

**CARC Meeting**  
**June 20, 2002**  
**Nebraska State Capitol, Room 1510**  
(\* Minutes not yet approved by committee)

The meeting was called to order at 9:37 a.m. by Chairman Greg Ibach.

CARC members present were: Greg Ibach, Mark Kuzila, Gary Hergert (on behalf of Elbert Dickey), Jack Daniel (on behalf of Richard Nelson), Steve Soberski (on behalf of Roger Patterson), John Erickson, Roger Lempke, and Don Wilhite. Barb Cooksley and Merwin Fricke were absent. Dayle Williamson joined the meeting at 10:45 a.m.

The minutes from the May 23, 2002, meeting were unanimously approved.

Mark Svoboda, with the National Drought Mitigation Center, began by discussing the total precipitation as a percent of mean from January 1 to June 18, 2002. He said no part of Nebraska has received above normal amounts of precipitation during this time period. He also said there is not enough moisture in reserve to buffer Nebraska through the summer.

He reviewed the USDA Topsoil Moisture Report, the short to very short category. Sixty-eight percent of the state is in this category. He compared the Vegetation Health maps for June 16<sup>th</sup> in 2001 and 2002. He noted the extreme stress in the wheat belt in 2002, stretching from Texas all the way up through the Dakotas. The Standardized Precipitation Index map for January 1 to June 10, 2002, reflects the positive spring precipitation realized in the southeast and eastern parts of Nebraska.

Svoboda reviewed the Drought Monitor, showing a series of the maps to display how the drought has expanded eastward, particularly in the last few weeks. The D-2, severe drought, has moved into the Kearney area in Nebraska, while D-1 has moved into the Sandhills area and into the Dakotas, he said.

John Pollack, with the National Weather Service (NWS), reviewed the 6- to 10-day forecast, noting he is more pessimistic than the NWS outlook for near normal precipitation. He said he believes drought conditions will deteriorate over the next 15 days.

Svoboda reviewed the monthly and seasonal outlooks for temperature and precipitation. He said both mostly show equal chances of normal, above-normal, or below-normal temperatures and precipitation for Nebraska through the fall, although he is optimistic we may catch the results of some monsoon activity.

Mike Hayes, with the National Drought Mitigation Center, detailed reservoir levels. He noted that at this point in time, Lake McConaughy would normally be at its peak height. However, as of June 19<sup>th</sup>, the lake was 61% of capacity, down from May 22<sup>nd</sup>, when it was at 65% of capacity. The lake experienced record low inflows from January to present and continues to break that record with each day.

North Platte flows at Lewellen were 98 cubic feet per second (cfs), compared to 784 cfs in 2001. As of June 4<sup>th</sup>, the snow melt runoff was complete. The South Platte is experiencing similar low flow problems. Hayes said at Roscoe, the flow is 12 cfs, compared to 179 cfs in 2001.

Hayes said in the Republican River Basin, Hugh Butler, Swanson, Enders, and Bonny (CO) reservoirs were all at historical lows for this time of year.

State Climatologist Al Dutcher reviewed a series of precipitation maps detailing precipitation totals for 30- and 60-day time frames, looking at those totals as a percent of normal precipitation. He talked about the current conditions reflected in the Drought Monitor, noting that he felt the southeastern part of the state should have been categorized at a higher level of drought. For example, the last major precipitation event in Lincoln in the past 28 days has been only .10 of an inch.

Referring back to the precipitation maps, he noted the southwest and the Panhandle, over the past 30 days, have only received a half-inch to an inch of precipitation, and are 20 to 40% of normal. Dutcher reviewed the soil temperatures map, noting that he had not seen the temperatures depart so much from normal in the past five years.

Dutcher reported on soil moisture levels taken from a sampling of automated soil moisture probes across the state. He said one- or two-inch precipitation events themselves will not end the drought; we will need one inch of precipitation each week through the summer.

Roger Lempke, in looking for some positive news, asked if the dry weather meant a decreased chance of tornadic activity, but Pollack said that was not the case.

Ibach noted the potential for fires with the dry conditions and that the situation would need to be monitored.

