

**Climate Assessment Response Committee (CARC) Meeting (Draft Minutes)
March 25, 2013**

Members Present:

Bobbie Kriz-Wickham, Chair
Jack Daniel
Barb Cooksley

Brandi Flyr for Brian Dunnigan
Al Berndt
Rick Koelsch

Members Absent:

Senator Tom Carlson
Senator Ken Schliz
Merwin Fricke

Jeremiah Blake
Mark Kuzila
Mike Hayes

Audience members present included: Brian Fuchs, NDMC; Mark Svoboda, NDMC; Doug Klein, USDA-FSA; Allen Dutcher, state climatologist; Dean Groskurth, USDA-NASS; Kelly Brunkhorst, Nebraska Corn Board; Neil Dominy, NRCS; Barb Mayes Boustead, NWS Omaha/Valley; Phil Erdman, US Senator Johanns Office; Sarah Heidzig-Kraeger, FSA-USDA; Robert Swanson, USGS Nebraska Water Science Center; Jason Lambrecht, USGS- Nebraska Water Science Center; Ryan Chapman, NDEQ; Dana Divine, CSD; Natalie Umphlett, High Plains Regional Climate Center; Kelly Smith, National Drought Mitigation Center; Don Westover, UNL Nebraska Forest Service; Jay Rempe, Nebraska Farm Bureau; Kristen Hassebrook, Nebraska Cattlemen; Marcia Trompke, CNPPID; Pat O'Brien, NRD; Nancy Gaarder, Omaha World Herald; Art Hotovy, Lincoln Journal Star; Dean Edson, NARD; Denise Wallman, Department of Roads; Lindsey Salestrom, NDA and via phone Rebecca Davis, USDA-RMA.

Chair Bobbie Kriz-Wickham called the meeting to order at 1:37 p.m. in the East Campus Union of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. With new faces in the crowd the meeting was began with introductions of the attendees previously listed.

Minutes from the November 29, 2012 meeting were reviewed and approved.

Mark Svoboda with the National Drought Mitigation Center presented the drought overview. He showed U.S. conditions on a map from the previous November meeting compared to a map with current conditions. The maps showed a persistence of drought conditions across the plains with Nebraska being the most widely affected state. 100% of the state is still showing severe drought to exceptional drought conditions with slight improvement since last September – specifically in the north central portion of the state that borders South Dakota.

For the time period of December through March there has been a 30-50% precipitation reduction in most areas. Spotty winter storms are to blame for the fluctuation.

Soil moisture is found only in the top meter of the ground, not below 3-4 feet down; however, the east is getting some recharge while the central high plains region still has deficits.

Winter wheat and forage conditions continue to decline and lack recovery relief, with 50% of wheat in poor or very poor condition. A large portion of Nebraska forage areas are in D4, which other forage areas in the region are also experiencing.

The current snowpack has been reduced by 20-30% as of March 22, 2013. However, the Northern Rockies are better off than the Central and Southern Rockies. Overall the snowpack conditions are worse off than a year ago.

The drought conditions are expected to persist throughout the planting season in the central plains, with the drought intensifying in the western and southern portions of the country. However, to the east conditions will improve – yet we still have 52% of the U.S. in drought heading into spring as compared to 30% last year at this time.

Models continue to trend toward Neutral conditions through the spring months which make the weather patterns hard to predict.

Brian Fuchs with the National Drought Mitigation Center gave a water supply update.

Lake McConaughy is 64.9% full which is up from November (59.8%) and September (54.1%), however down from last year at this time when it was 82.4% full.

Streamflows across a good portion of the state are half of the capacity they were last year. The North Platte Basin is 81% of normal and the Lower North Platte River Basin is 66% of normal. The 14 day average streamflow is showing a slow response compared to historical data with the southwest section of the state recording flows in the 1st and 3rd percentiles. This is due to the soil being too dry to allow ample runoff.

Colorado's streamflows are 70-80% of normal with northwest Wyoming in a little better condition.

