

Interagency Drought Workgroup (IDW)
Meeting Minutes

December 10, 2020, 2:00 PM Teleconference

Meeting agenda, with data handout:
<https://egov.ct.gov/PMC/Agenda/DownloadHistory/1297>

Meeting handout:
<https://egov.ct.gov/PMC/Agenda/Download/9791>

CT Agency representatives:

DEEP: Bill Foreman, Helene Hochholzer, Doug Hoskins
DEMHS: Bob Kenny
DoAg: Steve Anderson
DPH: Mike Hage, 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: Nancy Furbush, Britt Westergard

Other participants:

Alicea Charamut

1. Call to order

Martin Heft called the meeting to order at 2:03 PM.

2. Introductions (if needed)

Martin Heft identified the person voting on behalf of each agency to introduce themselves. They were Martin Heft, OPM, Steve Anderson, DoAg; Lori Mathieu, DPH; Doug Hoskins, DEEP/PURA. DEMHS was not represented at the beginning of the meeting but Bob Kenny joined later and voted on its behalf.

3. Approval of minutes: 11/5/2020

A motion was made and seconded to approve the draft [11/5/2020 minutes](#) and the motion was approved unanimously.

4. 2021 meeting dates

Martin described the proposed list of [2021 meeting dates](#), which follow the 1st Thursday of the month format used this year, while avoiding holidays and Thursdays that are the 1st day of the month, as indicated. He added that meetings will be canceled when unnecessary. A

motion was made and seconded, there was a brief discussion, and the motion was approved unanimously.

5. Discuss current conditions and areas of improvement/degradation

Martin Heft listed the current drought stage of each county and Eric Lindquist provided an overview of the most recent data as shown in the [meeting handout](#). He pointed out that some stream flow and ground water sites were still were meeting Stage 2 and Stage 3 criteria as of the end of the November. He noted that MA just lowered drought stages statewide to Stage 1. He did not have an update for RI.

Martin Heft asked if anyone had anything further to add since submitting data. Lori Mathieu said 70% of reservoirs are below normal and highlighted that we count on reservoirs being full going into spring. She added that she is concerned about the potential for a 2-year drought.

John Mullaney said he had a couple things to add. He said November stream flows were below normal at only 7 of 64 gages and pointed out that the state's criteria, which look further back, result in many of those wells reaching drought triggers. He also noted that most monitoring points have risen even higher since the beginning of the month.

Bruce Wittchen said he believes the group should ignore the [state drought plan's](#) drought criteria, which are oriented towards going into a drought, not coming out. He highlighted the [USGS's real-time well in Salisbury](#), which he said has been recovering steadily since early or mid-October, but remains below normal. We're approaching the time of year when many wells stop rising in winter and, if that were to happen now, that well could be well below normal in spring. That well is in a sand & gravel aquifer, as are many water company wells, and it might signal a broader problem.

There was a discussion of possible drought stage changes and Lori Mathieu expressed her concern despite the recent improvements and said the group should be mindful of the potential for a two-year drought. Martin Heft noted that the drought plan directs this group to consider trends, as well as the specified thresholds, and said there have been reports of isolated remaining impacts. He recommended being cautious in lowering the stages and reconsidering the changed stages again in January.

Britt Westergard said the current seasonal outlook during December – February shows CT as having equal chances of being normal, drier than normal, or wetter than normal. She added that the two-week outlook is wetter than normal and noted there is a higher probability of temperatures being warmer than normal during December – February.

Lori Mathieu asked Eric Lindquist to describe how MA's version of this group operates. Eric said MA's approach is similar but includes more fire indices and has different thresholds. He added that MA also can declare drought by specific drainage basins as well as by that state's drought regions. John Mullaney said MA's drought regions align well with county boundaries except in the SE.

Eric suggested the group consider having an occasional presentation at meetings, such as by representatives of MA's and RI's groups. Doug Hoskins recommended also having a presentation about the [Drought Early Warning System](#) (DEWS), noting the additional criteria considered there. He also said the state drought plan's use of the word "incipient"

for Stage 2 is incorrect when coming out of drought. There was further discussion of the use of the plan coming out of drought and of meeting with counterparts from neighboring states.

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

Martin Heft recapped the discussion, saying drought stages should be reduced, not eliminated, and suggested that counties in Stage 3 be reduced to Stage 2. Bruce Wittchen said it might be better to have all counties in Stage 1 so that the state can publicize an increase back to Stage 2 if needed later. There was further discussion of possible approaches. Alicea Charamut said conservation actions are not significant now and it would be better if the group is able to respond with an increase to Stage 2 if conditions worsen in the spring.

Doug Hoskins said ground water is a lagging indicator but shows recovery and Eric Lindquist reminded the group to consider current levels and the trend. Lori Mathieu asked how conditions compare with the drought of 2016-17 and Eric said a WPC topical group is completing its review of the previous drought. There was further discussion and John Mullaney said he would provide 2016-17 data.

Martin Heft proposed two options, the first being to move each county at a higher stage to Stage 1, with the second being to lower each county by one step, but not lower than Stage 1. Either way, the group will continue to monitor. There was a discussion of voting. Martin asked if anyone was opposed to keeping Fairfield and New Haven counties at Stage 1 and there was no opposition.

Martin said Litchfield and Middlesex counties might be lowered to Stage 1 and there was further review of the data. A motion was made and seconded to lower New London County to Stage 2 and all others to Stage 1. There was a roll call and the motion was approved by DEEP, DPH, OPM, DoAg, and DEMHS. Martin said OPM will work on the needed notifications and there was a discussion of a press release.

7. Drought Action Team update

Eric Lindquist provided an overview and noted that DEMHS will update local coordinators on today's decision. He recommended that the interagency group use the action team when it is time for a post-drought analysis. The WPC's topical group is completing a review of the 2016-17 drought response now, but we should delay the review this year's drought and response. He recommended people begin jotting down issues of concern.

8. Items for next meeting and schedule

Martin said the next meeting will be January 7, 2021 and mentioned the desire to meet with people from MA and RI in future meetings.

9. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 3:05.

Minutes prepared by Bruce Wittchen, OPM