

**Interagency Drought Workgroup (IDW)**  
**Meeting Minutes**

January 20, 2017, 2:00 PM  
CT Office of Policy & Management  
Room 2A, 450 Capitol Ave.  
Hartford, CT 06106

**CT Agency representatives:**

Pete Aarrestad, DEEP; Steve Anderson, DoAg; Jacob Ducharme, DPH; Doug Glowacki, DESPP (by phone); Doug Hoskins, DEEP; Linda King-Cole, DEEP-PURA; Dave LeVasseur, OPM; Eric Lindquist, OPM; Lori Mathieu, DPH; Ryan Tetreault, DPH; Bruce Wittchen, OPM;

**Other attendees:**

John Mullaney, USGS East Hartford; Britt Westergard, NWS Albany

**1. Call to order**

Dave LeVasseur called the meeting to order at 2:05 PM.

**2. Assessment of Existing Conditions**

• **2a. Review & evaluation of data**

*Groundwater:*

John Mullaney presented groundwater data and trends for the month of December. Overall, groundwater levels rose through the month of December but are still well below normal. The continuous monitoring well in Clinton is one of few that have returned to its normal range. January measurements will not be conducted for another week, but groundwater levels have continued to rise through the month of January at all of the continuous monitoring sites.

Pete Aarrestad asked if the ground is frozen enough to affect the rate of groundwater recharge. Bruce Wittchen said it is normal in any given winter for water to find its way into the ground even when frozen.

Bruce asked if the groundwater map that John displayed is the total number of cumulative months below normal or the number of months out of the past six. He mentioned that the map could be deceptive if a well has been normal for the past two months but below normal for the months prior to that.

*Streamflow:*

John Mullaney presented graphic visuals demonstrating that streamflow has been creeping back toward the normal range, particularly in eastern Connecticut. The vast majority of stream gauges averaged below normal conditions for the month of

December. He mentioned there is a risk of faulty data during mid-winter thaws as a result of possible ice jams that may affect a stream gauge. It was noted that the Farmington River flows are still weak as MDC continues holding back a large quantity of water to replenish its water supply.

Bruce Wittchen asked about the correlation of snow pack with predicted future stream flow. He noted that streams are improving now due to mostly liquid precipitation said good stream flow in January could mean bad stream flow in March if winter precipitation does not fall as snow.

*Precipitation:*

Doug Glowacki displayed a chart of actual vs. normal rainfall and a chart of cumulative rainfall deficit at Bradley International Airport over a 30-month period from June 2014 to January 2017. The charts demonstrated that 9 of the past 10 months at Bradley International Airport have featured below normal precipitation. The month-to-date precipitation for January 2017, however, has been near-normal. Based on the 30-month trend, Connecticut has been in a pattern of below normal precipitation during the spring. If this pattern continues, Connecticut may see another drier-than-normal spring.

*Reservoirs:*

Jacob Ducharme displayed a reservoir status report on the screen and Lori Mathieu provided an update on conditions. Generally, the water systems in the eastern portion of the state are faring better than those in the south and west. There are currently two active emergency orders, available for review on DPH Drinking Water Section's website. Aquairion's emergency order is approaching its 150-day cap; DPH will look to extend it. Lori predicted that some of the most severely impacted reservoirs in the southwest portion of the state may not fully recover before spring. As of January 20, over 20 systems still have some kind of voluntary or mandatory water use restrictions. Statewide average reservoir capacity is at 73% of normal. Lori said DPH continues to work with water utilities and local health districts.

*Palmer Drought Severity Index (Palmer Index) and Crop Moisture Index:*

Steve Anderson overviewed the monthly Palmer Index and Crop Moisture Index reports for Connecticut, which are each within their normal range. It was noted that neither of these indicators are appropriate for measuring drought during winter months.

*Fire Danger:*

Forest fire danger is no longer being regularly measured and updated. The CT DEEP Division of Forestry will resume updates when conditions warrant.

- **2b. Discussion**

Britt Westergard asked Eric Lindquist to display a NOHRSC interactive map of snowfall deficit in the Northeast. Currently, northeast regional snowpack is well below-normal for the time of year. There was further discussion about snowpack.

Ryan Tetreau briefly discussed permits for domestic wells. There has been a sharp decrease in the number of drilling permits.

Dave LeVasseur mentioned the Nor'easter in the forecast for the coming weekend and asked about the next chance of precipitation after that. Dave said that if the weather changes back to a dry and warm pattern after the Nor'easter then we will likely remain in a holding pattern. Linda King-Cole and Lori Mathieu agreed. Lori said that reservoirs have either been holding steady or seeing slight improvement.