The Republican River Basin conservation pools have increased their storage thanks to water management. The Harlan County Reservoir is 62.2% full, 191,330 AF behind last year as we head toward the growing season.

More hydrologic impacts are anticipated to develop due to drought in 2013 without any significant changes this spring as the 2012 drought becomes a multi-year event.

State Meteorologist Al Dutcher gave the Water Availability and Outlook report. He stated we have received a minimum of 10 inches of moisture since October, with the Eastern region of the country receiving 20-30 inches. The northeast region has a 17 inch deficit remaining since 2011.

He said that April has the potential to add 1.5 inches of moisture, but we need about 5.

In 2013 so far temperatures have been below normal and the 4 inch soil temperatures are just getting into the 30s – suggesting late planting this year.

The US Spring Flooding Risk was released with Nebraska falling into the slight risk category- Dutcher doesn't believe this to be accurate.

April through June climate dangers include: Pasture conditions, wheat, tree damage, insect pressure, disease, freeze risk, severe weather, water supply issues due to irrigation strain and fire.

Barb Mayes Boustead with the National Weather Service commented that blocking patterns next month show slow moving patterns will stay in the US.

Robert Swanson with the USGS provided a brief presentation with a closer look at streamflows across the state and noted many recordings were already tying record lows, which isn't normal for this time of year. He also stated that wells should be at their max this time of year, but many continue to drop.

Doug Klein gave an overview of the Federal drought programs available this year through the Farm Service Agency. He said there are no counties listed as priority secretarial disaster areas currently but many counties will qualify for the fast track designation once we approach growing and grazing season.

Programs that specifically benefit livestock are still unfunded, and its too early to tell if funds might become available. Klein noted it is important that producers maintain good records in case funds get allocated to these programs.

Bobbie asked Doug about the ECP program and he mentioned that 2012 claims were accounted for and FSA is looking at the possibility of being able to help restore stock ponds with the program. Neil Dominy with NRCS also mentioned that EQIP is exploring similar options as well.

Dean Groskurth, Director of the Nebraska Agriculture Statistics Service gave an overview of the 2013 crop yields and hay stock along with wheat conditions. Dryland acres seem to be the most affected by drought, and yields similarly reflected amounts from 2002. Hay prices have sky rocketed since 2011 and Nebraska has the lowest hay stocks since 1957.

Bobbie moved the discussion to activities relating to public drinking water systems and Jack Daniel stated there is a lot of stress on the system and not a lot of recovery in wells. 1 in 4 wells are at high risk, meaning they have only 4-5 ft of water above the pump. He also mentioned that many communities have two wells, but usually if one well goes so will the other one. He was unsure how many wells could be dug deeper.

It was discussed that community ordinances need to be upgraded and people need to be educated on water use during drought years.

Rick Koelsch said that all of the extension beef seminars covered drought issues and NET broadcasted some of the information. Other topics covered in seminars included downsizing operations and the long-term economic implications; information on planting forages under pivots instead of traditional row crops; and making good decisions in deficit irrigation areas. They also covered alternative crops, such as grain sorghum and the skill set needed to grow the drought tolerant crop.

Rebecca Davis with RMA conversed via phone line with the group about indemnity payments – a record \$1.5 billion was paid in Nebraska, which was the 3rd highest crop loss payment behind Iowa and Illinois. She said that preventive planting will most likely be an issue along with wheat claims, although the office has not seen many notices from Nebraska yet. (215 notices so far out of 9000 program applicants.)

Rebecca noted the pasture, rangeland and forage program had a significant increase in participation with 3.4 million acres enrolled.

She also said her office has fielded a lot of questions about the lack of irrigation water, and RMA has been reminding them that preventive planting insurance dates are March 15-May 25th.

Barb Cooksley said Custer County where her ranch is located received 10.25 inches of precipitation but they were able to keep all of their cattle by utilizing corn and bean stover bales.

Bobbie mentioned LB583 and the duties assigned with it.

Communication between all parties was encouraged when dealing with drought topics and issues and the next meeting date was debated. The group decided the date will be decided in roughly two months time.

Meeting was adjourned at 3:13 pm.