

**Climate Assessment Response Committee (CARC) Meeting (DRAFT MINUTES)
April 24, 2012**

Members Present:

Bobbie Kriz-Wickham, Chair
Mark Kuzila
Mike Hayes
Jack Daniel

Jeremiah Blake
Al Berndt
Barb Cooksley
Brandi Flyr for Brian Dunnigan

Members Absent:

Senator Tom Carlson
Senator Chris Langemeier

Merwin Fricke
Rick Koelsch for Elbert Dickey

Audience members present included: Mark Svoboda, NDMC; Brian Fuchs, NDMC; Tom Renninger, NDOR; Doug Klein, FSA; Allen Dutcher, state climatologist; Eric Zach, NGPC; Ryan Chapman, NDEQ; Nicholas Streff, USDA-NASS; Dean Groskurth, USDA-NASS; Dayle Williamson, Sen. Ben Nelson's office; Scott Sprague, DHHS-DPH; Darrell Podany, Sen. Johanns' Office; Jason Lambrecht, USGS; Barb Mayes Boustead, NWS; Pat O'Brien, NARD.

Chair Bobbie Kriz-Wickham called the meeting to order at 10:03 a.m.

Minutes from the December 15, 2011 meeting were unanimously approved.

Mark Svoboda with the National Drought Mitigation Center presented the first half of the drought overview. He showed current U.S. conditions on a map from April 17, 2012, compared to a map from December 13, 2011. The current map depicted a large improvement in the exceptional drought conditions in the southern states. The current maps also showed D1 conditions being experienced in 11.9% of Nebraska, specifically in the panhandle region and the eastern portion of the state.

Svoboda said the seasonal drought outlook shows a small chance for improving conditions in the northeast portion of Nebraska with a greater likelihood of persistent and possibly intensifying drought conditions in the panhandle as we head into summer. Weather models are trending toward Neutral/El Nino conditions later in the growing season.

Currently there is less snow pack in the Rockies compared to last year with most areas feeding the North and South Platte basins at less than 50% of the average snow water equivalent. Streamflow forecasts for these basins are generally around 50% of normal.

Brian Fuchs, with the National Drought Mitigation Center, gave the Nebraska water supply update. Lake McConaughy is 82.4% full, which might be the peak for this year. Inflows to the lake are currently at 773 cfs, compared to 5,259 cfs a year ago.

Snowpack is currently 49% of normal in the upper North Platte Basin, with 69% in the lower basin and 60% in the South Platte Basin. Fuchs said with recent rains the hydrology in the eastern part of the state is doing fine, however, streamflows remain below normal or much below normal in extreme southwest Nebraska.

The Republican River Basin reservoir conservation pool capacities are as follows: The Hugh Butler Reservoir is at 16.3%, Enders is at 42.9%, Harry Strunk is at 97.3%, and Swanson is at 67.4%.

The Harlan County Reservoir conservation pool is 100% full, with 320,664 acre feet of water in storage.

Fuchs said a combination of reduced run-off, dry soils, and higher irrigation demand is expected to impact the water supply over the next several months. Most systems are currently in good shape due to favorable conditions over the last 2 growing seasons but more than likely there will be reductions during the growing season.

The Water Availability and Outlook Committee report was given by Al Dutcher, the state climatologist. He said we are roughly one month ahead of schedule in our temperatures and precipitation rate, which makes it hard to know the water needs. Areas that are dry trending are expected to remain dry with no significant improvement.

March, being much warmer than normal, caused pastures to green-up early and advanced planting, which could lead to some frost damage. Dutcher said this is more of a concern in the eastern Corn Belt as Nebraska producers did a good job of holding off from planting too soon.

Dutcher said there is a chance for El Nino conditions to establish this summer which might influence better growing season conditions, but it could result in a wetter harvest. However, the trend at present is for neutral conditions.

Barb Mayes Boustead with the National Weather Service said that neutral pattern will make it hard to predict conditions during the summer.

Dutcher said the current upper air pattern has been holding relatively steady, which may cause extremely warm temperatures in June and July if it stays in place.

Barb Cooksley, a rancher from central Nebraska, reported on conditions in her area. She said the pastures and meadows were looking good as they had received some nice rains this spring, although they were partially hit with some hail. She said it has taken nearly 10 years for their ranch to recover from the last drought, but they are finally at full cattle capacity again.

Nick Streff, Deputy Director of the Nebraska Office of the National Agricultural Statistics Service, gave a Nebraska Prospective Plantings report. Winter wheat acres are at a record low this year with plantings down 11.2% from last year. The number of acres being planted to corn is the largest since 1933 with 450,000 more acres being planted than last year. Soybeans are down 200,000 acres from last year.

About 68% of alfalfa is in good to excellent condition, which is about average, with oats also near average at 77% good to excellent. Pasture and Range grasses are at 60% good to excellent, about 6% below average.

Bobbie mentioned that UNL Extension already has put out drought related information to help producers think about their options to address the dry conditions.

CARC members then discussed sending out a press release to explain the current conditions and encourage the public to take them into consideration heading into the growing season.

Committee members also discussed consideration of adding implementation triggers into the state drought plan. NDMC staff agreed to find some examples from other state plans.

The next CARC meeting date was scheduled for June 6th, location TBA.

Meeting was adjourned at 11:30 a.m.