

Massachusetts Drought Management Task Force – Meeting Summary

December 8, 2025, 10:00 am – 12:00 pm conducted remotely via Zoom

Attendees, Drought Management Task Force Members:

Purvi Patel, Co-Chair, Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA)
 Benjamin Hiltunen, Co-Chair, Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency (MEMA)
 Elizabeth McCann, Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP), Water Management Act
 Thomas Maguire, MassDEP, Wetlands Program
 Kate Bentsen, Department of Fish and Game (DFG), Division of Ecological Restoration
 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
 Adam Kautza, DFG, MassWildlife
 Dalene LaPointe, Department of Public Health (DPH)
 Joe Dellicarpini, NOAA – National Weather Service
 Brian Loving, United States Geological Survey (USGS)
 Moussa Siri, Water Supply Citizens Advisory Committee (WSCAC)
 John Gregoire, Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA)
 Michael Botelho, Department of Agricultural Resources (MDAR)

Other Attendees:

Alfredo Con	Charles River Watershed Association	Joseph Holbeche	Massachusetts DMF
Bailey Mullins	DCR OWR	Justine Kent-Uritam	Town of Dover
Brittany Segill	MassDEP	Luke White	Town of Yarmouth
Bruce Broisman	DPH	Michael Souza	MEMA
Caitlin Spence	EEA	Patrick Cunningham	City of Worcester
Cindy Cook	Windnorth	Pine duBois	JRWA
Crystal Stiles	CIRES/NOAA NIDIS	Rob Faley	Town of Chatham DPW
Erin Graham	DCR OWR	Thomas Trainor	Sherborn Groundwater Protection Committee
Heather Stayton	City of Westfield	Tim Pasakarnis	Cape Cod Commission
Jimmy Powell	Jones River Watershed Association (JRWA)	Toni Stewart	DCR OWR
John Scannell	DCR	Vanessa Curran	DCR OWR
William Bercume-Brisbois	Town of Needham		

1. Introduction

Patel called the meeting to order at 10:04 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 is being recorded for the purpose of meeting notes. Patel introduced herself and her co-chair from MEMA, Ben Hiltunen.

2. Approval of November 6, 2025 DMTF Meeting Notes

Pederson made a motion to approve the November 6 meeting notes with a second by Zoltay. The vote to accept the meeting notes was unanimous.

3. Updates on Current Conditions and Impacts

Weather & Forecast: Joe Dellicarpini– NOAA National Weather Service (also representing the Northeast River Forecasting Center)

November brought 2-3 inches of precipitation accumulations across most of the Commonwealth, with departures ranging from 1 to 2 inches below normal. The Cape/Islands and northern Berkshire County were closer to normal. The 3-month lookback is near normal for most of the state. Southeast MA and Cape Cod are near to slightly above normal. The 6-month lookback is generally below normal, especially northern Worcester and Middlesex Counties and Essex County. The 7 Day outlook forecasts modest rainfall (0.25 – 0.5 inches) and leaning toward below normal precipitation with below normal temperatures also likely.

Hydrologic: Brial Loving – USGS

Streamflow conditions across most of Massachusetts during November were below normal, and gradually declined during the month relative to day-of-year averages. Exceptions were the Western Region, where conditions improved slightly, and the Southeast Region where they held steady. Groundwater levels at most wells monitored were below the 25th percentile in November, including at least one well in every Drought Region. Conditions gradually declined during the month relative to day-of-year averages everywhere except the northern part of the Western Region.

Water Supply: Elizabeth McCann – MassDEP

One emergency reported but not drought related.

Water Supply: John Gregoire – MWRA

Quabbin is at about 81% full and still in normal range. Since the last DMTF meeting the Quabbin has lost about 5 million gallons. They are transferring 220 million gallons from Quabbin to Wachusett for elevation control and continuing to release 20 million gallons per day to the Swift River for statutory release requirements. Once the reservoir is back up to mid normal range, they will stop the transfer from Quabbin. Sudbury Reservoir is within its normal range, and the Foss Reservoir has been lowered by ten feet as part of the annual winter drawdown to control milfoil. Recent testing showed only one inch of freeze depth in the exposed bed, while the target is 5-6 inches to effectively kill the plant roots.

Water Supply: Jennifer Pederson – MWWA

No suppliers have notified MWWA of any water supply issues.

Private Water Supply: Marco Pareto – DPU

Not present at meeting but reported via email.

Aquarion water company has not updated water bans since August,

- Milbury, Oxford, and Sheffield customers are in a drought level 2 zone (all non-essential outdoor water uses are banned, except the watering of ornamentals and flower gardens with drip irrigation, hand-held hose or watering cans may be permitted)
- Dover customers are in drought level 1 (non-essential outdoor water use is allowed one day per week before 9:00 am and after 5:00 pm)
- Pine Hill customers in drought level 1 (non-essential outdoor water use is allowed two days per week before 7:00 am and after 7:00 pm)

Wetlands: Tom Maguire – DEP

MassDEP received a report from the Peabody Conservation Commission concerning very low water levels at Spring Pond in Peabody. Maguire stated that the low levels could be due to lower than normal precipitation or work at the dam outlet.

