

CARC Meeting Minutes (Draft)
Friday, March 28, 2014
10 a.m. 901 Hardin Hall East Campus

Meeting called to order at 10:04 a.m.

In Attendance: Committee Members; Bobbie Kriz-Wickham (Chair), Nebraska Department of Agriculture; Brandi Flyr Department of Natural Resources; Mike Hayes, National Drought Mitigation Center; Jack Daniel, Department of Health and Human Services; Mark Kuzila, UN Conservation and Survey Division; Jeremiah Blake, Governor's Policy Research Office; Rick Koelsch University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension; Barb Cooksley, Rancher.

Staff and Audience: Brian Fuchs, National Drought Mitigation Center; Mark Svoboda, National Drought Mitigation Center; Al Dutcher, Nebraska State Climatologist; Lindsey Salestrom, Nebraska Department of Agriculture; Jordan Dux, Nebraska Farm Bureau, Dean Groskurth, Nebraska NASS; Phil Erdman, US Senator Johnanns Office; Dan Steinkruger, Farm Service Agency; Doug Klein, Farm Service Agency; Eric Zach, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission; Kristen Hassebrook, Nebraska Cattlemen; Neil Dominy, USDA-NRCS; Scott Sprage, DHHS-DPH; Steve Eddy, NWS-Hastings; Rebecca Davis, USDA-RMS; Al Laukaitis, Lincoln Journal-Star; Steve Owen, City government.

Minutes from the October 2013 meeting were reviewed and approved.

Mark Svoboda started the meeting with the current conditions. He reviewed the October 15 Drought Monitor map and compared it to the current map of March 25th. Improvement was shown in the extreme western portion of the state; however, the southwestern portion is still lagging behind in recovery. Drought has begun to redevelop east into Iowa.

Dryness class changes over the last month were shown on a map with a large portion of the state showing no change, a centralized pocket of 1 class degradation, and 1-3 category improvements in the northwestern section and all along the northern most border of the state. 1 class improvements were also shown in portions of the eastern 1/3rd of the state.

One year ago 76.16% of Nebraska was in exceptional drought. This year there are no exceptional drought areas in the state and current conditions show 4% rated as severe.

The Percent of Normal Precipitation map showed the far western portion of the state receiving much higher amounts of moisture than the rest of the state. The majority of the state remains drier than average.

Soil moisture readings in the top 1M of soil are below average across much of the state with a small pocket of good moisture in the western tip of the panhandle.

The spring and summer Streamflow Forecasts as of March 1 look promising due to prominent snowpack in the Rockies.

The U.S. Seasonal Drought Outlook, valid for March 20-June 30, shows improvement of drought conditions in the state with some drought removal likely. It was mentioned these models are somewhat optimistic.

The ENSO chart is showing a move from Neutral to El Nino possibly starting in June and continuing to develop through late summer.

In summary, spring will be critical in making the low winter moisture deficit up as the soils thaw out. 38% of the contiguous U.S. is currently in drought. 65% of Nebraska is still in drought with the southwest portion still feeling the brunt of the longer-term drought. Lack of soil moisture is a concern in NE. Models are hinting at improvement or removal of drought across the entire state by the end of June and El Nino may be on the way.

Brian Fuchs gave the water supply outlook. Lake McConaughy is 60.8% full. Currently the lake sits a bit lower than it did at this time year last year.

Inflows during the October meeting were at 1,365 cubic feet. Current inflows are at 782 cubic feet- the lower number may be due to ice and cold weather affecting readings. Daily inflows have been trending below normal since the start of the year.

Better run-off may come since the soils are in better shape in the basin and snowpack is good in the mountain region.

The 14 day average streamflows compared to historical flows show that southwest Nebraska is not recovering from the drought, and central flows are below normal. North and east streamflows are near normal.

The Republican River Basin shows the Hugh Butler at 19.4% full, Enders 31.1%, Harry Strunk 57.8%, and Swanson 26.3%; all slightly above the October readings.

Harlan County is at 43.2% full with 135,729 acre-feet (AF) in storage. The historical storage for this time of year is 246,042 AF.

Fuchs presented a random sampling of wells from across the state with southern and central wells below the historical average, while a well in the panhandle was well above average.

A summary of the water supply report was given, covering that drought conditions have eased, however the winter was dry. Good snow conditions in the Rockies and fall precipitation have allowed for a better hydrological situation, especially on the Platte Basin. Storage in the Republican River basin has improved slightly.

Al Dutcher gave the WAOC Report and an overview of Nebraska Climate Conditions.

The Departure from Normal Temperature map shows December-February temperatures were lower than normal. Eastern Nebraska was 2-6 degrees below normal and western Nebraska was 1-3 degrees below normal. Winter precipitation trends for Nebraska show widespread low precipitation amounts, but there was a pocket of above average snowfall in the Panhandle.

March maps show below normal temperatures across the state and much of the region. Precipitation has been low for the month across much of the nation.

Soil recharge October-March has not been great with below normal amounts of precipitation for most of the state, the exception being the northwestern corner of the state and a few pockets in the eastern portion.

The very dry winter has led to the elimination of surplus moisture deposited during October and November precipitation events.

Soil temperatures over the past week statewide range from 33-42 degrees; which is causing the lag in dormancy break.

Snow depth is high in Canada and the northern region of the U.S. creating the "Polar Vortex" which caused a near record in ice coverage of the Great Lakes. A deep frost still remains across the upper Midwest.

Ocean temperature trends do not show El Nino yet, but there are increased odds for the pattern to develop in late summer.

The three month outlook for precipitation and temperature maps show normal conditions, however April shows normal precipitation with below normal temperatures for most of the state.

Dutcher mentioned the three month outlook maps have not been overly accurate.

Dan Steinkruger spoke next about regional climate hubs and emergency conservation programs renewed in the Farm Bill. There will be the opportunity for some cost-sharing projects and three livestock programs will again be available retroactively to cover losses of animal in 2013 and forage dating back to 2012.

Dean Groskurth passed around a handout that showed the 2013 hay stocks.

Bobbie mentioned the grasshopper report sent to her by APHIS. 2014 is not expected to be a problem year as numbers appear to be low.

Rebecca Davis handed out a 2014 Farm Bill fact sheet. She told the group that losses are mostly finalized and Nebraska came in at \$521M, which was way down from 2012. Pasture, Rangeland and Forage program acres dropped and a FAQ page is being developed for producers to find the help they need.

Jack Daniel said his department has not been notified of any well or water supply problems yet, but the aquifer is losing ground since there hasn't been a good recharge in 3 years. Water quality will decline when water quantity declines.

Brandi Flyr said her department is re-launching their new website. The new INSIGHT water availability tool will be accessible at the site.

It was brought to the group that the South Platte was expecting water to keep coming from Colorado since a diversion dam was washed out. Wyoming is moving water down stream and crops in the area should be fine.

Jack Daniel suggested the group talk to Scott Josiah about tree health and what is expected this year.

Bobbie gave the status of LB882 and LB1008. The committee is to pass along any reports received. Rick Koelsch asked if there was a plan for accepting the reports and if a presentation would be given. Bobbie asked for feedback on that subject from the committee, and Koelsch and other committee members expressed a desire to receive the report for review prior to the report being formally presented to the Committee by the report authors.

The next meeting was discussed with Thursday, May 27th as the date in mind.

Mike Hayes mentioned the Drought Symposium on City Campus April 2-4 and the art exhibition related to drought that would run until May 18th.

Bobbie thanked everyone for their reports.

Meeting was adjourned at 11:50 a.m.