

**Climate Assessment Response Committee (CARC) Meeting
March 20, 2007**

Members Present:

Neil Moseman, Chairman
Steve Soberski for Ann Bleed
Al Berndt for Roger Lempke
Mike Hayes for Don Wilhite

Jack Daniel
Barb Cooksley
John Erickson
DeLynn Hay for Elbert Dickey

Members Absent:

Mark Kuzila
Merwin Fricke

Chairman Neil Moseman called the meeting to order at 1:35 p.m. Self-introductions were made.

Mike Hayes with the National Drought Mitigation Center and State Climatologist Al Dutcher presented the Water Availability and Outlook Committee (WAOC) report. Hayes began by showing the U.S. Drought Monitor from August 22, 2006. He noted that, when CARC last met in August, there had been some significant rainfall in eastern Nebraska, improving conditions in that area. He showed the U.S. Drought Monitor from March 13, 2007, noting the significant improvement for Nebraska and the nation, including Texas, Oklahoma, and Kansas. He said southern California, Wyoming, Arizona, and western Nebraska are among the areas still suffering extreme drought conditions.

Hayes reviewed the regional and Nebraska U.S. Drought Monitor maps. He said 48 percent of Nebraska currently is not experiencing any drought conditions or abnormal dryness.

Hayes reviewed the March 1, 2007, Mountain Snowpack map. Much of the western United States is at normal or below normal levels, which he said is contrary to media coverage locally about the extent of snowfall in Colorado. He also showed the March 1, 2007, Spring and Summer Streamflow Forecast map. Many areas are at normal to below normal levels, although there are some normal to slightly above normal conditions in the Colorado Front Range.

Hayes reviewed the Missouri River Basin Spring and Summer Streamflow Forecast map. He said conditions do not look very positive, although he noted generally March and April are the wettest months for that area. Water managers are worried, he said, because so far March has been warm and the snowpack is rapidly disappearing.

Hayes reviewed the current situation regarding Lake McConaughy. He noted the lake is at 34.7 percent of capacity, and four foot below its level at this time last year. He said the Bureau

of Reclamation is predicting 84 percent of normal snowmelt runoff in the basin that feeds Lake McConaughy.

Hayes said, according to information provided by the Bureau of Reclamation, the Republican River Basin had some unexpected positive inflows in February. The area had historic low inflows in 2006 at Enders, Butler, Swanson, and Strunk reservoirs. However, Strunk Reservoir, which is spring-fed, is now at 97 percent of full. Harlan County Reservoir is at 48 percent full, while Swanson is at 38 percent, Enders is at 26 percent, and Butler is at 44 percent. Rain is needed, Hayes said, but the soil moisture profile is wet.

State Climatologist Al Dutcher reviewed Nebraska's current conditions. A Departure from Normal Precipitation map for July 2006 to present showed the improvement in conditions in central and eastern Nebraska.

Dutcher reviewed soil moisture maps for selected areas and noted that in areas near Mead and Kearney the soil profile is full and warmer weather is needed so that farmers can get into the fields to plant. He showed a soil moisture map from the Scottsbluff area, noting that area obviously still needs moisture.

Dutcher showed sea surface temperature maps that indicate the beginning of a change from an El Nino weather pattern to a La Nina pattern, which generally means drier conditions in eastern Nebraska. He said he doesn't think the impact will be felt until near the end of summer.

Dutcher said the forecast for the next 8-10 days shows likelihood of above normal temperatures and is noncommittal on precipitation. The long-range forecast maps, for May-July, are noncommittal on both temperatures and precipitation.

Dutcher said he thinks the Nebraska Panhandle has some chance for moisture over the next week.

Barb Cooksley noted that, while some moisture has been received, the Sandhills are still dry and feeling the long-term effects of drought. She said she is seeing a species shift in the grasses on their ranch, with more drought-tolerant grasses taking over the range. She said the uncertainty of conditions has made them reluctant to rebuild herd size at this time.

Chairman Moseman noted that Merwin Fricke, who couldn't attend the meeting, indicated during a phone call that moisture conditions near Hastings were improved from last year.

With the WAOC report completed, Hayes provided an overview of federal drought legislation and an update on several National Drought Mitigation Center projects. Hayes said legislation creating the National Integrated Drought Information System (NIDIS) was signed into law in December 2006. Fiscal year 2007 appropriations associated with this new law will be used to fund the creation of a drought "portal" for the nation. NDMC will be involved in this project.

Hayes said the National Drought Preparedness Act will likely be reintroduced this session of Congress. Hayes was asked to explain the difference between NIDIS and the Drought Preparedness Act. He said NIDIS activities would be directed toward predicting and monitoring

drought conditions, while the Drought Preparedness Act is designed to help states with drought mitigation activities.

Hayes reviewed the NDMC work on the VegDRI (Vegetation Drought Response Index). This index will be operational from the NDMC web site in May. It uses remote sensing data, at a very high resolution, to better read vegetative conditions as an indicator of drought. NDMC will be visiting with agricultural producers to gain an understanding of how this tool could be most useful to them on their farms and ranches.

Hayes said the NDMC is updating the Drought Impact Reporter in 2007.

Hayes said the NDMC is working with ranchers to develop a drought mitigation plan template. It is tentatively called "Managing Risk on the Ranch."

Following Hayes' report, Cooksley asked about the Weather Channel report on Nebraska's drought in 2006. Bobbie Kriz-Wickham will try to find the link to the report on-line and e-mail it to the Committee.

Jack Daniel, co-chair of the Municipal Water Supply, Health and Energy Subcommittee of CARC, noted HHSS is continuing its efforts to work with managers of public water supply systems that may not have backup wells in place in the event of drought conditions.

DeLynn Hay noted the USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service and other organizations are starting to conduct grasshopper counts.

Dutcher said blowing dust and wildfire potential are both concerns in western Nebraska.

Kriz-Wickham reported on the status of LB 43. The state legislation has been signed by Governor Heineman. It creates a structure for a permanent roadside haying program, although it appears some exceptions can be made for drought.

Mark Harris, director of USDA's Nebraska Field Office for the National Agricultural Statistics Service, provided a hay and forage report. He noted that with potential decline in the number of acres devoted to forage production, and ongoing concerns with drought, supplies could continue to be very tight this year. An official hay stocks report will be issued by his office on May 1.

Dayle Williamson with U.S. Senator Ben Nelson's office said the markup on the Senate supplemental appropriations legislation is scheduled for this week. He said it is his understanding that a drought assistance package will be offered as an amendment to the legislation.

Al Berndt said that, based on today's CARC meeting, he will encourage Governor Heineman to call together his Drought Management Team.

The meeting adjourned at 3:00 p.m.

CARCminutes032007.doc