

Massachusetts Drought Management Task Force – Meeting Summary

January 9, 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
Thomas Maguire, MassDEP, Wetlands Program
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)
Joe Dellicarpini, NOAA – National Weather Service (NWS)
Moussa Siri, Water Supply Citizens Advisory Committee (WSCAC)
Alex Taylor, 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)

Other Attendees:

Aisha Revolus	EEA	Jimmy Powell	Jones River Watershed Association (JRWA)
Bailey Mullins	DCR OWR		
Chris Kluchman	EOHLC	John Scannell	DCR DWSP
Crystal Stiles	CIRES/NOAA NIDIS	Jonathan Flynn	CRWA
David Clemons	MA Dept of Fire Services	Justine Kent-Uritam	Town of Dover
Deanna Marks	NWS		
Edwin Sumargo	EEA	Luke White	Town of Yarmouth
Elizabeth McCann	MassDEP	Michael Souza	MEMA
Emilia Fiora	Charles River Watershed Association (CRWA)	Mike Retzky	Town of Needham
		Pine duBois	JRWA
Erin Graham	DCR OWR	Purvi Patel	EEA
Garrett Stillman	Mass Rural Water Association	Rob Faley	Town of Chatham
Giovanna Recinos	City of Salem	Toni Stewart	DCR OWR
Greg Lane	Next Generation Strategies, LLC	Vanessa Curran	DCR OWR
Jack Collins	Oak Bluffs Water District	William Bercume-Brisbois	Town of Needham
Jason Duff	DCR OWR		

1. Introduction

Patel called the meeting to order at 9:40 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 explained that Rao would be joining shortly to facilitate the meeting. Patel introduced herself and co-chair from MEMA, Ben Hiltunen. Hiltunen welcomed everyone and requested an update from federal partners on how their participation will be impacted if there is another government shutdown.

2. Approval of November 6, 2025 DMTF Meeting Notes

Carroll made a motion to approve the November 6 meeting notes with a second by Siri. The vote to accept was unanimous with one member abstaining because they were not present at the November meeting.

3. Updates on Current Conditions and Impacts

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

December brought 3-4" precipitation accumulations across the Commonwealth with pockets of higher/lower amounts. Departures ranged from 1 to 2+ inches below normal. The 3-month precipitation totals are generally 60-100% of normal with greatest deficits in western/northeastern MA and near to above normal for South Shore and Cape Cod. 6-month precipitation totals are generally 60-100% of normal with greatest deficits along and north of I-90 and Nantucket. The 7 Day outlook is favorable for appreciable rainfall (0.75 – 1.5") and leaning toward near normal precipitation beyond 7 days.

Hydrologic: Brian Loving – USGS

Streamflow conditions were similar to November's, declining slightly during the first half of December but improving slightly in the second half of the month. Lowest conditions were in the Cape and Islands, and in the northern part of the state east of the Connecticut River. Groundwater levels were also similar to November's conditions, but percent of normal declined slightly at nearly all wells. Water levels in all parts of the state were below or much below normal, except the Western Region.

Water Supply: Duane LeVangie – MassDEP

MassDEP has not heard from any PWSs that any systems are having difficulty meeting demands due to drought conditions. The only concerns reported have been regarding water quality.

Water Supply: John Gregoire – MWRA

Quabbin is 81.1% full which is in the normal range. There is no transfer to Wachusett currently happening. The releases to the Swift River are happening as normal. Wachusett is a little below normal but with low demand in the winter, there is no need yet to turn on the transfer from Quabbin. Precipitation in the MWRA system watershed remains below the 10-year, the 5-year, and the long-term averages. Sudbury Reservoir is in the normal range and the usual drawdown for invasive plant control is occurring in Foss Reservoir.

Water Supply: Jennifer Pederson – MWWA

No suppliers have reported concerns. Stockbridge says their reservoir has been overflowing since early November. Belchertown is seeing above average groundwater levels. Edgartown has no capacity concerns, and the residents seem to be taking the drought seriously.

Private Water Supply: Alex Taylor – DPU

No updates from Aquarion since October 6. They continue to operate under the September advisory, which was:

- 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

No reports from Conservation Commissions.

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

Not present at meeting.

Massachusetts Rivers Alliance: Lydia Olson

Mass Rivers received one report from the South Coastal Basin, specifically the Jones River at the Silver Lake outlet. The lake level has gone down slightly since December and water levels are very low in the river.

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

No updates to report.