Susan France, with the Department of Natural Resources, gave a brief update on anticipated water rights administration and irrigation water expectations. They have had to shut irrigators off at several different locations to get water to senior water rights holders and to meet instream flow needs. She said in the Republican River Basin, there are some canals that haven't even come on yet, but once they do, water administration will probably take place. She said this isn't unusual, except that it's happening much earlier than normal for that area. Ibach asked what this means for producers with crops. France said some have supplemental wells to replace surface water needs, but others do not.

Phil Soenksen, with United States Geological Survey, reviewed streamflow conditions, noting that in the southwest, several streams are showing equal to or new record lows. He said streamflows in the southeast part of the state are beginning to reflect the growing dry conditions, compared to a month ago. Pumpkin Creek near Bridgeport is dry.

Dean Groskurth, with Nebraska Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), presented the committee

with information on wheat conditions from a NASS report released June 12<sup>th</sup> based on June 1<sup>st</sup> conditions. His report also included information on pasture conditions and topsoil moisture. He said this year could be Nebraska's lowest overall production year for wheat since 1944.

Gary Hergert, Director of the West Central Research and Extension Center in North Platte, said he spoke with extension educators and other individuals in the Panhandle, and that generally pasture and rangeland is in poor condition. Many dry bean producers are waiting for moisture so they can plant their crop, and those who have planted will need to irrigate to get the crop up. Some have cut their wheat for hay or feed. In southwest Nebraska, he said some dryland farmers have left their corn fields to fallow. Some are waiting to build up a bit of moisture in order to plant more drought-tolerant crops like millet or cane for forage. Hergert said the general mood of people in western Nebraska is not positive, including those who aren't producers themselves, but are impacted when producers struggle.

He said extension educators are fielding calls from producers who are asking for drought management advice. They also have responded with newspaper articles and are weighing the possibility of organizing informational meetings.

Mark Wilke, with the Farm Service Agency (FSA), distributed a map of the areas that have been declared a disaster by USDA Secretary Ann Veneman. Sixteen counties have been designated disaster areas and 17 counties are contiguous to those areas. FSA is awaiting word on 10 additional counties with requests pending in Washington, DC. They continue to monitor conditions in other counties.

Greg Reisdorff with FSA reported that 23 counties currently have been approved for emergency grazing on Conservation Reserve Program acres. He noted a number of additional counties are monitoring conditions.

Jack Daniel, Co-chair of the Municipal Water Supply, Health, and Energy Subcommittee, reported on the public water supply drought impacts. He said two towns have been added to the list of communities with water restrictions in place. These communities, Lexington and Lyman, are experiencing infrastructure problems related to the dry conditions. Three others, Battle Creek, Mason City, and Wood River, are utilizing water restrictions to conserve water even though they have no current water problems. He said he expects the list of communities with water restrictions to grow rapidly as weather conditions deteriorate.

Jaimie Huber, with the Nebraska Department of Roads, reported on the number of roadside haying permits sold since the program began on Monday, June 17<sup>th</sup>. She said sales primarily have been for two-lane highways, with the bulk of permits thus far sold in the Broken Bow and Kearney areas.

Ibach said the Nebraska Department of Agriculture has been working with a charitable organization to review the opportunity for eastern producers to donate their roadside hay to western producers, if they choose. No details have been arranged yet.

Ibach said the Department continues to work with FSA to determine counties eligible for disaster designations. He said the Department has also requested that Dr. Roy Frederick, of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, conduct an analysis of the counties that have received disaster designations to quantify losses. Ibach said those figures, once finalized, may be shared with the Nebraska Congressional Delegation in order to help secure federal financial assistance for producers.

Craig Head, with Nebraska Farm Bureau (NFB) Federation, presented a letter that was sent to Governor Johanns by the Nebraska Farm Bureau Board of Directors. Head said that based on a conference call with NFB members, the board had developed several ideas for actions related to the drought. Those ideas were incorporated into the letter.

Member Don Wilhite said he recently took part in briefings of Congressional staffers in Washington regarding drought. He also noted that the National Drought Preparedness Act of 2002 would be discussed in committee soon in Congress. The bill would create a National Drought Council, a National Office of Drought, and a Drought Assistance Fund.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:25 a.m.

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