

Massachusetts Drought Management Task Force – Meeting Summary

May 09, 2017 100 Cambridge Street, 2nd floor, Room A

Attendees:

Vandana Rao, EEA	Jonathan Yeo, DCR	Erin Graham, DCR
Alan Dunham, NWS	John Gregoire, MWRA	Michelle Craddock, DFG
Sara Cohen, DCR	Peter Ostroskey, DFS	Jen Pederson, MWWA
Gabby Queenan, Mass Rivers Alliance	Kate Bentsen, DFG	Gardner Bent, USGS
Adam Kautza, DFG	Lexi Dewey, WSCAC	Duane Levangie, DEP
Michael Czerwicz, Easthampton Water	Richard Friend, DEP	Paul Holloway, MEMA
Scott McCarthy, Easthampton Water	Ralph Pecora, Lexington DPW	Michael Celona, DPH
Margaret Van Deusen, CRWA	Marilyn McCrory, DCR	Kate Adams, DPH
Paula Phipps, Bio4Climate		

Introductions

- Rao called the meeting to order at 10:03 am.
- Meeting attendees were asked to introduce themselves.

Updates on Current Conditions and Impacts from Members of the Task Force

Current Hydrologic Conditions - DCR Office of Water Resources, Viki Zoltay

- Precipitation for the month was one to three inches above normal in all regions except the West, which was below normal.
- Average monthly streamflows were normal in all regions.
- Groundwater levels made significant recoveries after last month's stagnation. Only the CT River Valley and Cape & Islands have more than 1 well still below normal.
- Reservoirs are mostly normal, except for the Quabbin, Cambridge, and the Cape.
- NOAA projects above normal precipitation and equal chances for below normal, normal or above normal temperatures for May.

Streamflow and Groundwater Conditions in Massachusetts - USGS

During April 2017, mean monthly streamflows across the state were normal (25-75th percentile) or above normal (76 to 90th percentile). In 2017 mean monthly streamflows have generally been normal or above normal (10 to 24th percentile) for three of the four months. During April 2017, groundwater levels across the state were mainly normal or above normal. There are a few wells where groundwater levels are still below normal (less than the 24th percentile), but they all have had rising groundwater levels over the last few months (beginning of 2017) and are approaching the normal range.

Weather- National Weather Service Update, Alan Dunham

The above normal precipitation of April continued into early May. The outlook for May is for above normal precipitation. For the next three months, May through July, there are equal chances of above and below normal precipitation while temperatures are expected to be above normal for the three month period.

Water Supply

Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection, Rebecca Weidman and Duane Levangie
Some communities have instated outdoor watering restrictions.

Massachusetts Water Resources Authority, John Gregoire

MWRA source reservoirs continue to improve. Although Quabbin Reservoir remains technically in “Below Normal” status, the elevation has been on an upward trend since late January and is presently at just over 86% capacity. The “Normal” elevation line is at 90% capacity which started on April 1st so we continue to chase that bright line. MWRA forecast modeling shows that under median yield conditions, Quabbin should get into “Normal” capacity in the next 3 months and remain there in the 6- and 12-month scenarios. Given April rains, the driest scenarios now look unlikely. Wachusett Reservoir’s elevation has risen substantially over the last several weeks due to rain and MWRA holding water back due to both Quabbin “below normal” status and operations reasons at the Shaft 12 Intake and the Shaft 1 turbine repairs.

Massachusetts Water Works Association, Jen Pederson

No drought impact updates.

There was no representative from the Department of Public Utilities.

Environmental

Wetlands- Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection –Duane Levangie
Nothing new to report.

Department of Fish and Game- Division of Fisheries and Wildlife, Adam Kautza

Field work will resume soon.

Agricultural- Department of Agricultural Resources

There was no representative

DCR Fire – Update provided by Jonathan Yeo

Leaf out is good and the KBDI is low throughout the state; some minor fires were reported.

There was no representative from DCR Infrastructure.

Public Health- Department of Public Health, Michael Celona

Nothing new to report.

Discussion of Drought Level Recommendations

- West: This region continued to have all indices at Normal for the third month in a row. The task force agreed that the region should remain in a Normal condition.
- Connecticut: The long-term precipitation index is at Advisory reflecting a precipitation deficit from last Fall and Summer as well as the recent increase in rainfall. Reservoir level is at Warning because of the Quabbin reservoir which is slightly below normal; however, this has no real impact on their system and is far from their own drought levels. Groundwater is at an overall Normal, although two of the 10 wells were still below normal - between the 10th and 25th percentile; all other indices are at Normal. In spite of these below normal levels, the task force felt that this region is on its way to a full recovery and the recent rains have helped tremendously. Task force was comfortable moving this region to Normal.
- Central: The long-term precipitation index is still at Advisory while all other indices are at Normal. The task force agreed that this region should move to Normal because of the recent heavy rains, the forecast, and the steady recovery over the last several months.
- Northeast: Streamflow and Groundwater have completely recovered in the Northeast; both precipitation indices are also at Normal. The reservoir index is at Watch, primarily because of the Cambridge reservoir system which was still below normal up until the end of April. The task force talked about the reservoir index and because the Cambridge reservoir was fast recovering to normalcy as a result of the recent rains, they felt comfortable moving this region from an Advisory to Normal.
- Southeast: Conditions in the Southeast Region have fully recovered with all indices at Normal. The task force agreed to move this region to Normal.
- Cape & Islands: Conditions in this region have improved. Both Precipitation indices are at Normal, the one non-water supply reservoir/pond is at Advisory. Groundwater overall is at Normal, however, a third of the wells are below normal. The task force had a fair amount of discussion about the groundwater levels in this region. The wells here are deep wells that typically take longer to go down and longer to recover. It will be another month or more before the recharge from the recent rains begins to be seen in the wells. Some local water suppliers are being cautious and have already instated outdoor watering restrictions. The task force felt that because of the rainfall over the last month and a half as well as the forecast this weekend the Cape is on its way to full recovery. They recommended moving this region from Advisory to Normal Level.

Next Steps

Since all the regions are at Normal, the recommendation to the Secretary is that the drought be officially lifted. Rao thanked the Task Force for their dedication, their time, and their professional input over the last one year. She also thanked members of the public for attending the meetings and for providing their ideas, suggestions and feedback which were very useful during the task force deliberations. Rao also talked about the Drought Management Plan update. Agency staff is working on the indices as well as drought-related actions. EEA will present details of the proposed revisions to the Task Force at a later date.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:40 am.