

Massachusetts Drought Management Task Force – Meeting Summary

April 7, 2026, 9:30 am – 11:30 pm conducted remotely via Zoom

Attendees, Drought Management Task Force Members:

Vandana Rao, Co-Chair, Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA)
Benjamin Hiltunen, Co-Chair, Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency (MEMA)
Duane LeVangie, Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP), Water Management Act
Jen Pederson, Massachusetts Water Works Association (MWWA)
Lydia Olson, Massachusetts Rivers Alliance (MRA)
Viki Zoltay, Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), Office of Water Resources (OWR)
Anne Carroll, DCR OWR
Dalene LaPointe, Department of Public Health (DPH)
Rob Megnia, NOAA – National Weather Service (NWS)
Moussa Siri, Water Supply Citizens Advisory Committee (WSCAC)
John Gregoire, Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA)
Nick Stasulis, United States Geological Survey (USGS)
Brian Loving, USGS
Kate Bentsen, Department of Fish and Game (DFG), Division of Ecological Restoration
Adam Kautza, DFG, MassWildlife
Thomas Maguire, MassDEP

Other Attendees:

Allyssa Lane	Dedham-Westwood Water District	Laurie Ruzala	Yarmouth Water Dept.
Benjamin Chan	Town of Wellesley	Luke White	Yarmouth Water Dept.
Brittany Segill	MassDEP	Marcela Rojas	MassDEP/UMass Amherst
Caitlin LeDuc	Natick DPW	Matt Comeau	Lynn Water & Sewer Commission
Cody Jones	Sunderland Water District	Michael Blanchard	Town of Dover
Colin Walsh	Captains Golf Course	Michael Souza	MEMA
Crystal Stiles	CIRES/NOAA NIDIS	Mike Retzky	Town of Needham
Deanna Marks	NWS	Peter Speck	NWS Albany
Demetrios Vidalis	Wellesley Water and Sewer Division	Pine duBois	Jones River Watershed Association
Don Cooper	Medway Water	Purvi Patel	EEA
Elizabeth McCann	MassDEP	Richard Bradley	Superscape Landscape LLC & GIA
Emilia Dick Fiora del Fabro	Charles River Watershed Association	Rob Faley	Chatham DPW
Eric Hooper	Town of Sharon	Steve Cusick	Needham Water Dept
Erin Graham	DCR OWR	Tim Pasakarnis	Cape Cod Commission
Giovanna Recinos	City of Salem	Toni Stewart	DCR OWR
Grace Manning	DCR/EEA Intern	Vanessa Curran	DCR OWR
Jack Collins	Oak Bluffs Water District	William Bercume-Brisbois	Needham DPW
Joshua Canarelli	Northeast River Forecast Center (NERFC)		

1. Introduction

Rao called the meeting to order at 9:35 a.m. and thanked everyone for attending. She asked attendees to enter their names and affiliations in the chat and reminded them that the meeting was being recorded for the purpose of meeting notes. She introduced herself and co-chair from MEMA, Ben Hiltunen. Rao and Hiltunen thanked everyone for their commitment to the Drought Management Task Force and the extended drought period we have been dealing with. Rao then noted that the March meeting notes were not ready to be approved yet, moving on to introduce Joe Dellicarpini for the first update on current conditions and impacts and gave well wishes for his upcoming retirement.

2. Updates on Current Conditions and Impacts

Weather & Forecast: Joe Delliparpini – NOAA National Weather Service and Northeast River Forecasting Center

February brought 3-5.5" precipitation accumulations across the Commonwealth. Departures ranged generally within 0.5" of normal. Greatest deficits were seen in Essex, Middlesex, Dukes, and Nantucket Counties (0.5-1.5" below normal). The 3-month precipitation totals are generally 70-100% of normal except Nantucket (~60%). The 6-month percent of normal precipitation is very similar to the 3-month numbers. The 7 Day Outlook looks dry with very little precipitation forecast through next weekend. The outlook beyond 7 days is leaning toward above normal temperatures and precipitation. There is no significant risk for river flooding over the next 10 days.

Hydrologic: Brian Loving – USGS

USGS currently has limited data-visualization products. Streamflow conditions improved significantly during March statewide. Lowest conditions continue to be in the Northeast and Cape Regions. Groundwater levels also improved significantly during March statewide, with the Cape and Islands having the greatest concentration of wells with below normal percentiles.

Water Supply: Duane LeVangie – MassDEP

There are no current drought-related problems from regional staff, though some water systems are under emergency declarations due to water quality issues. Rao noted that drought conditions can compound water quality challenges by reducing groundwater recharge, leaving some communities more resource-constrained.

LeVangie noted that mandatory water use restriction reporting is ongoing on an annual basis, but meaningful data is limited for now since outdoor irrigation has not yet begun for the season. The first water restrictions map of the year is expected to be published on May 1st.

