

Massachusetts Drought Management Task Force – Meeting Summary

May 19, 2025, 10:30 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)
Gardner Bent, United States Geological Survey (USGS)
Duane LeVangie, Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP), Water Management Act
Tom Maguire, MassDEP, Wetlands
Kate Bentsen, Department of Fish and Game (DFG)
Jennifer 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)
Dave Celino, DCR Fire
Anne Carroll, DCR OWR
Dalene LaPointe, Department of Public Health
John Gregoire, Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA)
Rob Megnia, NOAA – National Weather Service
John Scannell, DCR
Michael Botelho, Department of Agricultural Resources (MDAR)
Moussa Siri, Water Supply Citizens Advisory Committee (WSCAC)

Other Attendees:

Aaron Miller	Wellesley Water Division	James Zimmerman	Chester Water Department
Alan Taubert	Salem Beverly Water Supply	Jason Duff	DCR OWR
Allyssa Lane	Dedham-Westwood Water	Karyn Lothrop	MA-DCR Fire Control
Bailey Mullins	DCR OWR	Matt Comeau	Lynn Water & Sewer Commission
Becca Dahl	State of CT	Michael Souza	MEMA
Brittany Segill	MassDEP	Purvi Patel	EEA
Caitlin LeDuc	Town of Natick	Richard Dawe	Lynn Water & Sewer Commission
Casey Ciapciak	Natick Water Division	Sara Cohen	DCR OWR
David Michaluk	Seekonk Water District	Sharon Clement	Town of Danvers Public Works
Don Cooper	Medway Water Department	Thomas Lannan	Methuen Water
Elise Tarnauskas	Springfield Water & Sewer Commission	Toni Stewart	DCR OWR
Elizabeth McCann	MassDEP	Vanessa Curran	DCR OWR
Erin Graham	DCR OWR	William Chapman	Edgartown Water Department
Giovanna Recinos	City of Salem		
Heather Stayton	Westfield DPW-Water Division		

1. Introduction

Rao called the meeting to order at 10:30 a.m. and thanked everyone for accommodating the mid-month session. She reminded participants that mid-month meetings were not customary, but due to faster-than-expected improvements in drought conditions, the team deemed it prudent to review the latest data. She asked attendees to enter their names and affiliations in the chat and reminded them that the meeting would be recorded for the purposes of meeting notes. Rao introduced herself and her co-chair from MEMA, Ben Hiltunen. Hiltunen welcomed the attendees and expressed gratitude for their continued work on the Drought Management Task Force (DMTF).

2. Updates on Current Conditions and Impacts

Presentations supporting the updates are made available on the Mass.gov website [here](#). A summary of each is provided below.

Weather & Forecast – Rob Megnia, National Weather Service

In May, most of the state experienced above-normal precipitation to date. The Central and Western Regions received 2–4 inches above normal, eastern Massachusetts had 0.5–2 inches above normal, and the Cape and Islands received 0.5–1 inch above normal. Three- and six-month precipitation departures were near normal statewide, though parts of Western Massachusetts and the Cape and Islands remained below normal. Forecasts favored near- to above-normal precipitation through June 1, with a continued trend expected through August. Carroll asked if above-normal precipitation and temperature could balance each other out. Megnia responded that the impact would depend on how far temperatures deviated from normal.

3. Presentation of Index Severity Levels per MA DMP

Zoltay reminded attendees that the data presented reflected conditions through May 15. She 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 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.

She noted that the most recent U.S. Drought Monitor showed improvement in May compared to April. The Standardized Precipitation Index (SPI), though limited without the DCR stations monthly reporting, showed above-normal conditions across most of the state. The nine-month SPI still reflected early drought deficits. Evapotranspiration indices were elevated but had minimal actual

impact due to the limited volume (less than an inch). Streamflow's were mostly normal statewide, with some below-normal values in the East. The Cape remained at index severity level 2.

