

CARC Meeting
July 27, 2000
Lower Level Room A, Nebraska State Office Building

The meeting was called to order at 9:32 a.m. by Acting Chairman Dayle Williamson. Self-introductions were made by committee members and those present in the audience.

CARC members present were: Merwin Fricke, Ralph Medina sitting in for Stan Heng, Richard Nelson, and Dayle Williamson. Members absent were Mark Kuzila, Barb Cooksley, Greg Ibach, Elbert Dickey, Dave Vogler and Roger Patterson.

The minutes from the June 26, 2000, meeting were approved following two corrections. Ralph Medina was incorrectly listed as Ross Medina and Merwin Fricke's name was incorrectly spelled.

Bobbie Kriz-Wickham with the Nebraska Department of Agriculture gave a report on the 2000 Nebraska Water and Natural Resources Tour, which she had just returned from a day earlier. The topic of the trip was water transfer and marketing, and the tour group traveled western Nebraska and eastern Colorado.

Mark Svoboda, with the National Drought Mitigation Center, reviewed the National Drought Monitor that was just released that morning. The southwest part of Nebraska still has the worst drought classification in the state, with a portion classified as a D-3 extreme drought. Svoboda explained that cooler than normal temperatures contributed to a fairly static drought map the previous two weeks.

Svoboda showed the Standardized Precipitation Index, highlighting the 9-month period through the end of June 2000. He discussed a cooperative effort between various university organizations that will provide a more complete climate picture and noted that process may be in place in the next couple of months.

Al Dutcher, state climatologist, presented the June 2000 precipitation summary, noting that high population areas had received good rains in the past month, and the southeast part of the state, in particular, had a wet June. Conversely, the southwest part of the state received less than one inch of precipitation for the month of June, and Dutcher noted a pocket of dry area west of Grand Island in the central part of the state. He showed several percent of normal precipitation maps.

Dutcher noted that while there have been some timely rains, the crops need 1/3 of an inch of water a day. Because there is still a moisture deficit from a dry fall, winter and spring, crops may still be in danger, he said. He predicted yields this season would not be record-setting. He also noted major hail storms have caused damage in at least four different areas.

Dutcher showed the Climate Outlook map for August, which indicates below normal temperatures for Nebraska. Jeff Reese of the National Weather Service noted that the recent increase in precipitation amounts, coupled with the prediction for below normal August temperatures, has created confusion in the public. He said his office fields at least two phone calls a day regarding the status of the drought.

Don Wilhite with the National Drought Mitigation Center noted crops in some drought areas look green and healthy to the 'untrained eye" but yields this fall should show the impact of the drought. Adding to the public perception problem, Dutcher noted that the state's population centers have received fairly good rains.

Nathan McCaleb, a soil scientist with the USDA, handed out the soil moisture data, collected at 16 sites across the state. He noted that almost all samples at the 20-inch to 40-inch depth show moisture levels at or below the plant wilting point.

Dave Loos, with Nebraska Agricultural Statistics Service, reviewed a handout of most recent crop and weather statistics. He pointed out that a year ago the corn crop was rated 80 percent good or better, while this year it's rated 50 percent good or better. For soybeans, last year at this time 76 percent was rated good or better, while this year only 46 percent is rated good or better.

Glenn Engel, with U.S. Geological Survey, distributed a stream flow conditions report. He said the southwest part of the state has had a couple of areas that showed minimum flows for the period of record.

Dayle Williamson handed out a report on reservoir elevations and Platte River flow data.

Jack Daniel, co-chair of the Municipal Water Supply, Health, and Energy Subcommittee, distributed a handout on Health and Human Services System - Regulation and Licensure Drought Management Activities. His office continues to monitor community water systems potentially at risk due to the drought. He noted that rain and cool weather have helped in the east part of the state, where many problem water systems are located.

Steve Soberski, co-chair of the Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Wildlife Subcommittee, read a report from co-chair Barb Cooksley. She said she was pleased with the cooperation of the state Farm Service Agency regarding Conservation Reserve Program acre release during the drought. Cooksley also told Soberski she thought the CARC subcommittees need to be prepared to work on drought-related issues through the fall and winter to be prepared in the event of ongoing drought conditions next spring. Wilhite agreed and suggested that ideas need to be pulled together in the event that CARC wants to request funding from the Legislature.

The committee discussed the need for a season-end report on drought activities in order to better address future needs.

Wilhite reviewed additional, minor changes to the state drought plan. He also discussed an upcoming meeting at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln that will address the possibility of a multiple year drought. The scoping session is designed to look at potential impacts. A report on the meeting will be made to CARC.

The next CARC meeting will be Thursday, Sept.21, at 9:30 a.m. The meeting was adjourned at 11:13 a.m.