

CARC Meeting Minutes
September 21, 2000
Lower Level Room F, Nebraska State Office Building

The meeting was called to order at 9:35 a.m. by Chairman Greg Ibach.

CARC members present were Greg Ibach, Mark Kuzila, DeLynn Hay on behalf of Elbert Dickey, Jack Daniel on behalf of Richard Nelson, and Mark Svoboda on behalf of Don Willhite. Members absent were Merwin Fricke, Stan Heng, Dayle Williamson, Barb Cooksley, Dave Vogler, and Roger Patterson.

The minutes from the July 27, 2000, meeting were approved.

Mark Svoboda, with the National Drought Mitigation Center, reviewed the Standardized Precipitation Index. He noted southwest Nebraska was in the worst SPI category for a 12-month period, a classification which has occurred only once or twice in the 100-year period.

Svoboda said some areas of the United States have seen precipitation relief recently due to tropical storms in the Gulf of Mexico area. Some parts of Nebraska had a slight recovery from the drought in June and July, but most of the state in August received only 25% to 50% of normal precipitation.

Svoboda reviewed the National Drought Monitor that was just released that morning. He noted that nationally the drought has shown a marked increase in Texas, Oklahoma, and Kansas, increasing in intensity in those states. It also grew in Nebraska. The southwest part of Nebraska still has the worst drought classification in the state, with a portion classified as a D-3 extreme drought, but that classification also grew into a four- to five-county area in east central Nebraska. Much of the remainder of the state is in a D-2 drought severe classification.

For the climate outlook, Svoboda explained that weather experts have indicated a decline in the La Nina weather pattern, which means predictions will be less stable. He said forecasts call for some improvement in precipitation levels, but he doesn't think the drought will be eradicated.

Al Dutcher, state climatologist, noted a growth in the drought into the northern Sandhills and also commented on the new D-3 classification in east central Nebraska. He said that going back 12 months, most of the state received less than 70 percent of normal precipitation.

Dutcher said as far as precipitation relief, it will be another month until the storm track establishes itself to determine where moisture predominantly will fall. The first two winter storms, Dutcher said, will establish the pattern. The upper atmospheric conditions are looking a bit better than last year as far as moisture possibilities, he said.

Ibach asked about the possibility of having above-normal snow pack in the Rocky Mountains needed to help recharge southwest Nebraska river basins. Svoboda, Dutcher and Jeff Reese, with the National Weather Service, all said reports have been varied, and they are unsure of snow pack predictions.

Nathan McCaleb, a soil scientist with the USDA, handed out the soil moisture data, collected at 16 sites across the state. He noted that one soil scientist had to use a pickaxe to open the soil enough to get a moisture sample. He noted that almost all samples show moisture levels at or below the plant wilting point.

DeLynn Hay with Cooperative Extension gave a report on Extension activities related to the drought. He noted Extension continues to release information on drought mitigation through the media and on its Rural Routes website. Issues include fall tillage, winter wheat planting options, and assessing the need for fall irrigation.

Hay also briefed the committee on a UN-L meeting in July that brought together numerous branches of the college to talk about long-term drought impacts in Nebraska and whether there are research and education needs. Hay said the meeting organizers are continuing to solicit input.

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. He said water levels for public water systems continue to improve as the irrigation season ends.

Glenn Engel, with U.S. Geological Survey, distributed a stream flow conditions report. He said the southwest part of the state continues to show below normal flows at a number of gauging stations. He noted reservoirs in that part of the state also are low.

Ibach noted committee member Barb Cooksley forwarded a number of discussion items even though she could not attend the meeting. She wants the subcommittee she co-chairs, the Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Wildlife Subcommittee, to look into issues like forage production, reservoir levels, and wildfires in the event that the drought continues into 2001. She plans to call a subcommittee meeting sometime in October.

The committee discussed the printing of the state's drought plan. Members decided to print 100 copies for distribution to CARC members, state senators, Nebraska's U.S. senators and representatives, and interested news media. The plan also will be uploaded to the CARC website, and a news release announcing its placement on the website will be distributed.

There is a Drought Conference set for October 11-12 in Des Moines, Iowa. The National Drought Mitigation Center is a co-host.

A date was not set for the next CARC meeting, pending a meeting of the Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Wildlife Subcommittee. The meeting was adjourned at 10:40 a.m.

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