

**Interagency Drought Workgroup (IDW)**  
**Meeting Minutes**

October 1, 2020, 2:00 PM Teleconference

[Meeting agenda with handouts](#)

Audio recording available at:

[https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/Water/Drought/2020/2020-10-01\\_IDW\\_Recording.mp3](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/Water/Drought/2020/2020-10-01_IDW_Recording.mp3)

**CT Agency representatives:**

DEEP: William Foreman, Doug Hoskins, Jennifer Perry  
DEMHS: Brenda Bergeron, Doug Glowacki, Bob Kenny  
DoAg: Steve Anderson  
DPH: Steven Harkey, Lori Mathieu, Ryan Tetreault  
OPM: Martin Heft, Eric Lindquist, Bruce Wittchen  
PURA: Cathy Pedemonti, Maria Szul

**Federal Agency representatives:**

USGS: John Mullaney, Tim Sargent  
NWS: Nicole Belk, Nancy Furbush, Britt Westergard

**Other participants:**

Alicea Charamut, Rivers Alliance

**1. Call to order**

Martin Heft called the meeting to order at 2:04 PM.

**2. Introductions (if needed)**

Martin noted that he will be voting on behalf of OPM at this meeting and asked the person voting on behalf of each agency to introduce themselves. They were Steve Anderson, DoAg; Steve Harkey, DPH; Bob Kenny, DEMHS; Doug Hoskins, DEEP/PURA. **Note:** Lori Mathieu joined the meeting during the discussion of Tolland County in Sec. 6 of this agenda and voted on behalf of DPH from that point.

**3. Approval of minutes: 9/3/2020**

A motion was made and seconded to approve the draft [9/17/2020 minutes](#). Eric Lindquist said the recording link will be inserted and the motion was approved unanimously.

**4. Update on Regional Water/Drought Coordinators (DEMHS)**

Bob Kenny said 154 municipal water coordinators have been designated, but there is some duplication and they represent 147 towns. Eric Lindquist said an outreach plan will be

developed for receiving information from and transmitting information to those local coordinators.

**5. Discuss current conditions and areas of improvement/degradation**

**a. Review summary prepared by OPM (see below) and any questions on agency updates**

Eric Lindquist displayed the table of Stage 2 drought triggers (see document linked above) and highlighted that data received today are not included. Doug Hoskins said fire danger has returned to moderate since yesterday and Eric said it probably will soon be high.

Doug Glowacki said a below-normal total of 1/2" of precipitation is expected in the next week, with only 1/4" in the west, due to a storm passing to the SE. The outlook for the following week is completely dry.

Nicole Belk showed observed precipitation totals for September and eastern areas were largely under 1", well below normal. She noted that precipitation totals were probably higher than shown in Litchfield County, but a large part of the state was below 50% for the month. Looking forward, she said temperatures should be normal for the next week and above normal the second.

Eric Lindquist asked about precipitation totals for the month prior to this week's rain and Nicole showed those totals using [CoCoRaHS](#) data. Totals tended to be 1" or less in the NE and increased to the SW.

John Mullaney said the rain temporarily pushed some wells into the normal range and Tim Sargent highlighted that new monthly lows were recorded in August for eight stream gages having at least 30 years of records and more records are likely in September. John Mullaney pointed out the number of months stream and ground water stations had been below normal, the criteria specified in the [state drought plan](#). There was a discussion of these data, which had not yet been updated in the drought trigger chart.

Steve Harkey provided an overview of water company reservoir data. Statewide, reservoirs are at 67% of capacity and 83.5% of normal. Hartford County is at 75% of normal and Fairfield County would be lower than indicated if not for the fact that Bethel does not use its reservoir much. He showed data on a system-by-system basis and indicated those with voluntary conservation requests, noting those that were more recent.

Martin Heft asked about the Aquarion Greenwich system and Steve said the company was thinking of going to their 3<sup>rd</sup> Stage if there was no rain. They will hopefully get a message out to reduce demand. Eric Lindquist asked about the Southington system, which is listed as being at 18%. Steve said they mostly use ground water at this point and have an interconnection if needed. He noted that Southington's drought triggers are based on demand, not supply. Doug Hoskins added that Southington is considering further well development and there was a discussion of these data.

Doug Hoskins said they are not hearing much anecdotally about unauthorized withdrawals or dry streams. Bill Foreman said West Branch Farmington River flows are being augmented. DEEP has been working with the MDC since the end of August, with

the goal being to maintain water temperatures. They have depleted 19% of their allotment. There was a discussion of how stocking has been modified, with most being in lakes and ponds.

Ryan Tetreault said DPH is collecting limited information from some health departments regarding the number of well deepening and hydrofracking permits, which can indicate private well problems. Eric Lindquist said he believes the problem is greater than those permit data show. There was a discussion of the availability and value of ancillary data, such as reports of eastern CT dairy farms needing water.