Water Supply: John Gregoire – MWRA

Quabbin has recovered nearly 2 feet of elevation (~14 billion gallons) following March rains and snowmelt, though a dry forecast may temporarily push levels back to below normal. A 3.6-billion gallon diversion from the Ware River also aided recovery. Wachusett is improving but may need an early supplemental transfer from Quabbin ahead of the standard mid-to-late May seasonal transfer. Both emergency reservoirs (Sudbury & Foss) are back in normal range. Water was also transferred via the Sudbury Aqueduct to refill Chestnut Hill Reservoir. These periodic operations help test aging infrastructure and train staff on the century-old system. Rao highlighted that periodic transfers and diversions also serve to test infrastructure integrity and keep aging systems operational. Gregoire added that these operations are valuable for training new staff on the 1920s-era Quabbin facility, much of which still functions as originally designed.

Water Supply: Jennifer Pederson – MWWA

Most reporting members are in good shape heading into spring. Milford's reservoir is recovering after purchasing water from Bellingham. Leominster is at 90%, Worcester at 93%, and Sharon and Franklin both report high stream flows, normal groundwater, and no anticipated concerns. The primary challenge flagged is public messaging - with visibly wet conditions, it's difficult to communicate ongoing drought restrictions to the public. Rao noted that EEA will be working to incorporate into the press releases that drought as a slow-moving system. Further messaging discussion was deferred to the end of the meeting.

Private Water Supply: Marco Pareto – DPU

No DPU representative was present, but updates were sent via email. Rao read the Aquarion update on their behalf, noting that restrictions have been updated per the March Task Force deliberations and the Secretary's declaration.

- Millbury & Oxford Customers: Level 3 – Severe (Non-essential outdoor watering banned)
- Dover and Ponds of Plymouth: Level 2 – Significant (Outdoor watering limited to 1 day/week)
- Pine Hills: Level 2 – Significant (2 days/week restrictions expected to take effect late this month)
- Sheffield: Level 1 – Mild (1 day/week watering allowed, except ornamentals and flower gardens)

Wetlands: Tom Maguire – DEP

No concerns reported regarding drought.

Fish and Game: Kate Bentsen – DER; Adam Kautza – DFG

No updates to report.

Massachusetts Rivers Alliance: Lydia Olson

No updates to report.

Water Supply Citizens Advisory Committee: Moussa Siri

No updates to report.

Agricultural: Michael Botelho – DAR

Not present at meeting.

Fire Danger: Karyn Lothrop – DCR

Not present at meeting.

Engineering: John Scannell – DCR

Not present at meeting.

Public Health: Dalene LaPointe – DPH

No reports of drying wells or related partner concerns. LaPointe noted that DPH is a member of an interstate CDC Drought Working Group through a cooperative agreement under the National Environmental Public Health Tracking Project. The group has requested permission to adapt EEA's drought messaging materials as templates for state, local, and county drought outreach - a recognition of Massachusetts' materials at the national level. Rao confirmed she had been in contact with DPH and offered to share any additional files needed.

3. Presentation of Index Severity Levels per MA DMP

Zoltay reviewed how DMP indices and severity levels were calculated, as well as the Drought Regions. She reviewed the drought management plan excerpt about what to focus on when Regions are leaving a drought. Zoltay highlighted that long term precipitation and groundwater should be recovered to exit a drought. She traced recent hydrologic trends, noting that the drought began in mid-August 2024 following a month-and-a-half of near-zero precipitation and high temperatures, which triggered unprecedented late-fall fire activity. Conditions have ebbed and flowed since. In 2026, January saw normal precipitation, February was below normal, and March returned to near-normal, with snowmelt providing a significant boost to streamflows and shallow groundwater recharge. The most recent U.S. Drought Monitor shows some improved conditions, primarily with the Western, Connecticut River Valley, Central, and Southeast Regions seeing the most improvement.

The Standardized Precipitation Index (SPI) for March was mostly normal to above normal across most of the state. Longer-term deficits persist in the Northeast and the Connecticut River Valley Regions. Cape Cod and the Islands are tracking between 12- and 24-month deficits. Zoltay explained that in the final summary table, different lookback periods would be used for different Regions based on the duration of their current drought conditions (3 and 6-month for Western, 6-month for Southeast, 9-month for CTRV, Central, and Northeast, and 12- and 24-month for Cape Cod and the Islands). Considering these lookback periods, the SPI ranged from index severity level (ISL) 0 to ISL 3 across the state. Streamflow is largely recovered statewide. Cape Cod has improved but remains below normal. Shallow groundwater wells have rebounded because of snowmelt. Deeper wells (approximately 20–25 feet below ground surface) are still recovering, particularly in the Northeast and Cape Cod Regions. The Islands Region remains mixed. A new statistic was introduced showing the percentage of wells below normal relative to total reporting wells. For Lakes and Impoundments, Northeast and Cape Cod Regions remain the most impacted, with Northeast at the 3rd percentile across five reporting systems. Significant recovery is underway, but the Northeast, Cape Cod, and Islands Regions continue to lag across multiple indices. Evapotranspiration and KBDI are not monitored during this time of the year.

