

Interagency Drought Workgroup (IDW) Meeting Minutes

July 9, 2020, 2:30 PM Teleconference

Audio recording available at:

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/Water/Drought/2020/Interagency_Drought_2020-07-09.mp3

CT Agency representatives:

DCP: Jason Cohen
DEEP: William Foreman, Helene Hochholzer, Douglas Hoskins
DEMHS: Bob Kenny
DoAg: Stephen Anderson
DPH: Steven Harkey, Lori Mathieu, Ryan Tetreault
OPM: Martin Heft, Eric Lindquist, Bruce Wittchen
PURA: Gail Lucchina, Maria Szul

Federal Agency representatives:

USGS: John Mullaney
NWS: Frank Nocera, Britt Westergard

1. Call to order and introduction of new member

Martin Heft called the meeting to order at 2:32 PM and asked attendees to enter their names into the chat on Teams. He welcomed Jason Cohen of the Dept. of Consumer Protection (DCP), who described his program's role regarding well drilling in the state. He highlighted the program's new project to create a mappable, searchable database of wells.

2. Approval of minutes: 6/30/2020

A motion was made and seconded to approve the draft 6/30/2020 minutes. Doug Hoskins mentioned a correction he had requested and Bruce Wittchen said it is included in the updated draft. The motion was approved unanimously.

3. New data, any changes in conditions since 6/30/2020 meeting, and weather forecast

Note: Links to current values of many of the data discussed below are available at:
<https://portal.ct.gov/Water/Drought/Data-and-Reports>

Martin Heft noted the location of drought criteria in the state drought plan and reminded everyone to provide their agency's information a day or two before a meeting, if possible, so OPM can compile and distribute it in a single email.

Martin asked Doug Glowacki for an update on current forecasts and Doug said the approaching tropical disturbance is projected to deliver 1" – 3" of precipitation to CT: 2"-3" in the west and approximately 1" in the east. Overall, precipitation would be at least normal for the next two weeks.

Britt Westergard provided an overview of the information provided by the National Weather Service. She highlighted that June precipitation was generally below normal in CT and pointed out areas that had localized storms. She noted that the current dryness does not extend back more than three months. She said it was one of the top-ten driest Junes at Bradley Field and temperatures were above normal for the month. Precipitation has been hit or miss so far in July and the next two weeks are likely to be warmer than normal and, following the approaching storm, drier than normal. Longer-term, there is a high probability of warmer temperatures and precipitation being normal or above the final week of July.

John Mullaney described [daily stream flows](#), which had been declining, are up due to the recent rain. He highlighted that ground water levels are now normal or above in nine of the state's [ten real-time monitoring wells](#) and explained that the typical monthly decline this time of year can lead to wells seeming to improve even if levels continue to decline while crossing into a new month. He showed two that had risen following recent rains and said the right conditions are required for that to happen this time of year.

Lori Mathieu described her program's Circular Letter 54, regarding community water system data reporting, and asked Steve Harkey to share it with the group. She described some of the requirements and note DPH has long received reservoir data and is now working on obtaining ground water source and system demand information. Steve Harkey said the reservoir numbers have improved, overall, in the last week. He noted the number experiencing further declines and mentioned that some systems are trending upward. Eric Lindquist asked which towns had initiated voluntary or mandatory restrictions and Steve listed them. Lori Mathieu said DPH can share information received from Aquarion and described a recent call, which included a discussion regarding difficulties in seeking water use reductions in Westport.

Steve Anderson said agriculture-oriented criteria show some improvement in conditions. He described the week-to-week change in the [Palmer Drought Severity Index](#) for each of the three regions of CT, highlighting the reduction in the calculated figure for the amount of precipitation needed to end the drought. He also discussed the [Crop Moisture Index](#), soil moisture estimates, and [VegDRI](#). He noted that maps and tables are available online.

Helene Hochholzer said the [forest fire danger](#) is currently categorized as low or moderate, after being high at the previous meeting, and she described the split across the state. Bruce Wittchen said the new edition of the US Drought Monitor released today reduced the amount of area classified as abnormally dry. He noted that this week's author initially intended to escalate the amount and intensity of drought across the northern part of the state, but people across the regions pushed back against such a depiction.

Martin Heft asked if there are any relevant qualitative data and Steve Anderson said the weekly New England crop reports no longer reports from farmers. He said he has asked the agency to set up a system for receiving such reports from CT farmers and they are working on it.

Doug Hoskins mentioned that he had been contacted by a reporter with questions about drought conditions. Referring to the data discussed by Steve Anderson, he said the figures for the amount of precipitation required to end a drought seem to be a worthwhile approach but asked how those numbers are generated. There was a discussion of the calculation of those numbers, which might not be as meaningful as they appear.

4. Responsibilities specified in the [State Drought Plan](#) and recommended course of action

Martin Heft noted that the entire state is currently identified as being at Stage 1 of the drought plan. Bob Kenny provided an update on the work being done to identify a water coordinator for every CT municipality. Each region has surveyed its towns and is awaiting responses. He noted that one Council of Governments is questioning the process and whether the state's water utility coordinating committees (WUCCs) should instead have that role.

Martin invited opinions regarding whether the state should remain at Stage 1 or if it should raise or lower it. Doug Glowacki said his agency is comfortable with Stage 1. He noted that demands are high, but precipitation is expected. Lori Mathieu said DPH agrees and added that it will be important to monitor water demands. Steve Anderson said his agency agrees too. Martin said OPM agrees with remaining at Stage 1.

Martin Heft asked Eric Lindquist to describe the MA drought group meeting he joined remotely this week. He provided a quick overview and said we will try to coordinate more with MA's and RI's activities in the future. He noted that it is easier to attend remotely.

5. Additional items for next meeting and schedule

Martin Heft said the group should meet again at the end of next week.

6. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 3:21 PM.

Minutes prepared by Bruce Wittchen, OPM