Fish and Game: Kate Bentsen – DER, Adam Kautza – DER, Brad Chase – DMF

No updates to report from Bentsen or Kautza. Chase (not in attendance) reported via email about insufficient outflow at some Cape Cod sites preventing the release of juvenile river herring from ponds.

Massachusetts Rivers Alliance: Lydia Olson

Mass Rivers received verbal reports from some members. The Hoosic River Watershed Association reported normal flows in the northwest part of the state. The Taunton River Watershed Alliance reported more normal levels around the Assawompset Pond complex. However, there are continued concerns about water levels in the Jones River, where Silver Lake remains down by 30 inches.

Water Supply Citizens Advisory Committee: Moussa Siri

Siri reported that he made it out to the field but could not take pictures from the same places as before the snowfall. He noted that water flows in the Swift River and Kingston Bridge areas have decreased but remain better than September levels.

Agricultural: Michael Botelho – DAR

No updates to report.

Fire Danger: Dave Celino – DCR, Karyn Lothrop – DCR

Not in attendance.

Engineering: John Scannell – DCR

No updates to report.

Public Health: Dalene LaPointe – DPH

No updates to report.

4. Presentation of Index Severity Levels per MA DMP

Zoltay provided an update on the drought status, which has persisted in some parts of the state since mid-August of last year. As of the end of November, conditions are mostly status quo since the last meeting, with the primary improvement seen in the Western Region, as noted by the NWS and USGS. Regarding precipitation, the rain in September and October helped stop degradation and improved conditions in some areas. In November, the Western Region, Cape Cod, and Martha's Vineyard received

normal precipitation, but the rest of the state was below normal, especially the Northeast coastal area. A precipitation deficit still exists across all areas. Zoltay explained that the 6-month lookback period is used for most of the state, and the 12-month for the Cape and Islands. Evapotranspiration is minimal this time of year and does not significantly impact water availability. Streamflow has seen some recovery, with the Western Region and parts of the Connecticut River Valley Region returning to normal levels, while Central and Northeast Regions remain impacted, and the Southeast Region is mostly normal. The index values for the Regions and gauges reporting were also presented.

5. Discussion of Drought Level Recommendations by Region

Western – Patel noted the improved conditions in the Western Region. Maguire suggested transitioning the Western Region from Level 2 to Level 1 as an intermediate step rather than immediately jumping to Level 0 because of past instances where Regions were taken out of drought status prematurely only to return shortly after. Zoltay noted that as of the morning of the meeting the streamflow was back down, and Carroll stated that they may be comfortable taking a more conservative approach. Olson argued that the rapid changes of drought status levels, while potentially confusing to the public, is the new normal due to climate change causing rapid onset droughts and quick changes. After discussion, most task force members agreed to improve conditions to Level 0 – Normal Conditions.

Connecticut River Valley (CTRV) and Central – No comments for these Regions. The staff recommendation was to hold at Level 1. All Task Force members agreed to hold at Level 1 – Mild Drought.

Northeast – No comments for this Region. The staff recommendation was to hold at Level 1. All Task Force members agreed to hold at Level 1 – Mild Drought.

Southeast – Conditions have remained relatively similar to the previous month. The staff recommendation was to hold at Level 0. All task force members agreed to hold at Level 0 – Normal Conditions.

Cape Cod – No comments for this Region. The staff recommendation was to hold at Level 2. All task force members agreed to hold at Level 2 – Significant Drought.

Islands – There was discussion regarding an inconsistency in values from the 11/6/2025 DMTF meeting. The revised values are for groundwater and ET for October. The consensus was to keep the October declaration as is. For November, there was discussion about whether to keep the Islands split by county. Bentsen noted that similar to the Millers Basin compared to its Drought Region, Nantucket appears worse off than the Island Region itself. The staff recommendation was to hold at Level 2. Most task force members agreed to consider the Region as a whole and to hold at Level 2 – Significant Drought.

Individual River Basins – For the Millers River Basin the staff recommendation was to hold at Level 2. All Task Force members agreed to hold at Level 2 – Significant Drought.

Summary of Recommendations:

Southeast, Western: Level 0 – Normal Conditions

Northeast, CTRV, Central: Level 1 – Mild Drought

Cape Cod, Islands: Level 2 – Significant Drought

Millers River Basin: Level 2 – Significant Drought

6. Recommendations for Drought Level Response Actions

Patel summarized the recommendations for drought levels that had been discussed throughout the meeting.

7. Next Steps

The recommendations will be shared with the Secretary of EEA for a final decision on updated drought declarations. The Task Force will meet again in early January.

Meeting Ended: The meeting adjourned at 11:25 am.