

Interagency Drought Workgroup (IDW)
Meeting Minutes

June 2, 2022, 2:00 PM Teleconference

Meeting agenda:

<https://egov.ct.gov/PMC/Agenda/Download/13698>

Drought Conditions Report:

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/Water/Drought/2022/CT_Drought_Conditions_Report_2022-06-02.pdf

Current Conditions (will be current as of the time viewed, not at the time of meeting):

<https://portal.ct.gov/Water/Drought/Data-and-Reports>

Meeting Recording:

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/Water/Drought/2022/IDW_2022-06-02_audio.m4a

CT Agency representatives:

DEEP: Helene Hochholzer, Doug Hoskins*
DEMHS: Bob Kenny
DoAg: Simon Levesque*
DPH: Steve Harkey, Ryan Tetreault
OPM: Martin Heft*, Eric Lindquist, Amealia Maynard, Bruce Wittchen
PURA: Maria Szul

* - denotes voting member

Federal Agency representatives:

NWS: Nicole Belk, Britt Westergard
USGS: Dee-Ann McCarthy, John Mullaney, Tim Sargent

Other participants:

None

1. Call to order

Martin Heft called the meeting to order at 2:02 PM.

2. Seating of voting members

Martin Heft identified the quorum of agency representatives: DEEP – Doug Hoskins; DoAg – Simon Levesque; and OPM – Martin Heft. Steve Harkey said DPH voting member Lori Mathieu, who had expected to arrive later in the meeting, has a new conflict and will not be able to. Attendees from DEMHS and DPH have not been authorized to vote on behalf of their agencies.

3. Minutes – May 5, 2022

A motion was made and seconded to approve the [draft 5/5/2022 minutes](#) and the motion was approved unanimously.

4. Business

a. Review of Hydrologic Conditions

Martin Heft provided a quick overview of the data presented in the [handout](#) and highlighted that the table on the 3rd page of the handout compares data to the triggers for Stage 2 drought, not Stage 1. Eric Lindquist added that it's an attempt to display data on a county-by-county basis and noted that no triggers have been established for entering Stage 1. He described conditions as listed on the spreadsheet and Martin Heft invited comments. There were no comments and he asked Nicole Belk to provide an overview of the data she had provided.

Nicole Belk showed a map of May precipitation, pointing out that parts of Litchfield County received 4", close to normal, while Windham County averaged only 1¼". The 90-day map shows most of eastern CT receiving only 50-75% of normal precipitation during that period. She also highlighted that May was unusually warm.

Nicole said the 7-day precipitation forecast is below normal; the 8-14 day outlook predicts near-normal temperatures and slightly favor more than the usual amount of precipitation. Nicole provided an overview of the county-by-county data, pointing out that Windham County averaged only 32% of normal precipitation in May and received 60% and 61% of normal, respectively, for the two and three-month periods. She concluded by saying there only are chances of showers in the next seven days and precipitation is not expected from the tropical system in the Gulf.

John Mullaney described current ground water conditions and said conditions had been relatively normal in April and just a few wells have been below normal for 2+ months. Many wells were below normal for one month, especially in eastern CT. He pointed out that ground water levels now can be an early indicator of stream flows later in the summer: streams will rise following a storm but fall back to the level maintained by ground water. There tends to be little ground water recharge during this period. John also mentioned ongoing technical problems with [ground water watch](#).

Steve said DPH has solved the problem that had been preventing people from seeing reservoir data online and said the system is now updated through last week. He provided an overview, showing generally good conditions, and explained outliers where water companies had lowered reservoirs to allow maintenance work. There are no concerns at this point but DPH has prepared a circular letter that is ready to go out if this group chooses to go to Stage 1 anywhere.

Helene Hochholzer noted that the fire danger reported by DEEP can fluctuate daily and that, although all counties were classified as Moderate the day she provided the data used in this group's handout, Fairfield, New Haven, and Middlesex counties are down to Low now. She provided an overview of factors that influence the classification and Eric Lindquist noted the impact of such volatility when evaluating drought stages.

