**CARC Meeting Minutes**

Monday, July 17, 2023

Nebraska Department of Agriculture

245 Fallbrook Blvd, Lincoln, NE

Meeting was called to order at 9:36 a.m.

In Attendance

*Committee members:* Hilary Maricle (Chair), Nebraska Department of Agriculture; Shuhai Zheng, Representative for Jesse Bradley, Nebraska Department of Natural Resources; Matt Joeckel, UNL Conservation and Survey Division; Rick Rasby, UNL Cooperative Extension; Rick Leonard, Representative for Senator Steve Halloran; Becky Wisell, Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services; Ervin Portis, Nebraska Emergency Management Agency; Carl Sousek, Crops Producer.

*Staff and audience:* Brian Fuchs, National Drought Mitigation Center; Eric Hunt, University of Nebraska Extension State Climate Office; Nick Streff, USDA National Agriculture Statistics Service; Holle Evert, Nebraska Department of Agriculture; Van Dewald, NWS; Jenny Prenosil, NGPC; Pat Lechner, FSA; Donny Christensen, NEMA; Kole Pederson, NE Farm Bureau; Neil Moseman, US Senator Deb Fischer’s office.

CARC follows provisions in Nebraska’s Open Meetings Act.

Minutes from the November 28, 2022, CARC meeting were approved as presented.

Reports were provided as follows:

***Nebraska Drought Conditions and Water Supply Update***

Presented by Brian Fuchs, National Drought Mitigation Center

*Note: Maps, statistics, charts and other details are available on Fuch’s PowerPoint presentation that can be found at* carc.nebraska.gov

Past/Current Climate & Drought Report

Temperatures have been cooler than normal throughout the central to southern High Plains lately and near normal to slightly below for the calendar year. Over the last 60 days, most all the Dakota’s were 2-4 degrees above normal, while most of the southern High Plains was 2-3 degrees below normal.

Precipitation has been well below normal for the year over most of eastern Nebraska, eastern Kansas and the eastern portions of the Dakotas. The current pattern has brought

above normal precipitation over much of Colorado and Wyoming as well as portions of western Kansas, the Nebraska Panhandle, and into the Black Hills of South Dakota.

A second autumn/winter with little to no soil moisture recharge has allowed the drought to develop and intensify rapidly in the first half of 2023. Even with the most recent rains, soil moisture levels are still lacking.

Nebraska is currently showing 67.99% of the state in drought with just under 48% in severe drought or worse. Although, areas of the Panhandle have had drought eliminated with the recent weather pattern. When considering the previous CARC meeting held in November 2022, 99.78% of the state was in drought with just over 85% in severe drought or worse.

The seasonal drought outlook that goes through the end of September has current drought conditions improving during this time for most all the region with drought development expected to our south in southern Texas.

Nebraska Water Supply Update

Lake McConaughy is currently at 57% capacity and has been slowly rising with the influx of runoff from the Rocky Mountains, even as irrigation season has started. In November of 2022, Lake McConaughy was at 42.7% capacity.

Upstream reservoirs in Wyoming are near capacity for this time of year with most sending water downstream. The South Platte River is running well above normal with the runoff and precipitation taking place in the basin.

The Republican River basin reservoirs all have more water in storage than in November. Timely precipitation in June and July has reduced irrigation demand to this point in the growing season.

Harlan County Reservoir is holding about 22,000 acre-feet more water now than in November 2022 and is also holding about 21,000 acre-feet less than the historical average for this time of year.

***Nebraska Climate Update***

Presented by UNL Extension Agricultural Climatologist, Eric White

*Note: Maps, statistics, charts and other details are available on White’s PowerPoint presentation that can be found at* carc.nebraska.gov

Nebraska has seen historical levels of drought this spring and early summer in eastern Nebraska. However, there has been significant improvement in drought conditions recently, or outright elimination of drought has occurred in most of western Nebraska. The outlook is favorable for continued removal of drought.

Drought conditions have tremendously impacted winter wheat in the eastern half of Nebraska. Also seen is a poor start for dryland corn in much of eastern NE, especially between Grand Island and Lincoln

We are officially in El Nino. The Climate Prediction Center puts our chances at remaining in El Nino through the northern Hemisphere winter at around 90%. While no two El Nino events are alike, past patterns have shown there is a tendency to be wetter than average in our area.

The 30-day weather outlook for Nebraska shows equal chances of warmer and cooler temperatures with precipitation expected to be above average. Fall is likely to be wetter this year than the past three years. Good news for improving drought but perhaps more troublesome for harvest or wheat planting.

***USDA-NASS Crop and Acreage Reports***

Presented by Nick Streff, USDA-NASS

May Crop Report

As of May 1, Nebraska was at 530,000 tons of hay stocks. That is the lowest number since 2001 as well as being down over 57% from May 1, 2022.

June Acreage Report

19.4 million acres will be planted in Nebraska (all crops and does include hay harvested). This is consistent with the number of crop acres as have been planted in previous years.