**6. Recommend a course of action in accordance with State Drought Plan:**  
**a. Maintain or modify current drought stage for each county**

Martin Heft said the group will use a different approach today because of the complexity of conditions. He said the group will proceed county-by-county and invite a motion to change the current drought stage.

For Fairfield County, currently at Stage 1, there was no motion.

For New Haven County, currently at Stage 1, John Mullaney provided a quick reminder the USGS data and there was no motion.

For Middlesex County, a motion was made and seconded to elevate the county to Stage 2. John Mullaney provided a quick reminder the USGS data and the motion was approved unanimously.

For Litchfield County, currently at Stage 2, Martin Heft and Steve Harkey said they see no reason to change. John Mullaney provided a quick reminder the USGS data and there was no motion.

For Hartford County, currently at Stage 2, John Mullaney and Steve Harkey highlighted issues reflected in their data and a motion was made and seconded to elevate the county to Stage 3. The motion was approved unanimously.

For Tolland County, currently at Stage 2, a motion was made and seconded to elevate the county to Stage 3. John Mullaney said there are few stream gages in this county, but there are 13 wells and they are not at Stage 3. There was a discussion of the Stafford water system and whether its reservoir tends to be flashy. Steve Anderson asked if this county meets the criteria and Eric Lindquist read the trigger levels, noting the fire danger is likely to increase soon.

There was further discussion of Tolland County and Doug Hoskins pointed out that the forecast is dry. Lori Mathieu asked what will change if the county is moved to Stage 3 said agencies must be prepared to take more actions at that level. Martin Heft noted that he had already included some Stage 3-level actions in the recommendations for counties at Stage 2. The motion passed unanimously.

For Windham County, currently at Stage 2, a motion was made and seconded to elevate the county to Stage 3 and the motion was approved unanimously.

For New London County, currently at Stage 2, a motion was made and seconded to elevate to Stage 3, Steve Harkey provided an overview of the drought status of the New London and Norwich water companies. The motion was approved unanimously.

Martin Heft did a recap of the changes. Fairfield, New Haven, and Litchfield counties are unchanged. Middlesex County is elevated to Stage 2; and Hartford, Tolland, Windham, and New London counties are elevated to Stage 3.

Eric Lindquist showed the drought plan's table of potential actions at Stage 3 and Martin Heft reminded everyone that some are in the previous Stage 2 press releases. He added that OPM has begun drafting a possible press release for use following the recommended changes, but he does not know if the Governor or OPM will be responsible for it.

Lori Mathieu said the process should begin for convening unified command in accordance with the Stage 3 list. Martin said that will be part of the letter to the Governor. Doug Hoskins said the drought plan does not compel the Governor to convene unified command at this stage but the work group can put him on notice of that option. Lori Mathieu said doing so sends a signal to the water companies that this is a big deal, even having it be considered sends the signal. She added that utilities with adequate water for their own customers might need to sell water to other companies that need it.

Martin Heft noted the requirements for water companies at Stage 3 and there was a discussion of the list at each stage being only a guide. Martin said OPM will coordinate with the Governor's office.

Eric Lindquist said we are learning of the severity of problems experienced by some people with private wells, noting that DPH, DEMHS, and OPM staff were on a call with a 1<sup>st</sup> Selectman to discuss such a problem and what resources might be available. Lori Mathieu pointed out that there probably are many more people experiencing problems with private wells who we don't know about and said health directors should be aware.

## **7. Items for next meeting and schedule**

Martin Heft said the group should consider whether to meet again in two weeks or to wait a month as previously considered. Eric Lindquist suggested the drought action team should meet regularly over the coming weeks to review and work on recommended actions for Stage 2 and 3. Martin Heft recommended that the IDW plan to meet again in November unless there is a need to meet earlier.

Lori Mathieu said the drought action team will face some decisions that are small and some that are big. Who will decide? She noted that the state did not convene unified command in 2016 and said a need for high level decisions might require the IDW to reconvene to follow up on drought action team work. She added that the municipal water coordinators will be important.

Lori Mathieu said there might be a lot of decisions to make and this is a part of the plan that has not been worked before. Some water companies might not be paying attention. Eric Lindquist asked what additional request is made of them at Stage 3. Martin Heft said OPM circulated a list for agency feedback in advance of the Stage 2 declaration. There was a discussion of possible items to list, including municipal coordinators, [Emergency Support](#)

[Function 12](#) (ESF 12), anding ending outdoor watering at state facilities, but it was noted that all cannot be included in the press release.

There was a discussion of identifying three things to list for the Governor's consideration, recognizing that this is emerging on top of COVID. After further discussion, Martin Heft recommended the drought action team get together soon and Eric Lindquist said he will send an invite for a drought action team meeting to be held Friday or Monday.

## 8. **Adjourn**

The meeting adjourned at 3:40 PM.

*Minutes prepared by Bruce Wittchen, OPM*