

**CARC Meeting
April 3, 2003
Nebraska State Office Building, Lower Level C**

The meeting was called to order at 1:33 p.m. by Chairman Greg Ibach.

CARC members present were:

**Greg Ibach
Elbert Dickey
Richard Nelson
Steve Gaul, on behalf of Roger Patterson
Al Berndt, on behalf of Roger Lempke
Dayle Williamson
Don Wilhite
John Erickson
Mark Kuzila
Barb Cooksley**

Absent:

Merwin Fricke

The minutes from the January 31, 2003, meeting were unanimously approved.

Mike Hayes, with the National Drought Mitigation Center, began by reviewing the September 24, 2002; January 23, 2003; and April 1, 2003, U.S. Drought Monitors to show the changing conditions over that time period. He noted that in September the East Coast was in various stages of drought, although conditions began improving in that area by January. The drought in the western United States is still present, and some dryness has moved into the Upper Midwest. By the April map, he said, there is a bit of improvement in northeastern Colorado and northwestern Wyoming as a result of snow storms.

Hayes showed the Standardized Precipitation Index for 2002, noting that yellow/orange coloring over much of the western half of the United States indicated conditions below normal. A map showing percent of normal precipitation between January and April 1, 2003, shows dryness in the upper Midwest and northern Corn Belt, as well as the winter wheat areas of Texas and Oklahoma. In reviewing Nebraska's percent of normal precipitation from April 2002 to April 2003, Hayes said, the entire state was at 90 percent of normal or below.

Hayes gave the internet address for the High Plains Regional Climate Center web site as <http://hprcc.unl.edu/>.

He reviewed the basin average snow water content, as reported April 2, 2003. The eastern part of the Rocky Mountains is about normal, he said, but there are many areas in the western United States that are far below normal. He noted that a major, beneficial snowstorm that went through Colorado in March boosted the basins 30 percentage points closer to near normal levels. Hayes showed a Snotel report for a site near Winter Park, Colorado, which showed the extreme impact of the storm as a marked increase in number of inches of snow. He also showed a Snotel report for a southwestern Colorado site to explain that not all parts of the state got such a great benefit from the March storm.

Hayes showed the Colorado and Wyoming snow water equivalent charts. The South Platte River Basin in Colorado is at 111 percent of average. The lower North Platte Basin and upper North Platte Basin are both not quite near normal levels. Hayes pointed out that with the extreme conditions Nebraska has been experiencing, we needed the levels to be above normal.

He showed the Spring and Summer Streamflow Forecasts as of March 1, 2003, noting that new maps were due out soon and would be significantly different. Reservoir storage levels in both Colorado and Wyoming are at about 50 percent of average.

Forecasts for April give Nebraska equal chances of above normal, below normal and normal temperatures and precipitation. For the April through June period, the state again has equal chances for precipitation, and a slightly above normal chance for temperature abnormalities in southeastern Nebraska.

The U.S. Seasonal Drought Outlook map shows the drought as persisting in almost all of Nebraska, except the Panhandle and Southwest, where it will be ongoing, but show some improvement.

Member Don Wilhite noted that while the snowpack in Colorado is near normal, Nebraska has two to three years of drought effects to repair.

State Climatologist Al Dutcher showed precipitation in inches over the past 30 days. He said there has been above normal precipitation in western Nebraska, but the central part of the state has missed out on some moisture. As a percent of normal during that time period, central Nebraska is 5-25 percent, while the west is 130-200 percent because of a large storm event.

Dutcher said Nebraskans should want to see a larger snowpack in Colorado than the past few years because it is a source of moisture and cooler weather and may help renew moisture/precipitation patterns that have been lacking the past several years.

Dutcher reviewed a series of precipitation maps detailing precipitation departure from normal. During a period from October 2002 to present, an area in northeastern Nebraska has been normal, but most of the state is below normal. Dutcher said that in the past three years, precipitation departures from normal in the Central Platte Basin have been 12-20 inches below normal.

Dutcher showed soil moisture maps for a number of locations. The best areas for soil moisture are near Mead and Plattsmouth, although he said Ainsworth, Mitchell, and Arther all gained with the March storm.

