

**CARC Meeting
June 20, 2003
Nebraska State Office Building, Lower Level A**

The meeting was called to order at 10:00 a.m. by Chairman Greg Ibach.

CARC members present were:

**Greg Ibach
Sharon Skipton, on behalf of Elbert Dickey
Richard Nelson
Steve Soberski, on behalf of Roger Patterson
Al Berndt, on behalf of Roger Lempke
Dayle Williamson
Mark Svoboda, on behalf of Don Wilhite**

Absent:

**Merwin Fricke
John Erickson
Mark Kuzila
Barb Cooksley**

The minutes from the April 3, 2003, meeting were unanimously approved.

Mark Svoboda, with the National Drought Mitigation Center, began by reviewing the June 17, 2003, U.S. Drought Monitor. He noted there is still quite a bit of Nebraska that is either abnormally dry or in moderate or severe drought. The eastern one-third of Nebraska has had rain over the past 90-day period and, therefore, the map does not delineate an agriculture impact for this area. The western one-third of the state does have both agriculture and hydrological impacts at this time.

Svoboda said, in the short-term, conditions are improving. However, in the long-term, Nebraska is still facing precipitation shortages. He showed percent of normal and departure from normal precipitation maps for the last 90 days, year-to-date, and from October 1, 2002. The 90-day map shows the rainy pattern in eastern Nebraska, as well as good rains in eastern Colorado and western Kansas. The percent of normal precipitation map from October 1, 2002, through present shows improving conditions, particularly in the southwest of Nebraska. The picture changes when considering percent of normal precipitation from an entire year, dating back to June 19, 2002, Svoboda said, with most of Nebraska being in the 70 to 90% of normal category.

Svoboda showed an animation of the U.S. Drought Monitors to help the committee visualize the improvement in drought conditions over the past year. At least 50% of the United States was in a drought in June 2002; now, roughly 20 to 25% is in a drought.

He reviewed the mountain snowpack maps for February 1, 2003, and May 1, 2003, noting

improved conditions between the two time periods in eastern Colorado. He also reviewed the spring and summer streamflow forecast map as of May 1, 2003, noting that flows in the North Platte River Basin are expected to be low, but are better than last year.

Svoboda reviewed the status of Lake McConaughy. As of June 19, 2003, it was at 795,700 acre-feet, or 47% of capacity and 57% of average. Last year, at this time, it was at 61% of capacity and 76% of average. He said, according to information shared by the Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District, the board is expecting to have adequate water through the 2004 irrigation season. Current inflows are twice as high as last year, but are 20% of normal.

Short-range forecasts through early July are showing better than normal chances of below normal temperatures and above normal precipitation, Svoboda said. Forecasts for July and the July-September periods are mostly non-committal, giving Nebraska equal chances of above normal, below normal, and normal temperatures and precipitation.

The U.S. Seasonal Drought Outlook map, issued June 19 for the time period through September 2003, is positive for Nebraska, showing likely improvements. The drought is predicted to persist in the West.

State Climatologist Al Dutcher showed precipitation maps for the past week, the past 30 days, the past 90 days, and since October 1, 2002. Over the past week, he said, it is important to note that northeast Nebraska has not had much rain, while pockets of the state have 200 to 400% of normal rainfall. Over the last 90 days, a good portion of the central part of the state received above normal precipitation for the time period, while northeast Nebraska was below normal by 2 to 4 inches. For the time period dating back to October 1, 2002, most of the state has experienced either zero to three inches above or zero to three inches below normal precipitation.

Dutcher reviewed soil moisture conditions at five sites across the state, including Mitchell, Ainsworth, McCook, Mead, and Alliance. He said that last year, at this time, most of these sites were 50% lower than they are at present.

Dutcher said, overall, the picture is much better than last year, at this time, but the long-term drought is still evident and will not be totally alleviated this year.

Phil Soenksen, with United States Geological Service, reported on streamflow conditions, highlighting several key basins in Nebraska and noting the heavy streamflows in the eastern United States due to an extremely rainy pattern. He noted the North Platte River near Wyoming and the Republican River both are still recording very low streamflows. The Elkhorn River is also experiencing low streamflow.

He also showed graphs that compared current streamflow trends to past historical records for a number of key sites. He noted, that at the Republican River near Orleans, the flows are better than last year, although still low.

Susan France, with the Department of Natural Resources, noted that so far this year the Department has conducted water administration in two basins: the Republican River in Harlan County to Guide Rock for water to meet the terms of the lawsuit with Kansas, and the North Platte

River to satisfy instream flow rights. She also noted that the reservoirs on the Republican River are declining due to evaporation. Water users on the Platte River, she said, are being cooperative and trying to preserve as much water in the system as long as possible.

Member Richard Nelson gave the Health and Human Services System Department of Regulation and Licensure Public Water System report. He said with the rains, no communities are experiencing the troubles they had at this point last year. He also attributed this to proactiveness on the part of the communities, many of which have worked to get voluntary or mandatory conservation measures in place in advance of extreme drought conditions. He noted, however, that last year conditions for communities didn't become extreme until late June.

Nelson noted that the Nebraska Environmental Trust Board has proposed making water conservation a component of the environmental grants award process.

Craig Head, with the Nebraska Farm Bureau Federation, briefly reviewed the Drought Scouts report generated by Farm Bureau members' contributions. He said reports from members regarding moisture, pasture, and crop outlooks were generally more upbeat than a year ago.

Bill Hamlin, with the Nebraska Agricultural Statistics Service, reviewed pasture and range conditions as of June 15, 2003. He noted there were no areas reporting "very poor" pasture conditions, which is an improvement over a year ago when, on June 30, many counties in the western part of the state had pastures in poor to very poor condition. Hamlin also said the forecast for wheat yields this year is up from a year ago. Prices for hay and alfalfa are reported to be declining from last year, he said.

Brian Wolford, State Farm Service Agency Director, handed out a map showing the 2003 United States Department of Agriculture Secretarial Disaster Designations. So far, 53 Nebraska counties have received such designation due to drought and other conditions. He noted his agency would work to get specific designations for physical losses suffered in other areas, such as parts of Holt County, that have been hit by tornadoes.

Wolford said sign-up for the 2002 Crop Disaster Program began on June 6th at county offices. Some offices, particularly in dryland crop production areas, are very busy, and staff have scheduled appointments through the month of August. He noted that under the 2002 Farm Bill, producers enrolled in the federal Conservation Reserve Program can practice managed grazing and haying on program acres, with certain qualifications. Details of how this aspect of the program will work are still being finalized.

Greg Ibach noted that the state has distributed about 66 million pounds of nonfat dry milk (NDM) through the 2003 Livestock Feed Program, being operated in conjunction with the United States Department of Agriculture. The program is designed to help producers maintain their foundation livestock herds in the face of drought.

The group discussed the recent announcement of a \$393,000 grant to Nebraska from the federal Bureau of Reclamation. The funding is to be used to help purchase flow meters for the Republican River, expand the soil moisture monitoring network, and equip some state-operated stream gauges with satellite reporting capability.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:22 a.m.

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