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 recovery across parts of 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. The most recent U.S. Drought Monitor shows worsening conditions in central MA, Nantucket, and certain areas of southeast MA and Cape Cod.

The Standardized Precipitation Index (SPI) for December was variable with the eastern half of the state receiving less and therefore experiencing a larger precipitation deficit than the rest of the state. Zoltay explained that in the final summary table, the 6-month lookback would be used for most of the state, except for the Cape and Islands for which the 12-month lookback would be used because the drought began earlier in those Regions. Streamflow in December worsened across a lot of the state, ranging from ISL 1 to 3 depending on the Region. Groundwater also worsened across a lot of the state, ranging from ISL 0 in the Western Region to ISL 2 in several Regions. Lakes and Impoundments are mixed with mostly normal conditions except ISL 2 in the Northeast and Cape Cod Regions. Evapotranspiration and KBDI are not monitored during this time of year.

5. Discussion of Drought Level Recommendations by Region

Western – Precipitation and streamflow are below-normal, while groundwater is remaining somewhat steady. Rao requested Task Force members to review the conditions in the Housatonic and Hudson River Basins, both of which are showing primarily Level 1 – Mild Drought conditions. The initial staff recommendation was Level 1 for the entire Western Region. There was discussion over the discrepancy between the U.S. Drought Monitor and the state data for the Western Region (the U.S. Drought Monitor not showing drought conditions in the Western Region as clearly as the state indices). It was also noted that the 2-month lookback should be used for precipitation in the Western Region because drought status had been removed last month. After discussion, members were split with several agreeing to hold this Region at Level 0 – Normal Conditions and a few voting to move the Region to Level 1 – Mild Drought. A summary was provided to the Secretary after the meeting and it was decided to hold at Level 0 – Normal Conditions for the declaration.

Connecticut River Valley (CTRV) – Conditions continue to show Level 1 drought across most of this Region, while the Millers River Basin has worsened and is showing primarily Level 3 conditions. The staff recommendation was to hold the CTRV Region at Level 1 – Mild Drought and to consider the Millers Basin separately.

Central – Precipitation is right around normal, while the streamflow and groundwater are both at ISL 2. The staff recommendation was to move the Central Region to Level 2. There was brief discussion about the need to consider the impact of the Miller Basin on the Central Region, especially moving toward the spring. All members agreed to move this Region to Level 2 – Significant Drought.

Northeast – All indices are showing Level 2 conditions. The staff recommendation was to move the Northeast to Level 2. All members agreed to move this Region to Level 2 – Significant Drought.

Southeast – It was noted that the 2-month lookback for precipitation should be used because drought status was removed last month in this Region. Although this showed worsening precipitation compared to the 6-month lookback, the other indices are holding steady and the Region is expecting more rain in the

next seven days. There was a recommendation to consider individual river basins in the Southeast Region, but it was also noted that basin-scale designations are only used in special circumstances and considering the data are showing Level 1 conditions for the whole Region, the staff recommendation was to move the Southeast to Level 1. All members agreed to move the Southeast Region to Level 1 – Mild Drought.

Cape Cod – Streamflow conditions have been low for several months and remain low. Groundwater and lakes/impoundments are also still at ISL 2, and precipitation is at ISL 1. The staff recommendation was to hold the Cape at Level 2 – Significant Drought. There was discussion about looking into whether sewerage is affecting streamflow/groundwater levels on the Cape. After discussion, all members agreed to hold the Cape at Level 2 – Significant Drought.

Islands – Both precipitation and groundwater are at ISL 2 at the Regional scale. Duke’s County is primarily clear, while Nantucket still has very low precipitation and groundwater. There was discussion about discrepancies between precipitation stations that are very close to each other having very different levels. Zoltay and Dellicarpini explained that there are some discrepancies between the PRISM data and data received from the airport station that staff will investigate. It was noted that the Task Force should consider the communication to the public on how areas that are so close together can be experiencing such different conditions. After discussion, there was agreement to consider the two islands separately, and all members agreed to move Dukes County back to Level 0 – Normal Conditions and Nantucket County to Level 3 – Critical Drought, except one member who requested both islands be held at Level 2.

Individual River Basins – The Millers River Basin is showing primarily Level 3 conditions. All members voted to move the Millers Basin to Level 3 – Critical Drought.

Summary of Recommendations:

Southeast: Level 1 – Mild 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

Millers River Basin: 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 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 due to several parts of the state reaching Level 3.

Meeting Ended: The meeting adjourned at 11:16 am.