Simon Levesque provided an overview of agricultural data, highlighting clusters of pre-drought stress in agricultural areas, but mentioned that drier conditions can be beneficial for planting this time of year. Eric Lindquist pointed out the noticeable are of pre-drought stress in Litchfield County, which is not especially dry now, and contrasted it with the limited pre-drought stress shown in Windham County, which has been drier. There was a discussion of different levels of focus in the data and Helene Hochholzer highlighted that the Litchfield County area has been affected by Spongy Moths and the resulting defoliation might bias aerial surveys.

There were no further comments and the group returned to the chart of Stage 2 triggers. There was a discussion of MA's and RI's current status, with portions of eastern MA and islands being at their first stage and no part of RI having an official declaration, although they had issued a message about dry conditions. There was a discussion of recent months and the expected evaporative demand of the coming months.

Doug Hoskins said there is some justification for Stage 1 in eastern CT with less signal of dryness further west. Bob Kenny mentioned that no concerns have been raised at the western emergency management districts. Martin Heft invited a motion and a motion was made to go to Stage 1 for Windham and New London counties and the motion was seconded. There was further discussion of the current [drought status in MA](#) and Nicole Belk said the MA group will meet again [June 8](#). Bruce Wittchen said the larger [RI committee](#) tends to meet less frequently and sometimes meets only to declare a drought and again to rescind it.

There was a unanimous vote in favor of the motion and Martin Heft said DPH will issue its circular letter and OPM will take the next steps in accordance with the drought plan.

- b. [CT Water Planning Council topical work group recommendations](#) regarding the CT Drought Preparedness & Response Plan and its implementation

Eric Lindquist showed where the group ended at the last meeting and the group began at the new 3.XX, Reporting and Documentation. There was a discussion of this review process and Eric explained that this section is based on recommendations by the WPC's drought plan topical subgroup, which studied drought plan implementation during the 2016-17 drought. He highlighted the recommendations to preserve data and said this section could use some tweaking. Martin Heft noted the need to maintain compliance with [freedom of information requirements](#).

Eric asked what would be ideal for providing historic documentation and Steve Harkey described timeline options. There was a discussion of those and other options and Martin Heft mentioned the possible funding of a water planning council budget. Doug Hoskins said he had compiled a timeline for the 2016-17 drought because of the impact on permitted diversions and there was a discussion of options for this group to create a detailed historic record. Bruce Wittchen recommended each agency document what it does and needs during drought and the group not do more than that in creating a historic record. If the WPC decides a broader record is needed it should handle that. This group should focus on its specific mission.

Eric Lindquist highlighted that the review this group is doing is focused on technical changes, the low-hanging fruit. But he pointed out that some concerns have been raised about the elimination of drought stage names and it was noted that some stage names

are still included in the updated draft. Eric said he will remove those and Martin said OPM will update and circulate the draft for agency review. He thanked everyone for their work.

Martin Heft asked Nicole Belk to update the group regarding the NWS's proposed revision to the precipitation data they compile for this group. Nicole said they are working on a more robust program having better QA/QC and mapping capabilities. It will also be updated to reference 1990-2020 normals. She said they can do the analysis for counties and for another geography for which shapefiles are available. They are looking for a consensus from this group. Martin Heft said the group will review this and get back to her.

c. Next meeting – July 7, 2022

Martin Heft said DPH's Lori Mathieu has another meeting she must attend at the time of this group's meetings and she asked if this group can meet at 1:00. He asked if anyone else has a concern about meeting at 1:00 but also noted that DPH should designate an alternate who can vote in her absence. Steve Harkey said DPH has a regular conflict at 1:00 and will check on that.

5. Public comment

There were no public comments, but Doug Hoskins asked what OPM will do to follow up on this group determining two counties are at Stage 1. Martin said OPM will notify the Governor, DEMHS will notify municipal liaisons in Windham and New London counties. DPH is already prepared to notify relevant water companies and state agencies will also be notified. Doug also asked if there is to be no press release at Stage 1 and Martin confirmed that.

6. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 3:30s.