

Interagency Drought Workgroup (IDW)
Meeting Minutes

April 3, 2025

Meeting agenda:

<https://egov.ct.gov/PMC/Agenda/Download/27547>

Drought Conditions Handout:

<https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/water/drought/2025/250403-idw-handout---march-conditions-report.pdf>

Meeting Video:

https://ctvideo.ct.gov/opm/250403_Interagency_Drought_Workgroup_Meeting_Recording.mp4

Members and Agency Staff | * - denotes Voting Member | ^ - denotes Drought Coordinator

DEEP: Melissa Fahnestock, Doug Hoskins*, Elizabeth Mcauliffe, Shalyn Zappulla
DEMHS: Doug Glowacki*, Michael Paradis
DoAg: Simon Levesque*
DPH: Eric Lindquist*, Ryan Tetreault
OPM: Martin Heft*, Bruce Wittchen^
PURA: Maria Szul*

Other State Agency Representatives

DAS: Doug Moore

Federal Agency representatives:

NWS/NOAA: Deanna Marks
Rob Megnia

USGS: John Mullaney
Tim Sargent
Dee-Ann Crozier

1. Call to order & Seating of voting members

Martin Heft called the meeting to order at 1:01 pm and confirmed the quorum of agency representatives: DoAg – Simon Levesque ; DEEP – Doug Hoskins; DEMHS – none; DPH – Eric Lindquist; OPM – Martin Heft; and PURA – Maria Szul.

2. Minutes – March 6, 2025

A motion was made by Eric Lindquist and seconded by Maria Szul to approve the 3/6/2025 meeting minutes. The minutes were unanimously approved.

3. State Drought Coordinator Report

Bruce Wittchen, filling for and reading a report from Becca Dahl, provided a brief overview of conditions, as described in the provided March 2025 Conditions Report.

He reminded the group that the state is currently in a Stage 2 Drought and has been since November. He noted the improvements within the USDM over the month, removing D2 status and leaving the state in D1 and Do.

There have been notable improvements in groundwater and streamflow conditions.

Precipitation values have been moving towards normal in recent months, and he pointed out that the 7-month precipitation values are below 65% of normal, which may be indicative of movement away from drought. Bruce also noted that the previous 6-month precipitation total was below 50% of normal, which could've led to worse conditions than the drought of record, had it not been for more rainfall in the recent months.

Fire Danger has oscillated between Low, Moderate, and High in recent weeks.

Reservoir levels range from the high 80s to over 100 percent of normal.

Bruce shared Becca's analysis of the conditions, where she noted that the drought plan does not prescribe a means for coming out of drought stages and that this movement depends on the tracking of trends and the professional judgement of the IDW. She also noted that while some drought triggers are being met, these are the longer-term values that are not indicative of the more recent trends.

Becca's report ended, stating that given the more recent improvements in rainfall, groundwater, and streamflow values, the State Drought Coordinator's recommendation is for the state to move down to Stage 1.

Martin Heft shared data from the Conditions Report, specifically the Stage 2 Drought Trigger Summary by Region overview table. He called on partner agencies to share any additional information or updates that they would like to provide.

Doug Hoskins shared that today's fire danger is Low.

Rob Megnia shared that it looks like a "wet week ahead" so it looks like there may be some opportunity to improve. Precipitation may range from $\frac{3}{4}$ " to $2\frac{1}{2}$ "

John Mullaney added that some wells are still below normal, but there are improving conditions.

Eric Lindquist added that last month, three systems were in a drought stage (East Lyme, Putnam and Danbury) and as of today both Putnam and East Lyme have moved out of their drought stage. Danbury remains in its first drought stage. The rest of the reservoirs throughout the state are near normal.

Martin reminded the group that the recommendation was to move to a Stage 1, which is not a public stage and requires no public notification but instead keeps the group at a “higher alert” to continue monitoring conditions closely.

Doug H. noted that today’s USDM took some of Southeast CT out of D1 to D0 which shows some improvement too.

Bruce mentioned that OPM staff had a conversation about messaging on drought if there was a decision to move from Stage 2 to Stage 1, that this may warrant a message from the Governor. He noted that groundwater data can be scattered, but that some of the monitoring wells can be low, while nearby wells are high. Translating these hyper-local differences in groundwater may be important for residents who are private well owners.

Ryan Tetreault noted that he received no reports of private wells going dry from local health departments.

A motion was made by Doug H. and seconded by Maria to remove the entire state from Stage 2 and lower it to Stage 1. The motion was approved unanimously.

Eric asked if there would be a press release about this change. Martin clarified that the Governor’s office will be notified, but the decision to put out a press release is left to the Governor. Eric expressed concerns about a press release being misleading that there is no longer drought. Martin reassured that OPM would work with the Office of the Governor to make clear that the state is still experiencing drought and the IDW is actively monitoring conditions.

4. Business

Martin Heft noted that the 2025 Drought Plan Tabletop Exercise has been pushed off a bit, but that staff has been working with DEMHS to address drought in other areas, including potentially in the annual EPPI exercise.

Martin also noted that the 2025 U.S. Drought Monitor Forum has been postponed.

5. Other Business

Tim Sargent announced that he and John Mullaney will be retiring in May. Dee Ann Crozier will take over USGS’ role in providing data and working with the IDW. They will also propose a second USGS staff member to backup Dee Ann’s work.

Eric recommended setting up a meeting between USGS and agency staff to flesh out this transition to make sure it goes smoothly.

Martin suggested that Becca sets this up with USGS staff.

John Mullaney added that he is planning to be back as an emeritus scientist and hopes to be able to assist and answer questions when they come up.

6. Public comment

There were no public comments.

7. Next Meeting – May 8, 2025

Martin Heft noted that the next meeting is scheduled to be May 8, 2025 and that staff will continue to monitor conditions, and the group is permitted to call a meeting if needed.

8. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 1:31 pm, moved by Eric and seconded by Simon Levesque.