

**Climate Assessment Response Committee (CARC) Meeting (DRAFT MINUTES)
June 6, 2012**

Members Present:

Bobbie Kriz-Wickham, Chair
Jack Daniel
Jeremiah Blake
Dr. Linda Boeckner, Aaron Berger and
others for Elbert Dickey (via phone)

Al Berndt
Barb Cooksley
Brandi Flyr for Brian Dunnigan

Members Absent:

Senator Tom Carlson
Senator Chris Langemeier
Mike Hayes

Merwin Fricke
Mark Kuzila

Audience members present included: Brian Fuchs, NDMC; Doug Klein, FSA; Allen Dutcher, state climatologist; Nicholas Streff, USDA-NASS; Dean Groskurth, USDA-NASS; Dayle Williamson, Sen. Nelson's office; Art Hovey, Lincoln Journal Star, Mary Schroer, NDEQ; Jordan Dux, Nebraska Farm Bureau; David Pearson, National Weather Service; Jason Lambrecht, US Geological Survey; Phil Erdman, Sen. Johanns' office; Bruce Anderson, UNL Agronomy; Eric Zach, NGPC; Tom Sands, NDOR; Nancy Gaarder, Omaha World-Herald; Marcia Trompke, CNPPID; and Lindsey Salestrom, NDA.

Chair Bobbie Kriz-Wickham called the meeting to order at 10:10 a.m. in the lower level of the State Office Building. A conference call also was opened for UNL Research and Extension faculty in the Panhandle region.

Minutes from the April 24, 2012, meeting were reviewed and approved.

Brian Fuchs with the National Drought Mitigation Center presented the drought overview. He showed U.S. conditions on the U.S. Drought Monitor map from April 17, 2012, compared to a map with current conditions. The current map showed more dryness to the south in Kansas, with migration north into the southern tier of Nebraska counties. The maps also show that drought conditions in the Panhandle have intensified, while there has been some improvement in northeastern Nebraska. Nineteen percent of the state now is showing moderate drought conditions, predominately in the Panhandle, while abnormally dry and moderate drought areas combined equal about 43 percent of the state.

Temperatures across most of the nation have been 4-6 degrees above normal over the last six months. In Nebraska over the past month precipitation has been 25-50% of normal with less than 25% of normal precipitation in the Panhandle. The spring and summer streamflow forecast for the region that feeds the North and South Platte River basins shows runoff at 25 to 50 percent of normal for this time of year, which is worse than had been hoped for.

The U.S. Seasonal Drought Outlook released May 17 shows some anticipated improvement in drought conditions in the Panhandle, however, Fuchs said it is expected the next outlook map, to be released in June, will show more drought developing.

Fuchs said models are trending toward neutral/El Nino conditions.

The Rocky Mountain snow season was not good and the snows were melted out by May.

Fuchs also gave the water supply update and reported that Lake McConaughy is 81% full, down from 82.4% full in April. Outflows from the lake have increased.

The USGS streamflow maps reflect the dry conditions on the Republican River. Fuchs reported the Republican River Basin reservoir conservation pool capacities are as follows: The Hugh Butler Reservoir is at 16.0%, Enders is at 42.7%, Harry Strunk is at 96.3%, and Swanson is at 67.5%.

The Harlan County Reservoir conservation pool is 100% full, with 315,833 acre feet of water in storage.

Fuchs said the water supply is stable for now, but storage levels are already declining across the state. Irrigation has started in some places to help crops get established. A combination of reduced run-off, dry soils, and higher irrigation demand will impact water supply over the next several months. Reduced inflows are the “new normal” on the Platte River system.

Al Dutcher, the state climatologist, provided additional information on Nebraska conditions.

The 30-day precipitation trend shows much of Nebraska less than 50 percent of normal with less than 25 percent of normal in the Panhandle and a small spot in northeast Nebraska at 100 percent due to rains over Memorial Day weekend. By looking over the past two months, the map shows slight improvement in some areas with the precipitation being 50-75 percent of normal in central and southern Nebraska, with a diagonal strip across the state being near 100 percent. The Panhandle region remains in the 5-50 percent normal precipitation range. Dutcher said the trends for precipitation seem to be shifting north, and that significant, spotty rains, while good, do not make much headway in decreasing the deficits.

