

Climate Assessment Response Committee (CARC) Meeting (DRAFT MINUTES)
May 19, 2011

Members Present:

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

Al Berndt
Steve Gaul for Brian Dunnigan
Merwin Fricke

Members Absent:

Barb Cooksley
Senator Tom Carlson
Jeremiah Blake

Senator Chris Langemeier
Elbert Dickey

Audience Members Present:

Wayne Vanek, NRCS
Vicki Wohlers, USDA-APHIS-PPQ
Pat Rice, NDEQ
Dayle Williamson, Senator Ben Nelson's office
Jack Wergin, Bureau of Reclamation
Pat O'Brien, Nebraska Association
Resources Districts
Steve Eddy, Nebraska Weather
Service-Hastings
Shawn Rossi, Nebraska Weather
Service-Hastings
David Pearson, Nebraska Weather
Service-Omaha
Ken Anderson, Brownfield Radio Network
Eric Hunt, School of Natural Resources-UNL

Scott Sprague, Department of Health and
Human Services, DPH
Cindy Newsham, NEMA
Tom Sands, NDOR
Tom Renninger, NDOR
Nataile Umphlett, High Plains Regional Climate
Center-UNL
Martha Shulski, UNL-SNR-HPRCC
Neil Dominy, NRCS
Nicholas Streff, NASS
Dean Groskurth, NASS
Barb Mayes Barstead, Nebraska Weather
Service-Omaha
Jim Mayer, Nebraska Weather Service-Omaha.

Chair Bobbie Kriz-Wickham called the meeting to order promptly at 1:30 p.m.

Minutes from the April 27, 2010, 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 May 19, 2011, depicting exceptional drought in the southern states extending into Kansas. The conditions were the result of a La Niña effect. He also mentioned 12% of Nebraska is experiencing abnormally dry conditions in relation to 0% last year at the same time. However, Nebraska came out of a long drought in 2009, and the outlook into the future is good. There is more than usual snow pack in the Rockies leading to a potential for high stream flow. The U.S. seasonal drought outlook map for May 19 to August 31 shows a slight improvement of drought conditions in Kansas, Colorado, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, Oklahoma, Alabama, Georgia, and Florida. However, the drought will persist or intensify in extreme southern Texas and Louisiana.

Brian Fuchs, with the National Drought Mitigation Center, gave the Nebraska water supply update. Lake McConaughy is 93.6% full and upstream water will continue due to snow melt making the lake 16 feet higher than a year ago.

The North Platte Basin above the Glendo Reservoir is at 2.05 million acre feet; 500,000 acre feet more than forecasted in April.

However, stream flow is below normal in Southwest Nebraska.

The Republican River Basin has water going into storage in the conservation pools. The Harlan County Reservoir current conditions have the conservation pool 100% full, with 324,317 acre feet of water in storage.

The Platte River basin is flooding with snowmelt. However, drought conditions may increase with a range from D1 - D4 in the Plains as temperatures increase during the summer months.

The Water Availability and Outlook Committee report given by Al Dutcher, the state climatologist, showed a neutral status has been reached in the equatorial Pacific. However, if La Nina conditions redevelop, it would favor late season dryness and support the northward movement of drought across the southern Plains into, at least, southern Nebraska.

Dutcher explained we'll likely carry deficits of precipitation into the growing season. Deficits incurred during the recharge period (October - April) have been shown by past research to increase growing season drought risk. For each inch of departure from normal during the recharge period, coupled with normal growing season moisture, average dryland corn yields decrease 2.55 from trend line yields. For example, a four-inch recharge period departure, coupled with normal growing season moisture, on average translates to a ten dryland corn yield decline.

Eric Hunt with the UNL School of Natural Resources explained his graduate work on the soil moisture index and showed the current index across Nebraska. He said, historically, the numbers look good, which is a good tool to gage the short-term deficits.

Dutcher said that the "Water Year" precipitation from October to present has a 4.5- to 6-inch deficit in southeast Nebraska. Areas 70 to 80% below normal in the off season will be the first indicator of formulating drought conditions.

He said crop emergence and soil temperatures are good for eastern Nebraska, but things are a little cool in the west. He said he has a number of concerns, particularly for the Platte River Basin. His primary concerns for the next 30 days include:

- 2 million acre feet of runoff is projected
- Current storage is 830,000 acre feet
- Flood pool storage is 250,000 acre feet
- Water release will be increased by CNPPID with high flows for at least 30 days
- Near record to record river stages, this doesn't include southern branch flow
- Sudden warmth and/or heavy rainfall would aggravate the situation.
- Irrigation will determine the summer flood risk.

He said June's temperature outlook is below normal in northeast Nebraska and the High Plains. June to August temperatures should be normal as the cooler temperatures shift east to Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, and further east. For that region, there will be a potential for an early freeze. June to August precipitation is expected to be normal.

The National Weather Service members present said the near term weather will be "messy" as wet weather and storm activity present the chance for more storm cells that may increase the number of tornados.

Dutcher concluded by saying our area of Nebraska (Lancaster County) could use another one or two inches to be setting well, heading into the summer months.

Don Wilhite, Director of the UNL School of Natural Resources (SNR), gave an overview of SNR's activities, including meetings with state and federal groups which led to new partnerships and collaborations. He said their data collection has helped envision future situations, allowing them to find solutions. He also commented the Water for Food Institute was slowly getting off the ground.

Vicki Wohlers, with USDA, APHIS, PPQ, presented information regarding grasshopper populations predicted for this growing season, and spoke of the grasshopper suppression program. The program allows four seasonal surveyors, who will be starting May 25th, to start counting grasshoppers in 48 counties. The late winter weather events of April have affected the grasshopper eggs, but researchers won't know by how much until they start counting. The eggs will hatch spring through fall. Depending on the stage of the grasshopper development, chemicals can be applied in strips to reduce the grasshopper population. There is a federal cost-share program available to help pay for the costs of spraying; federal land is covered at 100%, state land 50%, and private land may be covered for one-third the cost. On private lands, the cost must be shared with landowners or the state, if funding is available. Producers should visit with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, if spraying in an American burying beetle zone. The Grasshopper Suppression Program has been used in 17 western states with 1.3 million acres treated.

Dean Groskurth, Director of the Nebraska Office of the National Agricultural Statistics Service, gave a report on haystocks and a Crop Report. In Nebraska, there has been a 34% increase in haystocks, with a larger increase in eastern Nebraska versus the western half. Currently, farmers are on average with the planting pace. The wheat being produced is one bushel below last year.

Cindy Newsham spoke of the hazard mitigation grant program.

Mike Hayes told the group of the Colorado Governor reactivating a drought committee/team and reworking their drought plan. He thought it would be important for our CARC group to watch and see what takes place in Colorado. He wanted members to pay attention to see if Colorado's plan includes climate change, along with vulnerability assessment and triggers that would result in a response from the team.

Bobbie mentioned the next meeting date would be left open, and she would be in contact with members regarding that meeting.

Meeting was adjourned at 3:20 p.m.

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