

Massachusetts Drought Management Task Force – Meeting Summary

February 10, 2026, 9:30 am – 11:30 am 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)
Marcos Pareto, Department of Public Utilities (DPU)
John Gregoire, Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA)
Michael Botelho, Department of Agricultural Resources (MDAR)
Brian Loving, United States Geological Survey (USGS)
Kate Bentsen, Department of Fish and Game (DFG), Division of Ecological Restoration

Other Attendees:

Aisha Revolus	EEA	Jason Duff	DCR OWR
Alex Taylor	DPU	Justine Kent-Uritam	Town of Dover, Open Space Committee
Bailey Mullins	DCR OWR	Michael Blanchard	Town of Dover
Becca Dahl	State of CT	Michael Souza	MEMA
Benjamin Chan	Town of Wellesley	Peter Speck	NWS Albany
Brittany Segill	MassDEP	Pine duBois	Jones River Watershed Association
Caitlin LeDuc	Town of Natick	Purvi Patel	EEA
Crystal Stiles	CIRES/NOAA NIDIS	Sara Cohen	DCR OWR
Deanna Marks	NWS	Seth St Pierre	EEA/DCR Intern
Elizabeth McCann	MassDEP	Steve Cusick	Town of Needham
Emilia Dick Fiora del Fabro	Charles River Watershed Association	Tim Pasakarnis	Cape Cod Commission
Erin Graham	DCR OWR	Toni Stewart	DCR OWR
Garrett Stillman	Mass Rural Water	Vanessa Curran	DCR OWR
Giovanna Recinos	City of Salem	William Bercume-Brisbois	Town of Needham
Grace Manning	EEA/DCR Intern		
Jack Collins	Oak Bluffs Water District		

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 is being recorded for the purpose of meeting notes. She introduced herself and co-chair from MEMA, Ben Hiltunen. Hiltunen noted that the Task Force has now been meeting for close to 18 months and thanked everyone for their continued participation. He explained that since the last meeting, a statewide drought alert was sent out, as well as some targeted outreach to the most impacted areas. Hiltunen also encouraged everyone to review the Drought Management Plan given the continued drought conditions. Rao added that the interagency drought mission group met since the last Task Force meeting. Rao and Zoltay provided additional details on the Millers River Basin and an ongoing investigation into why that basin is experiencing more significant drought conditions than other parts of that region. Thus far, the data indicates that the Millers is simply getting less precipitation than the surrounding area, similar to how the two islands have been receiving very different precipitation patterns from each other.

2. Approval of January 9, 2026 DMTF Meeting Notes

The January 9 meeting notes were not sent out and would be sent out prior to next month's meeting and voted on at that meeting.

3. Updates on Current Conditions and Impacts

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

January brought 2-3.5" of precipitation accumulations across the Commonwealth. Departures ranged from 0.5 to 1.5 inches below normal. Snow Water Equivalent was generally 2-4" with some higher/lower amounts. Longer range precipitation departures show 3-month precipitation totals generally 60-100% of normal with greatest deficits in western MA and the Cape/Islands. The 6-month precipitation totals are generally 60-80% of normal with greatest deficits in Hampshire, Hampden, and Nantucket Counties. The 7-Day outlook is favorable for appreciable rainfall (0.75 – 1.5") and leaning toward above normal precipitation beyond 7 days.

Hydrologic: Brian Loving – USGS

Some streamflow stations are not reporting flow due to ice. Streamflow conditions declined further in January except for in the northern parts of the Western, CT River, and Central Drought Regions. Lowest conditions continue to be in the Cape and Islands. Groundwater levels declined at nearly every Climate Response Network well, relative to seasonal normals from December to January. The vast majority of these wells are at levels below the 25th percentile, and about half are below the 10th percentile.

Water Supply: Duane LeVangie – MassDEP

Generally, this is not a time of year in which there are water supply issues getting reported. However, one system recently requested an emergency declaration because a reservoir is not refilling normally. Their concerns are being exacerbated by one of their wells having high PFAS.

Water Supply: John Gregoire – MWRA

Quabbin is now slightly below normal levels for February (81.6% full). There is no transfer to Wachusett happening currently, but transfer might need to happen soon because Wachusett is at a record low elevation. Precipitation in their watershed through January is still below the 10-year, 5-year, and long-

term averages. Sudbury remains in its normal operating band. Foss is being slowly brought back up following the winter drawdown for invasive plant management.

Water Supply: Jennifer Pederson – MWWA

No suppliers have reported concerns.

Private Water Supply: Marco Pareto – DPU

Millbury, Oxford, and Sheffield Customers are in a Drought Level 2 zone (All nonessential 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 and Ponds of Plymouth customers are in a Drought Level 1 zone (Nonessential outdoor water use is allowed one day per week before 9:00 am and after 5:00 pm)

Pine Hills Customers are in a Drought Level 1 zone (Nonessential outdoor water use is allowed two days per week before 7:00 am and after 7:00 pm)

Wetlands: Tom Maguire – DEP

Not present at meeting. Notified Rao prior to meeting that MassDEP had not received any reports.

Fish and Game: Kate Bentsen – DER

No updates to report.

Massachusetts Rivers Alliance: Lydia Olson

Jones River Watershed Association reported that Silver Lake is down 32 inches. No other updates to report.