Maguire asked whether the absence of data from the Nantucket station was due to the use of NWS rather than DCR stations. Zoltay confirmed this may have been due to incomplete data submissions, which can exclude stations with excessive gaps. Groundwater levels were mixed, depending on well depth. Deep wells (>10 feet) took longer to recharge, while recent rainfall mostly influenced shallow wells. Most below-normal wells were in the east, especially the Cape and Islands. Groundwater index tables showed all regions at normal, except the Southeast, Cape, and Islands, which remained below normal. The Keetch-Byram Drought Index (KBDI) indicated normal conditions. Zoltay explained that in April, many indicators were below normal, but by mid-May, recovery had occurred. Data on lakes and impoundments were unavailable due to their monthly collection schedule.

Celino reported that fire conditions were no longer influencing drought status. With full green-up, spring fire activity had nearly ceased. Pederson shared that her organization had not received concerns from members but emphasized the need to discuss Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket separately. She cited a recent comment from Bill Chapman reporting that Edgartown's wells were in good condition. Rao agreed to review data from both regions during the discussion. Gregoire reported that the Quabbin Reservoir, which had previously dipped below normal, had gained about a foot in elevation—equivalent to 7.8 billion gallons—and had returned to normal range.

Maguire reported that the Taunton River at Bridgewater and the Freetown well remained below normal. He noted that Nantucket's station was missing data for two days, and he previously backfilled such gaps using nearby co-op stations. Zoltay responded that the automated Nantucket station had been excluded for some time due to its consistently low readings and confirmed ongoing efforts to expand the network using CoCoRaHS stations.

4. Discussion of Drought Level Recommendations by Region

The Task Force agreed to use the six-month look-back period to assess drought severity, as it best reflected current conditions. While evapotranspiration data showed deviations from historical norms, it was not used in determining recommendations because the total actual water loss was minimal.

Western & Connecticut River Valley (CTRV) – Six-month precipitation look-back indicated normal conditions. Streamflow and groundwater had fully recovered. The staff recommendation was to move both regions to Level 0 - Normal Conditions. The Task Force unanimously supported moving both regions to **Level 0 – Normal Conditions**.

Central – Conditions remained unchanged from the previous month and therefore there was agreement to keep this Region at **Level 0 – Normal Conditions**.

Northeast – Precipitation, streamflow, and groundwater levels all indicated normal conditions. The staff recommendation was to move the Region to a Level 0. The Task Force unanimously supported moving the Region to **Level 0 – Normal Conditions**.

Cape Cod – While precipitation appeared normal, streamflow and groundwater levels remained below normal. The Task Force unanimously supported keeping the Region at **Level 2 – Significant Drought**.

Southeast – Precipitation and streamflow were normal, but groundwater recovery lagged. The staff recommendation was to remain at a Level 1. While Pederson expressed interest in downgrading to Level 0, Gardner suggested considering a split within the region. Levangie mentioned recent storms missing the area. Rao advised caution against frequent status changes and there was no clear indication of full recovery in the entire region. After some discussion amongst the Task Force, it was decided to keep the region at a **Level 1 – Mild Drought**.

Islands – Precipitation levels were normal, but groundwater was taking longer to recover. Staff recommended Level 1 – Mild Drought for the Region. Pederson advocated separating the Islands for more accurate assessments, noting that the Vineyard’s data may not reflect Nantucket’s severity. Rao responded that neither island had shown full recovery. Zoltay presented data maps, showing only one real-time well, with perimeter wells reading normal and inland wells were below normal. A study on Vineyard groundwater patterns was ongoing. Rao noted the Task Force would reconvene in two weeks to reassess conditions. After some discussion amongst the Task Force, it was decided to recommend keeping the region at a **Level 1 – Mild Drought**.

Summary of Recommendations:

Western, CTRV, Central, Northeast-Level 0 Normal Conditions

Southeast, Islands- Level 1 Mild Drought

Cape Cod- Level 2 Significant Drought

5. Recommendations for Drought Level Response Actions

Rao invited final comments or recommendations from the group.

6. Next Steps

The recommendations would be forwarded to the Secretary for a final decision on updated drought declarations. The Task Force planned to meet again in June. The upcoming press release would note that while regional recovery had occurred, localized groundwater issues persisted. Rao reminded everyone that the next meeting was scheduled in two weeks, when conditions would be reassessed.

Meeting Ended: The meeting adjourned at 11:34 am.