Dutcher noted that 10 of the last 11 months in Nebraska have had above normal temperatures.

Dutcher said the latest vegetation health map has proven somewhat deceptive as it reflects cool season grasses in the Sandhills, and rancher Barb Cooksley confirmed that warm season grasses have not been emerging as normal, are remaining dormant, or are producing shorter plants.

Dutcher expects full water usage from corn in the next 10-14 days, with tasseling taking place in two weeks through the end of June. He reported the southeast portion of the state has observed lower stock pond levels, spotty soybean emergence in east central Nebraska, insufficient soil moisture in the northeast, wheat heads not filling in the southwest, hail damage in south central counties, pasture stress in north central counties and the Panhandle has dangerously dry conditions for both plants and animals.

In the June – August forecast, above normal temperatures are predicted in the Panhandle and south central regions; the precipitation forecast for the time period does not present a clear trend. Dutcher said there isn't a great deal of consistency in the forecast. National Weather Service representative David Pearson said this weekend there is a slight chance for rain, but not a large amount of rainfall is expected. If rain does occur it will fall in extreme eastern Nebraska

and Iowa. There are no big systems on the way, meaning no rain so the warm and dry conditions will continue.

Dutcher said there is a chance for El Nino conditions to establish later this summer or into the fall, which might influence better conditions. Right now warm water is in the deep layers of the ocean from Australia to South America which could influence El Nino, and possibly create more moisture across the Plains. Right now if a significant rain were to occur, the ground should handle 2-4 inches without flooding.

Responding to a question, Dutcher and Fuchs agreed that temperatures over 95 degrees, lack of water and night time temperatures remaining high will impact the yield of crops and also pose significant health threats for feedyard animals.

Pearson answered a question about the threat of severe weather, responding that without moisture the likelihood for tornados and hail is reduced.

Nick Streff, Deputy Director of the Nebraska Office of the National Agricultural Statistics Service, gave a May crop production report. Wheat production is predicted to be down from last year, mainly due to less wheat acres being planted. Forty-four percent of the wheat crop is in good to excellent condition. Nebraska pasture and range condition has dropped to only 49 percent good to excellent, compared to the 60 percent in April. Hay stocks, released in May, show 1 million metric tons in Nebraska, a drop from last year, but in line with the stocks historically reported in the May report. Significant declines in hay stocks are shown in Texas and Oklahoma, areas hit hard by drought last year.

Doug Klein with FSA spoke of drought programs available to producers. Those remaining are the NAP program, which provides financial assistance to producers of noninsurable crops when low yields, loss of inventory or prevented planting occur due to natural disasters, and the CRP program that allows for haying and grazing of CRP acres in emergency situations.

Aaron Berger with the South Panhandle Extension Unit in Kimball County, who joined via conference call, mentioned conditions in his area are rapidly deteriorating. UNL has released materials to help farmers and ranchers mitigate drought impacts; much of the material can be found on UNL's beef site, beef.unl.edu. He reported cool season grasses are three weeks ahead of schedule and producers already have to feed cattle that would normally be on pasture.

Bruce Anderson from the UNL agronomy department said that perennial grasses and hay lands in eastern Nebraska have very little soil moisture to support growth, with many acres of hay potentially producing only one cutting this season. The warm season grasses are not growing as well as normal. Eastern Nebraska is walking a fine line of needing rain to support livestock, he said.

Kriz-Wickham mentioned a press release the Department of Agriculture put out after the last CARC meeting and the radio spot she did to share drought mitigation resources. She also mentioned that Farm Bureau sent a note to USDA officials in Washington, D.C. about conditions in the state.

Jack Daniel did not report water supply concerns at this time from municipalities.

Kriz-Wickham will forward a report to the Governor on behalf of the committee and send out a note to determine the next CARC meeting date. Meeting was adjourned at 11:25 a.m.