

Interagency Drought Work Group Minutes

October 20, 2015, 10:00 AM
Office of Policy & Management
Room 4A, 450 Capitol Ave.
Hartford, CT 06106

CT Agency representatives:

Peter Aarrestad, DEEP; Steve Anderson, DoAg; Rob Baran, DPH; Bill Foreman, DEEP; Dave LeVasseur, OPM; Eric Lindquist, OPM; Tiziana Shea, DPH; Maria Szul, PURA; Cam Walden, DPH; Bruce Wittchen, OPM

Other attendees:

Andy Wade, USGS East Hartford , Britt Westergard, NWS Albany

1. Call to order

Dave LeVasseur called the meeting to order at 10:05.

2. Discussion of Existing Conditions

- **Review & evaluation of data**

Bruce Wittchen said the conditions we see could justify a Drought Advisory, but our plan's drought criteria say that they do not.

There was a discussion the drought measures specified by the state drought plan and of WPCAG Drought Plan Work Group discussions of the desirability of modifying the indicators or of considering them differently. A question was raised about the reliability of certain indicators such as the Palmer Drought Severity Index and whether certain indicators, such as stream flow and precipitation, should be given greater weight in determining drought status.

The group reviewed data for each of the seven official drought indicators (see Attachment 1). There was a discussion of statewide reservoir status as a drought measure and that individual system data are averaged across different periods of time. Demands on some systems probably have changed over the longer periods.

Pete Aarrestad gave a quick update on fisheries impacts — fish could not be stocked in all of the normal locations for fall stocking due to low flows. Andy Wade gave a quick update regarding USGS monitoring of streamflow and groundwater levels. Britt Westergard reviewed the extended forecast, NWS precipitation data and methodology, including CoCoRaHS data.

- **Course of action**

There was a discussion of whether the group can issue a drought advisory without a majority of the criteria having reached their trigger points. DPH is concerned about the credibility of doing so and others did not speak strongly for or against issuing an advisory.

There was a discussion about the potential benefits of revising the drought plan to provide increased flexibility, such as specifically authorizing the use of professional judgement when established criteria do not appear to represent actual conditions or are too slow to respond.

There was a discussion of how previous drought advisories were worded and whether it could be appropriate to issue a statement that is beneath the threshold of a “drought advisory”, to increase public awareness. Bruce will circulate the 2008 drought advisory press release for reference and group members will weigh-in with opinions after reviewing it.

There was discussion about whether it is too late in the year for a drought advisory to make any difference, since outdoor water use should be coming to an end. There was a discussion that a statement issued at this time can be crafted to make the public aware of the situation. Possible wording can include “this is the time of year when we begin recharging our water storage; such recharge has not been happening and water levels continue to drop.”

Group members were asked to provide their agencies' opinions on issuing a drought advisory after another week or so. The federal agencies were asked to provide any suggestions or other feedback they can provide to improve CT's drought indicators. People were thanked for their participation and the meeting was adjourned.

3. Date for next meeting

To be Determined

4. Adjournment

Attachment 1

Drought Advisory Criteria, as of 10/20/2015:

Precipitation: Two months cumulative below 65% of normal,

All counties were below 65% or just slightly above it for Aug – Sep and July – Sep. However, all counties are >65% for the 1 ½ months since the beginning of September.

Ground Water: Three consecutive months below normal,

Three of the state's 7 continuous read MWs are at record lows, a fourth is below the 10th percentile and two others are below the 25th percentile. However, only one of those six wells has been below normal (<25th percentile) for three consecutive months, although the Greenwich and Newtown wells could be considered close.

Streamflow: Two out of three months below normal,

Based on the USGS' 28-day hydrologic unit mapping, the Farmington and Thames River basins have been below normal (<25th percentile) across the past 28-days. I can't pull up the September map from the archive, but I recall the Thames basin also being below normal then, along with an area I can't remember somewhere else. The August map shows the eastern 60%+ of the state being below normal, along with lower Fairfield County.

Reservoirs: Average levels less than 80% of normal.

As of the end of September, reservoirs were at 71.3% of capacity state-wide, which is 87.2% of normal.

Palmer Drought Severity Index: -2.0 to -2.99

As of the latest update (Monday), only the Coastal division is in the -2.0 - -2.99 range.

Crop Moisture Index: -1.0 to -1.99 abnormally dry,

As of the latest update (Monday), all three CT divisions are normal

Fire Danger: Moderate.

As of the latest update (Friday), the fire danger is Low