There was a review of drought indicators and some members acknowledged that the indicators allow for a removal of the Drought Watch for some counties. However, Dave suggested the group consider leaving the declarations as-is and keep monitoring conditions heading into the spring. He said the state would look foolish to remove a portion of the Drought Watch now only to possibly have to reinstate it a few months later.

Lori mentioned that there will be a lot of pent-up demand for power washing, landscaping, etc. by people who held off on those things last year due to the ongoing drought. The spring could bring an unusually high spike in water consumption. There was discussion about the utility of public service announcements and communications efforts. Eric Lindquist mentioned that a dry spring would result in another gypsy moth infestation, removing ground shade and potentially compounding the drought/fire danger situation.

### **3. Course of action**

The Interagency Drought Workgroup agreed to maintain the "Drought Advisory" declaration in New London and Windham counties and maintain the "Drought Watch" declaration in all other counties. The group agreed that it should meet in another month to reassess conditions and make changes to the declarations as warranted.

### **4. New Business**

- **4a. Possible suspension of spring freshet release as allowed under Sec. 26-141a-4 of the DEEP Minimum Streamflow Standards**

Doug Hoskins informed the group that DEEP's minimum streamflow standards call for a spring "freshet" release of reservoirs/impoundments above stocked water bodies. He said that Regional Water Authority has requested a suspension of the freshet releases throughout its water system. Typically the freshet occurs between February 15 and March 15, and public notice goes out prior to that. Any entity that suspends a freshet for any reason must report to DEEP. Doug informed the group that DEEP prepared to grant a blanket statewide suspension of the spring freshet.

Pete Aarrestad clarified that the freshet is put in place to mimic the natural hydrograph of a river or stream to aid the survival and/or reproduction of certain fish species by cleaning out accumulated stream bottom sediments, etc. Pete said a freshet is not necessarily needed every year, but that multiple years without one could begin to harm aquatic life, depending on conditions.

Lori Mathieu said that performing a freshet release should be considered a priority. A water utility should not be allowed to suspend a spring freshet unless it is taking all the steps it should be for water conservation. Lori argued that water utilities have an ethical obligation to perform the freshet and that a suspension should only be granted if deemed absolutely necessary.

Pete clarified that a freshet typically lasts five straight days, but doesn't necessarily have to be. It could be 2 or 3 days. Lori said that water utilities should be requesting to reduce the duration of the freshet before requesting a complete suspension, if possible.

Bruce Wittchen said that water utilities in the eastern part of the state should not be granted a suspension if their water conditions are near normal.

Doug Hoskins said he will review DEEP's options with Denise Ruzicka.

## **5. Old Business**

- **5a. Possible suspension of spring freshet release as allowed under Sec. 26-141a-4 of the DEEP Minimum Streamflow Standards**

Dave LeVasseur solicited volunteers for a workgroup to review state agency actions prescribed in the CT Drought Preparedness and Response Plan. Jake Ducharme volunteered for DPH, Doug Hoskins volunteered for DEEP, Eric Lindquist volunteered for OPM, and Steve Anderson volunteered for DoAg. DESPP was not available to provide a volunteer.

Dave LeVasseur said he envisions DESPP/DEMHS as taking a leading role to propose roles and communication protocols with municipal drought coordinators, particularly since DESPP already has a well-established relationship with emergency management personnel in all 169 towns. DESPP/DEMHS was unavailable for comment. Dave reiterated that it is crucial for the state and towns to have a coordinated drought response and to-date that has not been the case.

The group discussed the creation of a drought task force, as required by the State's Drought Plan. Dave mentioned that DESPP might be the appropriate agency to lead such a Task Force, which should be designed to take over much of the Interagency Drought Workgroup's responsibilities during more advanced stages of drought; the Task Force would be comprised of broader representation that has more leverage to ratchet up communication and outreach. Bruce Wittchen said the Drought Task Force should be composed of state, town, and private representatives. It would need to be prepared in advance as conditions could deteriorate rather quickly in the spring, possibly over just a couple months. Ryan Tetreau asked whether Connecticut

Water Works Association should serve on the Task Force. Bruce asked the group to give some thought as to how broad or narrow the Task Force should be. Undoubtedly, DESPP would be the lead agency on such a task force. Doug Hoskins asked about environmental non-profits, to which Bruce responded they should be included but care must be taken not to let the Task Force become too big. Once membership is flushed out, the group can determine meeting frequency, etc.

## **6. Next Meeting**

The next meeting will be in approximately one month, to be schedule via email.

## **7. Adjournment**

Dave LeVasseur adjourned the meeting at 3:35 PM.

*Minutes prepared by Eric Lindquist, OPM*

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