

**Climate Assessment Response Committee (CARC) Meeting
April 22, 2008**

Members Present:

Neil Moseman, Chairman
Mark Kuzila
Mike Hayes
Al Berndt

Jack Daniel
Rick Koelsch for Elbert Dickey

Members Absent:

Merwin Fricke
Barb Cooksley
Ann Bleed (Department of Natural Resources representative)

Chairman Neil Moseman called the meeting to order at 9:35 a.m. Self-introductions were made. Audience members present included: Mike Moritz and Steve Eddy, National Weather Service; Dean Groskurth and Joe Parsons, Nebraska office of the National Agricultural Statistics Service; Brian Fuchs, National Drought Mitigation Center; Duane Gangwish, Nebraska Cattlemen; Tim Reimer and Milt Rogers, Nebraska Farm Service Agency; Tim McCoy, Nebraska Game and Parks; Wayne Vanek, Nebraska Natural Resources Conservation Service; Denise Wallman and Tom Sands, Nebraska Department of Roads; David Hendee, *Omaha World-Herald*; Al Laukaitis, *Lincoln Journal Star*; Todd Wiltgen, Senator Hagel's Office; Dayle Williamson, Senator Nelson's Office; Cindy Newsham, Nebraska Emergency Management Agency; Scott Sprague, Department of Health and Human Services; Jordan Dux, Congressman Adrian Smith's Office; Marcia Trompke, Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District; and Jeremy Szynskie, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Minutes from the August 16, 2007, meeting were unanimously approved.

Mark Svoboda with the National Drought Mitigation Center presented the first half of the Water Availability and Outlook Report. He showed U.S. Drought Monitor maps from April 17, 2007, and October 2, 2007, noting the growth in drought conditions in the southeast corner of the U.S. and in the western half of the U.S. during that time period. On the April 15, 2008, map, the drought abated somewhat in the southeast and the west, he said, but conditions worsened to the north and south of Nebraska.

Svoboda highlighted the Nebraska map of the U.S. Drought Monitor for April 15, 2008, noting the edging of drought conditions into southwest Nebraska over the past few months and the ongoing drought conditions since 1999 in northwest Nebraska.

Svoboda showed a panel of Drought Monitor Classification Change maps, noting the degradation of conditions in southwest Nebraska, particularly in consideration of the “water year.”

Svoboda said the snowpack conditions in the western United States were much more dire last year at this time. He said snows have been a bit sporadic in Wyoming, but in general, conditions are better in areas that feed Nebraska’s river basins. There will be some recovery in Seminoe and Pathfinder reservoirs in Wyoming, he said.

Svoboda showed the U.S. Seasonal Drought Outlook map for April 17, 2008, through July 2008. Nebraska is predicted to see some improvement in the early part of the period, but it depends on where the jet stream sets up, he said.

He highlighted the NIDIS Drought Portal and noted the ongoing development of a Republican River Basin water and drought portal.

In summary, he said conditions are improving slowly statewide; there are better snowpack conditions in the Rocky Mountains; there are better flows and lake levels in general; but the hydrological conditions still need to improve.

Brian Fuchs with the National Drought Mitigation Center provided the water supply update of the Water Availability and Outlook Report. Lake McConaughy currently is at 42.7 percent of capacity and is five feet higher at present than at this same time last year. Inflows are still below normal, he said.

Fuchs highlighted the U.S. Geological Survey streamflow maps, reflecting the precipitation in Oklahoma and trending northeast into the Ohio River Valley, and showing the low streamflows in the western portion of the Republican River Valley in Nebraska.

Fuchs said reservoir levels in the Republican River Basin show Hugh Butler at 72 percent of capacity, Enders with a 40 percent increase in volume compared to last year, Harry Strunk at 95 percent of capacity, and Swanson at 46.8 percent of capacity. He said Harlan County Reservoir is 91.3 percent full.

Al Dutcher, State Climatologist, reviewed Departure of Normal Precipitation maps for the region and Nebraska in December 2007. He highlighted the above-normal amounts shown in southeast Nebraska. He also noted the below normal temperatures in December, with the east 3 to 6 degrees below normal and the west 6 to 8 degrees below normal, which helped keep the snowpack in place. He also called attention to the precipitation the state received in August and September, noting its positive impact on soil moisture levels.

Dutcher said the precipitation trend in January, February, and March in Nebraska was below normal, but highlighted the normal- to above-normal precipitation in April to date across much of the state. He also highlighted the below normal temperatures from

January through March, and emphasized the trend over the past two weeks toward very low temperatures that have slowed field work.

He showed Percent of Max Available Water Maps, noting soil moisture conditions are good across most of the state.

Dutcher showed the one-month outlook maps for temperature and precipitation, noting there is a below normal chance of precipitation for western Nebraska. He also said the trend has been for the precipitation map to change significantly because the forecasting models are swinging broadly. For the three-month outlook maps for May, June, and July, Nebraska has a chance for below normal precipitation in the Panhandle, and equal chances for above, below, or normal temperatures across the state.

He noted La Nina conditions, plus the drought in the southeastern U.S., are influencing the outlook, and weather models are split on whether the La Nina will persist. He showed two charts with precipitation and temperature outlooks, one for Omaha and one for Scottsbluff, when the La Nina continued into the summer. Dutcher said if the La Nina does persist, he would expect dry conditions in the Corn Belt.

Joe Parsons with the Nebraska office of the National Agricultural Statistics Service provided an overview of hay production, hay stocks, and hay prices. Production was larger in 2007 than 2006, and he said in December of 2006, 64 percent of production was stored on farm, while 68 percent was stored on farm in December 2007. Price for hay and alfalfa took a big jump between 2006 and 2007, and it has stayed in that range, Parsons said.

Parsons also gave the Committee an update on current crop and weather conditions. Dutcher said there have been significant planting delays to the east of Nebraska.

Tom Sands from the Nebraska Department of Roads noted they have developed rules to make roadside haying a permanent program next year, per legislation approved last session. They will have a public hearing on the proposed rules on May 12. There will be a \$40 fee for permits; abutting landowners can apply for a permit from March 1 to July 29, and all others can apply after July 30. Additional program detail was discussed by the Committee.

Tim Reimers from the Nebraska Farm Service Agency Office provided an update on disaster designations for the state.

Moseman told the Committee that Nebraska is to be included in the Risk Management Agency's Pasture, Rangeland, and Forage Pilot Insurance Program for the 2009 crop year. Bobbie Kriz-Wickham with the Nebraska Department of Agriculture gave an overview of the program and noted the Committee had encouraged USDA, through a letter of support, to develop the program. The pilot project uses two different indices for the program – rainfall and satellite vegetation imagery. The vegetation index will be used in Nebraska. Kuzila suggested that a presentation be given at the next meeting regarding the vegetation satellite imagery. Svoboda suggested RMA also be invited to

talk about the program. Hayes suggested that once the program was in place, it would be good to get feedback from the producers who use it, and gather that data in a central place, such as the Nebraska Department of Agriculture.

Daniel reported on the public water supply conditions. At present, he does not know of any problems.

Kriz-Wickham reported that CARC member Barb Cooksley called in a report on conditions in her area. They had received some good precipitation and cool season grasses were just beginning to fill in. Pastures were looking fairly good, she reported.

Moseman said the next meeting date will depend on how conditions fair through the summer.

The meeting adjourned at 11:00 a.m.

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