Water Supply Citizens Advisory Committee: Moussa Siri

Siri visited three sites and took photos of current conditions. He will share them so they can be included for future comparisons.

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 updates to report.

4. 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 traced recent hydrologic trends, noting that the drought began in mid-August 2024 and worsened through mid-October, resulting in record low streamflows. Precipitation in late November provided

temporary relief, and December's normal to above normal precipitation improved conditions. However, January's below normal precipitation caused declines again. Recovery in streamflow and groundwater began in March and April, except on the Cape and Islands. By mid-May, significant recovery had occurred across most of the state, and by the end of May there was above normal precipitation and more improvement overall across the state. In June/July, conditions were mixed, with some areas drying out and various recovery across the state. August 2025 brought significantly lower precipitation and worsening drought conditions. September brought continued low streamflow and impacts to groundwater, despite mostly normal precipitation (except for the Islands). In October, the state received beneficial precipitation and some modest recovery resumed. November was mostly status quo except for some recovery in the Western Region. December brought below normal to normal precipitation and continued impacts to streamflow and groundwater. Precipitation was normal in January, but it is tied up in snow and so there have been continued impacts to streamflow and groundwater. The most recent U.S. Drought Monitor shows worsening conditions in the southeast and Cape Cod.

The Standardized Precipitation Index (SPI) for January was mostly normal across the state, but again, the precipitation is tied up in snow. Zoltay explained that in the final summary table, the 2-month lookback would be used for the Western Region because it was recently cleared of drought, while the 9-month lookback would be used for most of the state that has continued to experience consistent drought conditions. For the Cape and Islands, the 12-month lookback would be used because the drought began earlier in those Regions. Considering these lookback periods, the SPI ranged from ISL 0 to ISL 3 across the state. A lot of stream gages are iced out and so not reporting. Available streamflow data shows mostly below-normal conditions, except for the CTRV Region which is at ISL 0. Groundwater is also mostly below normal except for the Western Region. Lakes and Impoundments are mixed, ranging from ISL1 to ISL 3 depending on the Region. Evapotranspiration and KBDI are not monitored during this time of year.

5. Discussion of Drought Level Recommendations by Region

Western – Both precipitation and lakes/impoundments have gone back into ISL 1, but groundwater is still normal. The staff recommendation was to hold at Level 0 and see how conditions change over the next month. All Task Force members agreed to hold the Western Region at Level 0 – Normal Conditions.

Connecticut River Valley (CTRV) – Groundwater is at ISL 2 and Lakes/impoundments is at ISL 1. The Millers Basin would be reviewed separately. The staff recommendation was to hold the Region at Level 1. There was discussion on the need to review how to handle streamflow data when a number of gages are impacted by ice. After discussion, all Task Force members agreed to hold the Western Region at Level 1 – Mild Drought.

Central – Indices are mixed, but groundwater and lakes/impoundments continue to be below normal. The staff recommendation was to hold at Level 2. All Task Force members agreed to hold the Central Region at Level 2 – Significant Drought.

Northeast – Conditions have gotten worse, with streamflow and lakes/impoundments at ISL 3 and groundwater at ISL 2. The staff recommendation was to hold at Level 2. All Task Force members agreed to hold the Northeast Region at Level 2 – Significant Drought.

Southeast – Conditions have gotten worse, with streamflow at ISL 3 and the other indices at ISL 2. The staff recommendation was to move to Level 2. All Task Force members agreed to move the Southeast Region to Level 2 – Significant Drought.

Cape Cod – Groundwater and lakes/impoundments have worsened, and all indices except precipitation are at ISL 2 or 3. The staff recommendation was to hold at Level 2. All Task Force members agreed to hold the Cape Cod Region at Level 2 – Significant Drought. Pederson commented that the Task Force may need to start looking at other SPI lookbacks in between 12 and 24 months for Regions that have been in drought for over 12 months.

Islands – Dukes County continues to show normal conditions, while Nantucket continues to show impacts. The staff recommendation was to consider the islands separately and keep Dukes County at Level 0. All Task Force members agreed to consider the islands separately and to hold Dukes County at Level 0 – Normal Conditions. Nantucket is still showing conditions reflective of Level 3 drought, so the staff recommendation was to hold this county at Level 3. All Task Force members agreed to hold Nantucket County at Level 3 – Critical Drought.

Individual River Basins – The Millers Basin has improved to some extent, but most indices are still showing impacts. After discussion, there was agreement to remove the special designation for the Millers Basin this month because the conditions are more similar to the rest of the Central Region.

Summary of Recommendations:

Southeast: Level 2 – Significant Drought

Northeast: Level 2 – Significant Drought

CTRV: Level 1 – Mild Drought

Central: Level 2 – Significant Drought

Western: Level 0 – Normal Conditions

Cape Cod: Level 2 – Significant Drought

Islands: Duke's County- Level 0 – Normal Conditions; Nantucket County- Level 3 – Critical 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 in the next couple of days. The focus of messaging will be on this being a winter drought and recommendations would focus on indoor water use and leak detection.

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 February. Rao may convene the Interagency Drought Mission Group since one area of the state is at Level 3 – Critical Drought.

Meeting Ended: The meeting adjourned at 11:17 am.