Breaking it down by commodity:

* Corn – 9.5 million acres planted. Last year, 9.6 million acres planted.
* Soybeans – 5.5 million acres planted. Last year, 5.75 million acres planted.
* Wheat – 1.15 million acres planted last fall. Up 170,000 acres over previous year.
* Hay – looking to harvest about 2.4 million acres of hay (grass + alfalfa). Up about 200,000 acres from last year.

July Crop Report

NASS Crop Production Forecast:

* Wheat yield for Nebraska as of July 1 was an average of 39 bushels/acre. Up 7 bushels from last year.
* NE Wheat production is projected to be at 33.2 million bushels, up 26% from last year.

July 10 Crop Progress and Condition Report

* 62% of corn is in good to excellent condition. Down from where it has been historically but with timely rains over the last few weeks the condition has been trending towards better conditions. Nebraska is ahead or on schedule for corn plant development this year. Corn silking is at 21% which is at or above average.
* 55% of soybeans are in good to excellent condition. Down from where it has been historically but with timely rains over the last few weeks the condition has been trending towards better conditions. Nebraska is ahead or on schedule for soybean plant development this year. Soybean blooming is at 43%, setting pods is at 3%, also at or above average.
* 52% of pasture and range are in good to excellent. This is showing much improvement over the last two years.
* Wheat harvest is 12% complete. Slightly behind last year in average.
* Topsoil is at 60% adequate to surplus range.
* Sub soil is 39% adequate to surplus range.

**Other Updates and Thoughts from CARC Members/Advisors**

***Shuhai Zheng, Nebraska Department of Natural Resources***

As a result of the drought, we were experiencing historically low streamflow in the Big Blue and Little Blue River basins. The low flow caused us to have to close surface water uses the earliest that we ever have since the Blue River Compact with Kansas was put in place on November 1, 1968. The Department closed surface water usage on June 14th in the Little Blue and June 16th on the Big Blue. The Basin finally received significant precipitation on July 2nd, and we were able to open all those previously closed appropriations again shortly thereafter.

The Department also enforced a call for water administration on the south branch of the Big Nemaha River in Pawnee County. This action closed 15 appropriations beginning on June 28th. Timely precipitation allowed for the reopening five days later.

***Rick Rasby, University of Nebraska Extension***

Dry conditions, especially southeast Nebraska, where most livestock are watered out of ponds or dugouts have not received pond filler kinds of rain to replenish water supply, so livestock producers are having to haul water. This is an additional input cost that will create a challenge for producers.

***Ervin Portis, Nebraska Emergency Response Agency***

NEMA has noted the spotty nature (localized, not widespread) string of weather events over the last couple of months.

* April had fires in Cherry, Custer, Wayne, and Jefferson counties
* May had localized flooding in Republican River area: Hitchcock, Hayes, and Dundee counties
* June saw tornado and storm events, primarily in Dodge County.
* Late June, Boyd and Holt County in the Niobrara area saw significant flooding, enough to damage public infrastructure so that the Governor declared a state disaster.
* Two weeks ago, the Southwest Power Pole issued resource advisories due to high heat primarily to the south of Nebraska, but today it is back in normal operation.

***Hilary Maricle, Nebraska Department of Agriculture***

NDA has started receiving questions from producers on how the nature of these spotty events will affect farm program payments this fall. How will those events be identified and measured? NDA will likely continue to receive more questions regarding spotty weather events and is connecting producers with FSA to help provide answers.

***Carl Sousek, Row Crop Producer***

As far as the wheat crop goes in the eastern part of the state, it was put into dry ground last fall and apparently got some moisture over the winter and was able to vernalize, but we are experiencing about 1/3 yield as normal.

Regarding pictures that were shared during the meeting of a pivot corner of corn that does not receive irrigation and is noticeably struggling: there is still potential for that corn to come out of it. We have probably lost the top end of the crop potential. However, it is amazing what modern genetics have done for the corn plant to give it a better chance of not only surviving but also of producing an ear in less-than-ideal conditions. The condition of the plant and ear and how it develops is uncertain, but it is still a marvel what our modern genetics have done for the ag industry.

***Pat Lechner, Farm Service Agency***

This will be the second year in a row that FSA has rolled out their entire disaster portfolio from a federal FSA perspective. They are still working on wildfire response, mainly providing fencing repair and replacement. Majority of counties are administering the Livestock Forage Program (LFP). This program is driven directly off the drought monitor. A secondary program in use is Emergency Livestock Assistance Program (ELAP) which provides mileage recovery if producers are having to go additional miles beyond what they normally do to get hay. And likewise, if they are having to truck water to livestock, mileage assistance is available.

Starting July 16th, FSA released CRP for emergency haying and grazing. Every county in Nebraska met the initial criteria.

***Hilary Maricle, Nebraska Department of Agriculture***

There is a vacant seat on the committee for a livestock producer. An application has been received and we are waiting on an appointment.

At the fall meeting we would like to review the CARC statute and drought plan to ensure we are doing all we can to meet the goals of CARC. Last statute update was in 2017. Proposed time frame for the next meeting is the end of October or early November.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:08 a.m.