

CARC Meeting
August 16, 2001
Department of Agriculture, Platte Conference Room
*(*Minutes not yet approved by committee.)*

The meeting was called to order at 1:32 p.m. by Chairman Greg Ibach.

CARC members present were: Greg Ibach, Mark Kuzila, DeLynn Hay on behalf of Elbert Dickey, Richard Nelson, John Erickson, Larry Nedrow on behalf of Roger Lempke, Steve Soberski on behalf of Roger Patterson, Dayle Williamson, and Mark Svoboda on behalf of Don Wilhite. Members Merwin Fricke and Barb Cooksley were absent.

The minutes from the July 19, 2001, meeting were unanimously approved.

Mark Svoboda, with the National Drought Mitigation Center, began by discussing the regional distribution of precipitation and noted that over the past 60 days in east-central Nebraska and western Iowa dryness has continued to grow. He also referred to the USDA Topsoil Moisture Report, comparing the July 15, 2001, report that stated 38 percent of Nebraska topsoil was considered "short" to "very short" of moisture to the August 12, 2001, report that showed 63 percent of Nebraska topsoil in those categories.

Svoboda reviewed the Drought Monitor, showing how conditions have changed since mid-July. The August 14 Drought Monitor indicated a D-1, or moderate drought, in east-central Nebraska and west-central Iowa. He also noted that a pocket of moderate drought conditions in southwest Nebraska continues to persist, although it decreased slightly in size since mid-July.

Svoboda said the below normal temperatures that the state has been experiencing recently have been positive, particularly since precipitation has not been plentiful. He said the seasonal forecasts, which were due to be published following the meeting, would probably show "climatology" and not make any commitments on the likelihood of above or below normal temperatures and precipitation.

State Climatologist Al Dutcher reviewed a series of precipitation maps detailing precipitation totals for 30- and 60-day time frames and looking at those totals as a percent of normal precipitation. He noted that areas west of North Platte have received good rains, while the southwest and east-central parts of the state have had obvious deficiencies.

Dutcher noted that recent rainfall was crucial to soybeans in some areas of the state because the plants were just beginning to show striations in color and some lower leaf loss due to the dry conditions. He also said high dew points in the past 30 days were helpful to crops.

Glenn Engel, with U.S. Geological Survey, distributed a stream flow conditions report and discussed some highlights of the report.

Steve Soberski with the Department of Natural Resources presented a handout on reservoir capacities, noting that water levels have declined from last year at almost every reservoir. He also distributed a summary on surface water irrigation. He pointed out that some junior water rights holders have been shut off from irrigating in order to provide enough water to fulfill senior water rights.

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 noted that nine public water systems were under restriction, compared to three systems in July. Problems are due to poor infrastructure or low water levels. Systems with restrictions in place are Wood River, Lexington, Bruno, Funk, Wilcox, Guide Rock, Verdon, Grant and Humphrey. Daniel said they have received some calls from people whose domestic wells are being impacted by the dry weather and possibly by increased irrigation pumping.

Bill Hamlin with Nebraska Agricultural Statistics Service reviewed the Nebraska Topsoil and Subsoil Moisture Reports. He also reviewed a map indicating irrigated and nonirrigated corn acres and hay stocks as of May 1, and discussed the number of soybean and corn acres planted nationally.

Greg Ibach asked Brian Wolford from the USDA state Farm Service Agency to discuss any reports from FSA field agents. Wolford said his office is in regular contact with its agents and is paying special attention to east central, southwest and south central areas of the state.

Mark Wilke with FSA said in September county agents will be able to get a better assessment of grazing concerns and be able to review disaster declaration possibilities at that time. Wolford noted that Butler County representatives have contacted the state office regarding dry conditions, and he has requested additional information from that county.

Steve Soberski, co-chair of the Agriculture, Natural Resources and Wildlife Subcommittee, asked the committee if it saw a need for his subcommittee to meet and take any actions at this time. After discussion, the committee advised Soberski to continue to monitor conditions at this time.

Member Mark Kuzila asked if the use of irrigation wells had impacted any municipalities. Jack Daniel said it had, but that irrigators and communities were working together to resolve the issue. Kuzila said he felt that at some point an effort needs to be made to measure well depths in order to gauge, in advance, the areas that will be impacted most by dry weather.

Greg Ibach asked the committee for input on potential drought mitigation steps. After discussion the group decided to monitor the conditions and meet again on Sept. 14. The meeting will begin at 1:30 p.m.

Greg Ibach said he would prepare a report for Governor Johanns based on the meeting discussion.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:42 p.m.

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