

**Climate Assessment Response Committee (CARC) Meeting  
June 19, 2006**

**Members Present:**

Jamie Karl, Chairman  
Mark Kuzila  
DeLynn Hay for Elbert Dickey  
Brian Dunnigan for Ann Bleed  
Al Berndt for Roger Lempke

Mike Hayes/Mark Svoboda for Don Wilhite  
Jack Daniel  
John Erickson  
Merwin Fricke

**Members Absent:**

Barb Cooksley

Chairman Jamie Karl called the meeting to order at 1:34 p.m. He provided an overview of current climate conditions and the effects of those conditions on agriculture.

Mark Svoboda and Mike Hayes with the National Drought Mitigation Center and State Climatologist Al Dutcher presented the Water Availability and Outlook Committee (WAOC) report. Svoboda began by showing the current Nebraska conditions, including the June 13, 2006, U.S. Drought Monitor. He noted that on that map, all of the state had at least abnormally dry conditions, while 69 percent was experiencing D1 conditions, 46 percent was experiencing D2 conditions, and 16 percent was experiencing D3 conditions.

He said conditions have been in a downhill slide since April 1, and he showed maps depicting the rate of deterioration since the fall of 2005. Svoboda said the state is half way through what is generally the wettest three months of the year, and almost the entire state is below normal in precipitation amounts.

Svoboda showed a series of maps depicting departure from normal and percent of normal precipitation for the past three and past six months. He also discussed maps detailing the percentage of water available at four different depths in the soil. From these maps, he noted, it is apparent that the top layers of the soil are quickly drying out.

Mike Hayes provided the Nebraska Water Supply update. He showed the Natural Resources Conservation Service spring and summer streamflow forecast maps for the Platte River basins from March and May 2006. The March map, he noted, was fairly optimistic but due to warm, windy weather in March and April, the May map showed a negative change in the projected streamflow. He also showed the Missouri River Basin streamflow forecast map for May, noting the projection was lower than what was anticipated earlier this year.

Hayes said Lake McConaughy was at 38 percent of capacity, which is 1.3 feet above the level at this time last year. Inflows peaked in mid-May this year, compared to a mid-June peak in 2005,

and Hayes said he thinks by the irrigation season end the elevation could fall lower than where it has been the past several years.

Hayes said inflows into Harlan County Reservoir were generally better in 2005 than the previous three years, but inflows ceased in mid-April this year and irrigation began in May due to warm and windy conditions. Precipitation in some areas of the Republican River Basin is less than in 2002.

Svoboda provided the forecast report, noting the outlook for precipitation over the next five days was positive. The seasonal outlook for July, he said, shows a chance of above normal temperatures while the precipitation outlook is noncommittal. Those same outlooks are repeated on the 90-day forecast maps.

Dutcher reviewed a U.S. Geological Survey map of streamflows, noting low figures on the Elkhorn River in the east, as well as the Republican River Basin. He also reviewed the Vegetation Health Index map for June 11, 2006, and from the same time period in 2005. He noted the dry conditions raise the risk of fire, particularly with fireworks season nearing.

Dutcher talked about the Nebraska Rain Project, which uses local observers to report daily on rainfall measurements. More volunteers are needed for this project. Information can be accessed through the Department of Natural Resources web site at [www.dnr.ne.gov](http://www.dnr.ne.gov).

A National Weather Service representative provided an update on weather conditions.

Chairman Karl asked NDMC representatives to compare this recent drought cycle with that of the 1950s. Svoboda said he felt it was very comparable. Karl asked if an active hurricane season would benefit Nebraska, and Svoboda said it would not.

The group discussed anecdotal evidence that the winds are stronger this season than past years and noted the effect this is having on soil moisture levels.

Brian Wolford, Nebraska Farm Service Agency (FSA) Executive Director, provided an update on programs the FSA is working on related to drought. His office has requested disaster assessment reports from 52 counties in the western two-thirds of Nebraska. Based on that information, to date Governor Heineman has requested USDA disaster designations for 36 counties. More counties may be added as data becomes available. Wolford highlighted what the benefits are for those in counties that are granted a disaster declaration.

Wolford also reviewed the map of counties that have been approved for emergency grazing of Conservation Reserve Program acres.

Karl gave a report on the outcome of the April meeting of the Agriculture, Natural Resources and Wildlife Subcommittee of CARC. The group arrived at three drought mitigation recommendations:

1. Encourage the University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension to continue their good efforts to get producers valuable drought management information;
2. Continue the promotion of the Nebraska Department of Agriculture's hay hotline; and
3. Review grazing and livestock insurance options.

Karl noted that progress on all three recommendations has been made.

Jack Daniel, co-chair of the Municipal Water Supply, Health and Energy Subcommittee of CARC, provided that group's report. He noted the subcommittee offered three main recommendations:

1. Assist communities in searching for grant dollars to support public water supply management challenges;
2. Coordinate with Nebraska energy companies to better facilitate the delivery of assistance to those in need; and
3. Promote the conservation of water.

He unveiled the "water wheel," a water conservation publication for public water systems officials to share with customers.

Daniel provided the public water supply report and noted a number of communities are fairing better during this drought because of improvements they have made to their systems in recent years.

Karl said based on discussions he has had with agricultural producers, as well as the discussion at the meeting, he felt the Committee should offer these recommendations for the Governor to consider:

1. Authorize roadside haying;
2. Ask the State Fire Marshal to be proactive in promoting safety as fireworks season approaches, due to the elevated risk of fire;
3. Alert the Congressional Delegation of CARC findings;
4. Work with UNL agriculture economists to estimate the drought's economic impact on the state's agriculture sector;
5. Continue to publicize NDA's Hay and Forage Hotline; and
6. Work with UNL Extension to continue its drought education efforts.

DeLynn Hay, with UNL Extension, said the Market Journal program has featured extensive programs on drought management for producers. Cropwatch also continues to focus on drought.

The group discussed the availability of the Nebraska Rural Response Hotline. They also talked about the potential for agricultural disaster assistance from the federal government but were told that recent supplemental appropriations legislation did not include agriculture disaster funds for our area of the country.

A representative of the Nebraska Cattlemen said his organization would like to see all of Nebraska opened up for the roadside haying program so producers in areas that are not as affected by drought could share the available roadside forage with those in need.

Hayes commented on a survey that has been circulated regarding the NDMC Drought Impact Reporter tool. He said they would like to see better response to that survey from CARC members. It was decided to recirculate the survey.

The meeting adjourned at 3:00 p.m.

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