

Interagency Drought Workgroup (IDW)
Meeting Minutes

September 3, 2020, 2:01 PM Teleconference

Meeting handouts:
[Handout 1](#) [Handout 2](#)

Audio recording available at:
https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/Water/Drought/2020/IDW_2020-09-03_recording.mp3

CT Agency representatives:

DEEP: William Foreman, Helene Hochholzer, Doug Hoskins
DEMHS: Brenda Bergeron, Doug Glowacki, Bob Kenny
DoAg: Steve Anderson
DPH: Steven Harkey, Ryan Tetreault
OPM: Martin Heft, Eric Lindquist, Bruce Wittchen
PURA: Jack Betkoski, Linda King Corbin, Gail Lucchina, Maria Szul

Federal Agency representatives:

USGS: John Mullaney, Tim Sargent
NWS: Joe Dellicarpini, Britt Westergard
USDA-FSA Clark Chapin

Other participants:

none

1. Call to order

Martin Heft called the meeting to order at 2:00 PM and Clark Chapin and Joe Dellicarpini introduced themselves.

2. Approval of minutes: 8/20/2020

Eric Lindquist noted that an additional clarification was made in the draft minutes and a motion was made and seconded to approve the draft 8/20/2020 minutes with that clarification. The motion was approved unanimously.

3. Review of state actions taken since 8/20 decision to declare Stage 2 drought for northern counties

Martin Heft said the Stage 2 drought announcement was issued and mentioned followup interviews. Doug Hoskins said he thought the release was handled well and appreciated agencies having an opportunity to provide feedback regarding the draft.

4. Discuss current conditions and areas of improvement/degradation

Martin Heft said information regarding current conditions was circulated earlier today. Eric Lindquist provided an overview and showed the drought trigger spreadsheet. He highlighted that short-term indicators are worse, while long-term indicators such as reservoirs are slower to respond.

Britt Westergard provided further details about recent precipitation, noting that a portion of Litchfield County did receive some recent tropical storm precipitation. Other areas have been dry. She pointed out that five counties have reached the precipitation trigger for Stage 3. She also highlighted the role of this summer's heat. The 8-14 day outlook shows a higher likelihood of above normal precipitation, but there is an equal chance for above or below normal precipitation in the longer term, with warmer than normal temperatures likely to continue.

There was a discussion of the long-term outlook for precipitation. Doug Glowacki explained that a deep trough is expected on the east coast in the next two weeks with 1½ - 3" of precipitation currently expected. There also is a prospect for further tropical storm activity.

John Mullaney provided an overview of current conditions, as of yesterday. Some stream flows are up, but June – August stream flows were below normal for the state overall and most basins were below normal during the last seven days. He showed a map illustrating how long the well at each location has been below normal, a new graphic he has been working on, and said this might be one way to get a handle on county-wide ground water conditions.

Eric Lindquist noted that it becomes a judgment call, with some areas having fewer or more well locations and wells being in different setting. There was a discussion of the lengths of time individual wells have been below normal and of local differences that impact stream flows and ground water levels. There was a discussion of the effect of dams on downstream flows and John Mullaney suggested identifying a set of stream gages that are less affected by upstream activities. There also was a discussion of withdrawals and diversions in the Unionville area that affect Farmington River flows. Eric Lindquist outlined the approach he used in compiling the drought trigger spreadsheet.

Steve Anderson shared his screen to show various agriculturally oriented data. There has been a little improvement in the Palmer Drought and Crop Moisture index values and little change in topsoil moisture. He said it actually is wetter than the 5-year mean. The Veg DRI map shows more area with near-normal conditions than it had previously. The US Drought Monitor shows slight uptick in the amount of the state having non-drought conditions, but significantly more being in severe drought. Steve scrolled through the mapping he had provided and highlighted that some measures deteriorated especially rapidly the week of 8/16 – 23.

Doug Hoskins provided an update to the DEEP information provided earlier. He said Helene Hochholzer had to leave the meeting early but sent a message that the fire danger is now low statewide, but ground fires remain a concern, although there are no new ones. He said there is no update from DEEP-Fisheries, but he pointed out that the MDC's release to the West Branch of the Farmington has been reduced to 50 cubic ft per second (cfs) from 75. DEEP asked the MDC to keep more water in the reservoir. Bill Foreman provided some background about the relationship between flows and water temperature at various points in

the river. Doug added that the Pomperaug River has hit the last of three triggers identified in the Heritage Water Company low flow agreement.

Steve Harkey provided an update on DPH data, highlighting that 12 systems' reservoirs had been at or above normal levels three weeks ago and only five are now. Statewide, systems are at 75% of capacity, which is 89% of normal. Southington is down to 45% of normal. He noted that some systems have had an uptick in reservoir levels, but Bristol is at its Stage 2, with alternate day watering restrictions, and Norwalk's systems also have water use restrictions in place. He described expectations for Norwalk.

There was a discussion of providing reservoir data by county and Eric Lindquist requested that all agencies try to provide their data by county as possible. There was a discussion of the challenges of doing so for some data sets and a discussion of Norwalk facing a supply problem and a demand problem. There also was a discussion of the issues faced by systems relying on flashier reservoirs.

Bob Kenny provided an update on DEMHS's efforts to have towns designate municipal water coordinators. He said 91 have been identified, not including those in DEMHS Region 3, and he thinks there are an additional 10 there. He listed the number of coordinators on a region-by-region basis and said DEMHS used their list to circulate the the drought press release and provided further background regarding the use of such a list.

5. **Discussion of changes in conditions since previous meetings and weather outlook**

Martin Heft asked for opinions regarding whether the state should change any drought stages in accordance with the [state drought plan](#). Doug Glowacki recommended leaving the current classification as is, based on current conditions and expectatios for wetter weather. Doug Hoskins pointed out that uncertainties in the interpretation of some triggers and differences in which criteria are triggered can make it difficult to reach a conclusion about the appropriate drought stage for the different counties, but asked if it might be appropriate to elevate New London County to Stage 2.

Eric Lindquist showed precipitation data and said New London had been entering a flash drought in August. Steve Harkey said New London and Middlesex Counties have reached the precipitation trigger for Stage 3. Doug Glowacki said Litchfield County should be moved from Stage 2 to 1 if New London County goes to Stage 2. There was a discussion of the need for balance in responding to changes to avoid flip flopping between categories.

Eric Lindquist showed [CoCoRaHS](#) data and Bruce Wittchen noted that New London County is on the periphery of what appears to be an area of drought centered in Rhode Island and that state has not declared any drought stage yet. He recommended making no change and revisting this at the next meeting. There was further discussion of RI and Eric Lindquist noted that MA is at its second of four stages. There was a discussion of how the states' drought stage triggers and actions differ.

Maria Szul recommended leaving the stages unchanged until the next meeting in two weeks. Martin Heft listed the options that are under consideration and noted that he opposes improving Litchfield County from Stage 2 to Stage 1. There was further discussion and general agreement to maintain the existing status for each county.

6. **Items for next meeting and schedule**

There was a discussion of meeting less frequently when possible, but to meet again as scheduled on 9/17 because some members agreed with maintaining the status quo on the basis that the group will meet again so soon. Bruce Wittchen pointed out that the meeting following that would be Oct. 1 if we maintain the two-week schedule and recommended the first meeting of October instead be on 10/8 so we can have complete data for September. The next two meetings will be at 2:00 on 9/17 and 10/8.

7. **Adjourn**

The meeting adjourned at 3:20 PM.

Minutes prepared by Bruce Wittchen, OPM

DRAFT