action

Eric Lindquist referenced this week's updated table of drought indicators and noted changes since the table circulated in advance of last week's canceled meeting. Bruce Wittchen explained how he had incorporated wiggle room in the original to allow this group an opportunity to use professional judgment in evaluating the data rather than be locked into a binary, yes-no review of triggers. Formatted that way, however, the level of dryness was more ambiguous than he had expected. Eric Lindquist pointed out the level of deterioration since then, especially in indicators that can react more quickly, and noted the role of the higher temperatures discussed earlier.

Lori Mathieu said the state should spend the money to hire a consultant to help this group work through drought metrics. We have never used outside expertise. Water in reservoirs gives a false of security and this group should have outside assistance. She recommended that we stay at Stage 1, but meet weekly. Corinne Fitting agreed, but added that there should be a press release to explain the decision to stay at that level, noting that the indicators are mixed and the group will continue monitoring.

Martin Heft cautioned against doing Stage 2 actions at Stage 1, but Lori Mathieu agreed with Corinne's suggestion and said the public wants to know what to do. There was a discussion of a meeting schedule. Eric Lindquist asked what the stages mean and read the description of Stage 2 from pg 10 of the drought pla:

Stage 2 represents an emerging drought event, potentially impacting water supplies, agriculture, or natural ecosystems. Impacts from a Stage 2 drought are typically limited or isolated in nature, and are likely to be felt first in the most water-constrained settings. At Stage 2, government officials and public water suppliers in affected areas should be engaged and preparing to undertake mitigation activities should they become necessary. Data collection and reporting activities are increased, where appropriate, and communication and coordination becomes a priority. Stage 2 is the first publicly-announced stage of drought.

He asked if we now meet that standard and noted that this plan calls for the use of professional judgment. Lori said we could be there and Nicole Belk noted the role of excess heat in the ongoing deterioration. There was further discussion of conditions and Steve Harkey mentioned NOAA's [Evaporative Demand Drought Index](#) (EDDI), which provides an early signal. He recommended that group members familiarize themselves with it.

Pete Aarrestad asked what neighboring states have done and Eric Lindquist invited MA's Vandana Rao to describe what her state is doing. Vandana said MA's task force met yesterday and voted to recommend the entire state be elevated to Stage 2. The

recommendation has been submitted and the declaration might be issued today. She provided an overview of that task force's approach.

Lori Mathieu asked if that state has any water supply concerns, such as with the Quabbin Reservoir. Vandana said Quabbin stores multiple years of water and is doing great. Others are doing OK. She said SE MA is beginning to experience problems. There was a discussion of differences between MA's and CT's framework of water companies, with small systems being more prevalent in CT. Eric Lindquist provided an overview of NY's and RI's drought status.

Martin Heft said a meeting is already scheduled for next week and recommended staying at Stage 1 and sending an update to the Governor. Lori Mathieu agreed. Eric Lindquist asked each agency's representative to vote. Steve Anderson agreed with staying at Stage 1, but raising a red flag with the update to the Governor. Corinne Fitting agreed with remaining at Stage 1 for another week and asked that the update be posted online. Bon Kenny also agreed with holding at Stage 1 and re-evaluating next week. He added that he will circulate info regarding progress in identifying municipal water coordinators.

Martin Heft asked about the drought infographic DEEP presented at the previous meeting and Eric Lindquist said DEEP's Ali Hibbard is working on it. He will follow up with her.

6. Items for next meeting and schedule

The group will meet again at 2:00 on 8/20.

7. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 10:22 AM.

Minutes prepared by Bruce Wittchen, OPM