Wilhite gave a presentation on a tool that a graduate student is developing to show agricultural drought risks. It incorporates a number of factors, including climate, land use, irrigation access and soil water holding capacity. The goal is to develop an operational model that can determine drought risk on specific crops at critical points. So far, corn and soybeans have been studied. The next step is to computerize maps showing these drought risk areas and possibly make it available via the internet. Member Elbert Dickey noted that possibly this tool could be used to help determine prevented planting. Member Mark Kuzila asked about adaptation to other crops, like sorghum, and Chairman Ibach asked whether it could show impacts on grazing lands. Wilhite said he and his staff would discuss making such adaptations.

Wilhite gave a report on a recent meeting of the Western States Water Council, which was held in Lincoln. He said one of the ideas to stem from that meeting is the possibility of holding a western states drought summit in early May or June to assess needs, and, as a region, determine how we want to move forward.

He also reviewed the status of national drought mitigation legislation. The bill was introduced last year and had a great deal of support, but did not get passed. Currently, the bill is being redrafted with some changes, including having the Natural Resources Conservation Service of USDA serve as the lead agency on the national mitigation effort. The revised legislation may be reintroduced after Easter. He would like our Congressional Delegation to support it. Member John Erickson said Governor Mike Johanns is supportive of the legislation. He said the Governor also wants to work on a national drought monitoring network. Wilhite said National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration has some money set aside for such an effort.

Jeremie Kerkman with Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District gave a report on the status of Lake McConaughy. The lake currently is at 46 percent of capacity. He said the lake capacity should peak May 1 at 815,000 acre/feet, although they are hoping a wet April will increase that. He said if South Platte flows are increased this year, which they could be because of the March snows there, the lake could continue to fill through late July.

Kerkman said CNPPID expected to have a full irrigation supply in 2003 for the 225,000 acres that depend on the lake. Because of projections that only 300,000 to 600,000 acre/feet of water may be left at the end of 2003, Kerkman said they are concerned about the 2004 irrigation season.

Phil Soenksen with United States Geological Service reported on streamflow conditions, highlighting several key basins. As a whole, the Republican River is setting new record lows or is at

less than 10 percent of normal. The Middle Loup River is showing good flows because of groundwater inflows. The South Loup River near St. Michael is showing very low flows, which Soenksen said correlates with earlier maps that showed extreme drought conditions in that area.

He also showed charts that compared current trends to past historical records for a number of key sites. He noted that at the Republican River near Orleans the flows are now below the minimum historic lows.

Steve Gaul noted that the Department of Natural Resources is working with officials from Health and Human Services System and the National Drought Mitigation Center to construct a proposal for funding from the Bureau of Reclamation. The money would be used for drought efforts.

Member Richard Nelson reported on Health and Human Services System drought action plan. He also noted that his department has available to communities detection equipment to identify leaks in public water supply systems. He also said they are working on determining requirements for static water level monitoring so that a statewide database can be created.

Jack Daniel from Health and Human Services System Department of Regulation and Licensure reviewed the Public Water System report as of April 1. He noted that Lincoln and Cozad have reinstated voluntary watering restrictions and that Sidney already has in place forced water restrictions. Daniel said they have also started an effort to work with the state's Natural Resources Districts to find out well recovery levels.

He said that almost 19 percent of the community water systems in the state are down to one well, which could be a problem if 2003 is extremely dry.

Brian Wolford, State Farm Service Agency Director, said his staff is already indicating reports of rangeland losses in the area of 30 percent, a level needed for disaster designations. He said they have requested Disaster Assessment Reports from some impacted counties and expect to get them by mid-April. Disaster designation requests could be forwarded to the Secretary of Agriculture by the beginning of May.

He said disaster program signups have been determined. Crop Disaster Program sign-up will begin on June 6 and Livestock Assistance Program sign-up will be sometime in July.

Barb Cooksley gave a report on conditions in the Sandhills. They are anticipating grasshopper problems, particularly in northern Custer County. They are reducing their herd numbers due to feed supply shortages.

Elbert Dickey reported that Cooperative Extension staff continues to provide as much drought-related educational outreach as possible.

Craig Head with Nebraska Farm Bureau Federation said they will again be implementing the Drought Scouts report this season.

Wilhite reported on a series of drought-related risk management workshops.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:25 p.m.