

Water Planning Council Implementation Working Group
Drought Sub-Work Group Report
May 10, 2021

Summary of Draft Recommendations

Charge 1. *The WPC, through its committees, could develop a template for interpreting statewide drought indices to local risk levels and response measures for use by utilities at the local level, based on storage, demand levels, type of system, etc.*

1.1 The Department of Public Health should develop guidance for how utilities should develop their utility specific drought response plans, ensure that they are adequately protective of public water supply, and take into consideration precipitation and temperature changes expected from climate change.

1.2 Maintain allowances for regional declarations and professional judgement in the State Drought Plan.

1.3 Identify areas where additional indicator sites are needed (stream and groundwater gages in each drought region.) and maintain the existing stream gages and groundwater stations in order to monitor conditions locally

1.4 Develop a committee through the Water Planning Council to determine the need for a template for interpreting statewide drought indices and, if needed, to engage subject matter experts and stakeholders to develop a template for interpreting statewide drought indices. More localized templates may then be able to be developed but without making the resolution so narrow that it becomes an overwhelming task.

1.5 The State, in coordination with Federal partners, should develop an online portal for public water systems to report their various surface water and ground water capacities as well as the other metrics required by regulation.

1.6 Instead of a template, which may be too prescriptive, develop a checklist for press releases, messaging, and public outreach materials that will be issued by the IDW or lead agency.

Examples of messaging that should include:

- Clear messaging about the status of regions affected (or not) by dry conditions or drought.
- Language differentiating between IDW declared regional droughts and individual public water supply droughts and encouraging those on public water supply to pay close attention to their providers as conditions and restrictions will vary depending on the source.
- Information about the status of groundwater supplies and instructions for residents on private wells.

1.7 Conclusions of each IDW meeting should be consistently reported and clear. Data upon which conclusions were based should be included in official meeting materials.

Charge 2. *At present, the Drought Plan and the Interagency Drought Workgroup exist in an ad hoc capacity under the collective executive branch authority of the Water Planning Council, its member agencies, and the Governor. Because the Drought Plan is not authorized in statute, its implementation relies upon existing statutory and regulatory powers of the agencies that comprise the Interagency Drought Workgroup. There have been external efforts, most recently through House Bill 5154 (2018 session), to legislate a state drought plan. The Council should consider developing legislative recommendations to improve the authority and implementation of the Drought Plan for consideration during a future legislative session, as it offered to do in testimony it submitted regarding HB 5154.*

2.1 The IDW should have an officially designated leader.

2.2 A lead and backup member should be designated for each agency participating in the IDW.

2.3 IDW meeting minutes should include full documentation of the status of each defining criteria reviewed for all areas of the state.

2.4 All towns should be required through statute or regulation to have an official drought coordinator.

2.5 Reporting frequency of water levels and actions taken by water utilities should be increased to weekly during a drought.

2.6 The decision process by the IDW and/or the governor for taking actions (or not taking actions) during a drought needs to be fully documented.

2.7 Procedures for communicating between the IDW, towns, utilities and the public need be defined. Templates for communication of messages should be developed prior to the next drought.

Charge 3. *The adoption of water use restriction ordinances by municipalities is considered to be a major element of drought planning and response, but the model water use ordinance featured in Appendix B is deemed inadequate or impractical for some communities. There is also a need for better coordination between and among municipalities and public water suppliers on reduction targets. The WPC should consider collaborating with municipalities and public water suppliers to improve and promote the model water use restriction ordinance.*

3.1 A new set of model ordinances should be developed to better fit local municipal needs. There are many different scenarios regarding water supplies at the local level and model ordinances should be developed to meet the different set of conditions. For example, some towns may be serviced solely by public water supplies and other towns may be a combination of private wells and public supply. A task force should be convened to develop model ordinances for the different town/water supply configurations. These should include how municipalities will coordinate with local water utilities.

3.2 The Water Planning Council should confirm that public water suppliers have the authority to implement and enforce water use restrictions on their customers in accordance with their approved drought response plans without the need for enacting ordinances in each municipality served, similar to the authority assumed by Aquarion during the 2016 drought.

3.3 The WPC/IDW are currently finalizing the initial list of water coordinators. Each town will have a water coordinator to help facilitate communications between each of the responsible entities to aid in the messaging for water restrictions among other drought coordination efforts.

Charge 4. *Would the current state drought plan have been effective during the 2016-2017 drought?*

4.1 IDW should determine a consistent set of procedure for communications that should define timing and responsibilities.

4.2 Templates for various stages and drought conditions should be drafted and finalized using agency staff and communication's offices staff. These templates should be approved prior to the next drought event and include areas where additional situational information can be added during the drought event.

4.3 IDW should develop a mechanism to document any decisions made by the Governor's Office when a recommendation is made regarding drought declarations and conservation requests.

4.4 IDW should develop a plan to fully implement the use of the Water Coordinator that includes defining the role and responsibilities of the position.

4.5 The IDW should develop and establish simple and efficient mechanisms that ensure two-way impactful communications between the state and the Water Coordinator.

4.6 IDW should determine, after the full implementation of the Water Coordinator, if the Water Coordinator has fulfilled the role of two-way communication. If the Water Coordinator has not completely fulfilled the role, then the IDW should determine a mechanism that expands their membership to include local or regional stakeholders as advisory members.

4.7 IDW should establish monthly meetings during non-drought conditions.

4.8 IDW should establish a schedule of meetings during drought conditions whose frequency is sufficient to relay conditions and make timely decisions.

4.9 OPM should identify a staff position with sufficient authority to be the lead of the IDW and add the duties to the position's description to ensure the leader role is established.

4.10 Members and alternates should be determined by each agency who have the authority to make decision for their agency or branch and can attend meetings regularly.

4.11 IDW members and alternates should be updated periodically.

4.12 The Water Planning Council needs to provide guidance as to the role of water conservation in mitigating for drought and determine if water conservation should be part of the Drought Preparedness and Response Plan. Further it needs to look at other planning documents including the State Hazard Mitigation Plan and the GC3 reports.

4.13 The Water Planning Council needs to determine and advise the SWP-IWG and WPCAG as how best to coordinate with the GC3 planning efforts.