

**Climate Assessment Response Committee (CARC) Meeting (DRAFT MINUTES)
December 15, 2011**

Members Present:

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

Al Berndt
Barb Cooksley
Brandi Flyr for Brian Dunnigan
Rick Koelsch for Elbert Dickey

Members Absent:

Senator Tom Carlson
Senator Chris Langemeier
Jeremiah Blake

Merwin Fricke

Audience members present included: Mark Svoboda, NDMC; Brian Fuchs, NDMC; Tom Renninger, NDOR; Doug Klein, FSA; Allen Dutcher, UNL-NESC; Eric Zach, NGPC; Ryan Chapman, NDEQ; Nicholas Streff, USDA-NASS; Steve Eddy, NWS-Hastings; Mike Moritz; Wayne Vanek, NRCS; Dayle Williamson, Sen. Ben Nelson's office; Paige Bek, Nebraska Cattlemen; Scott Sprague, DHHS-DPH; Marcia Trompke, CNPPID; Darrell Podany, Sen. Johanns' Office.

Chair Bobbie Kriz-Wickham called the meeting to order at 1:05 p.m.

Minutes from the May 19, 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 Dec. 13, 2011, which depicted exceptional drought in the southern states which extended into Kansas. D1- D2 conditions are being experienced in 16% of eastern Nebraska.

The current conditions are similar to a year ago as a La Nina pattern has emerged, creating drier conditions headed into winter and spring. Fall is the climatologically dry time of year, but also a critical recharge period. The seasonal drought outlook through March shows persistent and possibly intensifying drought conditions.

Currently there is less snow pack in the Rockies compared to last year at this time, but it is still early and there is plenty of time left to accumulate more snow.

Brian Fuchs, with the National Drought Mitigation Center, gave the Nebraska water supply update. Lake McConaughy is 85% full, and water is being released to be in proper flood stage for the spring.

It has been a slow start to the water year with snow accumulation. However, stream flows across central Nebraska are much above normal, including a few points along the Missouri River. The eastern portion of the state is reporting that stream flows are normal to above normal, yet stream flows remain below normal in southwest Nebraska.

The Republican River Basin reservoir conservation pool capacities are as follows: The Hugh Butler Reservoir is at 16.8%, Enders is at 40.4%, Harry Strunk is at 87.7%, and Swanson is at 54.0%.

The Harlan County Reservoir conservation pool is 100% full, with 322,015 acre feet of water in storage.

CARC members discussed concerns about the potential for the drought in Nebraska to worsen in the spring. This dialogue led to further discussion about proposed changes to the USDA agricultural disaster designation process. USDA currently is taking comments on potential changes to how agricultural disaster designations are determined, and Doug Klein with Nebraska FSA, as well as some CARC members, noted concerns with the proposal. Comments in the changes are due to the Federal Register by Jan. 13, 2012.

The Water Availability and Outlook Committee report was given by Al Dutcher, the state climatologist. He said the water year precipitation map looks better, as it has been a wetter year this year versus last year in the eastern Corn Belt. If the trend continues northern Texas may be relieved of severe drought conditions, however, the Dakotas will be drier.

Dutcher said more consecutive storms are needed to improve water recharge, but he didn't expect any further degradation of conditions, and suggested that possible improvements might be made.

The National snow depth map is absent of any significant snow in the Northern Plains as the snow is melting between storms. The Dakotas will remain cold enough to have frost in the ground until spring. The eastern half and southern portions of Nebraska have kept warmer soil temperatures, and therefore are not frozen.

The moisture in the top 1-foot of soil is in good condition, but it becomes drier underneath that layer.

Dutcher predicts minimal flooding this spring as he doesn't think there will be as much runoff. The reservoirs can handle 1 million acre-feet of runoff, which should be manageable after the winter season.

Dutcher said the La Nina trend will be weakening in February – March which will create a more unstable weather pattern that could lead to large fluctuations in temperatures and windy conditions. The wind will cause more moisture to be lost to the atmosphere.

Kellie Bergman of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers gave a presentation on the 2011 flood and the 2012 outlook for the Missouri River mainstream reservoir system.

She said the forecasted runoff component for 2011 was 60.8 million acre-feet, the highest amount since 1898. The amount of water above Fort Peck as of May 1, 2011 was 141% above normal. May rainfall was 200-600% above normal in Montana and Wyoming. May, June and July of 2011 are in the top 5 runoff months on record.

Currently, water is being released from Gavins point at 22,000 cubic feet per second (cfs), and is expected to drop to 20,000 cfs by the end of December. The maximum release capable from Gavins Point is 600,000 cfs.

While restoring levees, priority will be given to those levees that are protecting citizens and critical infrastructure, or those that are federal levees.

Fort Peck snowpack is currently 72% of normal; the South Platte Basin Mountain snowpack is 91% of normal, and the North Platte Basin Mountain snowpack is 76% of normal. The Plains snow-water equivalents are much less than last year at this time.

To help those affected by the 2011 flood, and to prepare for next year, the Missouri River Task Force has been established, a technical analysis of the 2011 event will be made, all 16.3 million acre-feet of storage will be available at the start of the 2012 runoff season, and in January a 2012 annual operating plan will be released.

Nick Streff, Deputy Director of the Nebraska Office of the National Agricultural Statistics Service, gave a Nebraska crop report. He reported that the condition of the wheat crop is much better this year with 74% rating good to excellent. A dry fall led to the quick harvest of corn and soybeans.

Hay prices have increased from \$80/ton in April to \$135/ton currently.

Barb Cooksley reported on conditions in her area. She said it was a good grass year, allowing them to take in more cattle.

Rick Koelsch, a UNL Extension representative, told the group of webinars hosted for those affected by the 2011 floods. The attendance numbers from the webinar host sites are not yet available, but it is believed attendance was good. The webinar information will be archived at www.flood.unl.edu.

Bobbie asked CARC board members to review the drought mitigation plan appendix material and bring forward any suggestions for mitigative actions as the potential for drought increases.

Al Dutcher suggested a good time for the next CARC meeting would be during the first half of April. Bobbie said she would be in contact with members regarding that meeting.

Meeting was adjourned at 2:50 p.m.