5. Discussion of Drought Level Recommendations by Region

Western – The region was at Level 1 last month and is showing strong recovery. The recommendation is to move to Level 0. The team noted that the DMP does not clearly define how groundwater recovery is assessed, and there is concern that declaring recovery too early has historically led to conditions dipping back into drought. The Task Force was asked to think more carefully about how to characterize groundwater recovery going forward. All Task Force members agreed to recommend moving to Level 0 – Normal Conditions.

Connecticut River Valley (CTRV) and Central – Precipitation and snowmelt remain below normal, and a significant portion of wells have not fully recovered. While improvements have been seen, drying conditions expected this month could push the region back into drought. The recommendation is to hold at Level 1 – Mild Drought and reassess next month.

Rao asked to hear what Task Force members thought. Gregoire agreed it makes sense to hold rather than risk jumping back up next month. Pederson noted that patience is important on the other side too and that the Task Force should avoid being overly cautious about calling Regions out of drought but was ok with holding at Level 1. LeVangie highlighted that deeper wells are slower to recover, particularly on the

Cape and Islands, and questioned whether deep wells in CTRV are a factor. Zoltay added that deep wells are critical for stream baseflow, and streamflows are already below normal in April due to lack of groundwater support. Stasulis raised the importance of capturing real-world impacts, not just data and indices, and noted that partners' field reports should be incorporated. Rao confirmed that Task Force members serve that role, though fewer reports come in this time of year. Pederson noted that 12-month precipitation across three Regions is normal, and Rao reminded the group that the 9-month lookback was chosen to align with when drought began. Carroll clarified that while the Task Force tries not to move more than one level per month, they have adapted their approach to account for flashier drought patterns. Maguire cautioned that current streamflow improvements may be temporary due to snowmelt and suggested waiting for more sustained improvement. After discussion, all Task Force members agreed to recommend holding these Regions at Level 1 – Mild Drought.

Northeast – Improvements have been seen, but the 9-month precipitation lookback remains low, along with below-normal lakes and impoundments, and some groundwater. The staff recommendation was to move this Region to Level 1. There was brief discussion on whether Level 2 was warranted. Maguire expressed some concern about precipitation, but the group settled on Level 1 with the understanding that they can reassess if conditions worsen. After discussion, all Task Force members agreed to recommend moving to Level 1 – Mild Drought.

Southeast – Recovery has been observed across the board, including the most snowfall of any region. About a third of wells remain below normal, but the overall trajectory is positive. The staff recommendation was to move to Level 0, with continued monitoring. All Task Force members agreed to recommend moving to Level 0 – Normal Conditions.

Cape Cod – Cape Cod experienced slight groundwater improvement, but the indices overall still reflect significant drought. The staff recommendation was to hold at Level 2. All Task Force members agreed to recommend holding at Level 2 – Significant Drought.

Islands – Zoltay presented a comparison of Dukes and Nantucket Counties. Both have one above- and one below-normal groundwater well. Nantucket is performing slightly worse. There was discussion on whether to continue tracking the islands separately or to combine as a Region. Pederson favored keeping them separate. Zoltay noted a question about whether sea level rise may be affecting coastal wells, though no study has been conducted yet. After discussion, all Task Force members agreed to recommend holding Duke's at Level 0 – Normal Conditions and to improve Nantucket to Level 1 – Mild Drought.

Summary of Recommendations:

Southeast: Level 0 – Normal

Northeast: Level 1 – Mild Drought

CTRV: Level 1 – Mild Drought

Central: Level 1 – Mild Drought

Western: Level 0 – Normal

Cape Cod: Level 2 – Significant Drought

Islands: Duke's County- Level 0 – Normal Conditions; Nantucket County- Level 1 – Mild Drought

6. Recommendations for Drought Level Response Actions

Rao summarized the recommendations for drought levels that had been discussed throughout the meeting. The press release and other communications should come out early next week. Pederson requested that the upcoming press release acknowledge that water suppliers may be conducting spring maintenance activities such as hydrant flushing and tank rehabilitation that require significant water use even during drought conditions. LeVangie confirmed DEP can include language in their outgoing letter recognizing that spring flushing deferred from the fall drought period may need to occur now. Rao suggested using the Instagram page to communicate nuanced drought messaging to the public and encouraged Task Force members to share updates broadly. Rao noted that an interagency mission group has been meeting mid-month given the sustained Level 2 drought conditions, with a focus on messaging, the approaching growing season, and the interplay of rising temperatures and fire danger. Rao thanked everyone and reminded the group of the next meeting in May.

7. Next Steps

The recommendations will be shared with the Secretary of EEA for a final decision on updated drought declarations. Social media outreach will be coordinated via the MassWaters Instagram page. Task Force members are encouraged to share and amplify drought messaging. The Task Force will meet again in early May. Rao will evaluate whether an additional mid-month interagency call is needed.

Meeting Ended: The meeting adjourned at 11:20 am.