

**Climate Assessment Response Committee (CARC) Meeting  
February 27, 2006**

**Members Present:**

Jamie Karl, Chairman  
Barb Cooksley  
Mark Kuzila  
DeLynn Hay for Elbert Dickey  
Steve Soberski for Ann Bleed

Cindy Newsham for Roger Lempke  
Don Wilhite  
Jack Daniel  
John Erickson  
Merwin Fricke

**Members Absent:**

None

Chairman Jamie Karl called the meeting to order at 10:34 a.m. He acknowledged the presence of Governor Dave Heineman.

Nebraska State Climatologist Al Dutcher presented the Water Availability and Outlook Committee (WAOC) report. Dutcher began by showing the current U.S. Drought Monitor. He noted the presence of extreme drought in Texas and Oklahoma and said officials are monitoring the area to see if it might spread north. The southeastern corner of Nebraska has slipped into the D-2, drought-severe, category, but Dutcher said he believes this categorization is somewhat exaggerated. He noted hydrological concerns in western Nebraska but said from a soil moisture position, he thinks the southern Panhandle area, in particular, is doing well going into the spring.

The U.S. Seasonal Drought Outlook, issued through May, shows drought conditions persisting in the southern half of Nebraska. Dutcher said he thinks there could be some limited relief from conditions.

Dutcher reviewed Snotel information for Colorado and Wyoming, as well as spring and summer stream flow forecasts. Snow pack levels in some areas of Wyoming are 100 to 120 percent of normal, and the North Platte River region in northern Colorado has snow pack of 140 percent of normal. The stream flow forecast as of February 1 shows 110 to 140 percent of normal for the North Platte River basin for April-June. He cautioned that these statistics could change, in either direction, depending on the remainder of the snow season.

Dutcher also reviewed reservoir water availability. He said Lake McConaughy is showing improvement over this same time last year. It is at 36 percent of capacity.

He showed a percent of normal precipitation map for October 1, 2005, through present, noting that the southern part of the Panhandle is 150 to 175 percent of normal for that time period. He attributed this improvement to the October 2005 storm in that area. He also noted the moisture received by southwest, central, and northeast Nebraska in the November blizzard. Areas that

have precipitation departures from normal that are of concern include the south central, southeast, and portions of east-central Nebraska.

Dutcher showed the U.S. Geological Survey stream flow measurements for February 24, 2006. He noted areas of concern, particularly the Republican River basin and parts of the Platte River.

Dutcher reviewed the temperature and precipitation outlook maps. The forecast is showing equal chances of below normal, normal, and above normal temperatures for Nebraska for March, April, and May. The map shows a slightly below normal chance of precipitation in the southern two-thirds of Nebraska.

In summary, Dutcher said it seems that conditions have flipped from the past several years, and the eastern part of Nebraska is dryer than the western part at this point in time. Conditions in the next two months are critical for the eastern end of the state, he said.

A copy of the WAOC report is attached.

Brian Wolford, Executive Director of the Nebraska Farm Service Agency, reported on USDA responses to Nebraska crop disaster conditions. He reviewed disaster declarations from 2002-2005, how the disaster declaration process works, and the types of assistance programs delivered in Nebraska from 2002-2005.

Officials from the National Drought Mitigation Center (NDMC) provided a review of the implementation of a drought disaster grant, which was awarded to the Nebraska Department of Natural Resources from the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation. Don Wilhite said his staff was working with Nebraska Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to utilize some of the funding to create a map that would provide a visual display of soil moisture data that is being collected through the state's automated soil moisture system. Mike Hayes, with the NDMC, gave a formal presentation on the mapping project and noted they hope to have web-based maps available by April 1.

Mark Kuzila noted there may be other additional sources of information available to help make the product better by adding in more soils information. He'll work with the NDMC.

Wilhite asked about how this information can be incorporated into the state drought plan, and there was some discussion about whether the plan needed to be updated and how that process occurred in the past.

Wilhite gave a presentation on the Drought Impact Reporter Tool. Launched last July, the tool is a database for recording drought economic impact information. They utilize a news clipping service to get information for the database, but individuals also can submit information. The tool can be accessed at <http://droughtreporter.unl.edu>.

Bobbie Kriz-Wickham with Nebraska Department of Agriculture and Steve Soberski with the DNR gave a review of the CARC web site and the Drought Central web site. CARC members recommended the two web sites be combined.

Dean Groskurth with the Nebraska Agricultural Statistics Service reported on Nebraska hay stocks and Nebraska wheat conditions. As of February 1, 52 percent of the Nebraska wheat crop was in good to excellent condition, compared to 56 percent a year ago. The December 1 haystacks report showed the Nebraska supply at 5 percent above the level available a year ago.

Merwin Fricke said conditions are very dry in his area of south-central Nebraska. They have received enough moisture to get the wheat started, but he believes without moisture soon the wheat will begin to show stress.

Barb Cooksley reported on conditions in the Sandhills. They are still repairing fencing from the November blizzard. There is some soil moisture, but they are concerned that they aren't seeing good response in subirrigated meadows.

Chairman Karl asked the WAOC and Risk Assessment Committee (and related subcommittees) to meet and present him with reports before April 15 regarding the potential need for additional full CARC meetings and suggested mitigation actions.

The meeting adjourned at 12:10 p.m.

CARCminutes022706.doc