

Massachusetts Drought Management Task Force – Meeting Summary

May 21, 2026, 10:00 am – 10:30 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)
John Gregoire, Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA)
Viki Zoltay, Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), Office of Water Resources (OWR)
Anne Carroll, DCR OWR
Dalene LaPointe, Department of Public Health (DPH)
Andrew Loconto, NOAA – National Weather Service (NWS)
Moussa Siri, Water Supply Citizens Advisory Committee (WSCAC)
Adam Kautza, DFG, MassWildlife
Thomas Maguire, MassDEP, Wetlands Program
Drew Foley, Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA)
Marcos Pareto, Department of Public Utilities (DPU)

Other Attendees:

Aaron Miller	Town of Wellesley	Keira Rice	Wellesley Water & Sewer Department
Alex Taylor	DPU	Mary Berner	Charles River Watershed Association
Bailey Mullins	DCR OWR	Matt Comeau	Lynn Water & Sewer Commission
Benjamin Chan	Town of Wellesley	Matt Prince	North Reading Water Superintendent
Brad Perron	Salem/Beverly Water Supply Board	Michael Souza	MEMA Meteorologist
Brian Sullivan	Town of Burlington	Mike Retzky	Town of Needham
Brittany Segill	MassDEP	Peter Speck	NWS Albany
Caitlin LeDuc	Town of Natick	Robert Worthley	Town of Foxborough
Crystal Stiles	CIRES/NOAA NDIS	Sandra Howland	City of Peabody
Danielle Burney	EEA	Sara Cohen	DCR OWR
Demetrios Vidalis	Town of Wellesley	Thomas Cusick	Needham Water Department
Elizabeth Mccann	MassDEP	Tim Pasakarnis	Cape Cod Commission
Giovanna Recinos	City of Salem	Todd Melanson	Billerica Water
Julie Greenwood-Torelli	Cambridge Water	Vanessa Curran	DCR OWR
Jason Duff	DCR OWR	William Paulitz	City of Peabody
Johannes Buchanan	EEA		
Julie Greenwood-Torelli	Cambridge Water Department		

1. Introduction

Rao called the meeting to order at 10:30 a.m. and thanked everyone for accommodating the mid-month session. Rao 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). Rao explained that this meeting would focus on conditions in the Northeast Region due to rapid degradation in conditions in this Region.

2. Updates on Current Conditions and Impacts

Weather & Forecast: Andrew Loconto – NOAA National Weather Service and Northeast River Forecasting Center

May precipitation across the Commonwealth ranged from 1 to 3 inches through May 18th, with a maximum over 3 inches in northwest Worcester County and a low of 1.5 inches in northeast Massachusetts. Most areas tracked 1 inch below normal for the month. The 3-month and 6-month trends ran at 80% to 100% of normal, though the Berkshires, northeast Massachusetts, and the Islands dipped to 40% to 60% of normal. The 7-day forecast projected up to 1 inch of rain for western Massachusetts and the Islands, but only 0.1 inches for the northeast. The 6 to 10 day outlook suggests near-normal rainfall and above-normal temperatures, while the 8 to 14 day period trends warmer and drier. The 3-month seasonal outlook leans toward above-normal precipitation and temperatures.

Water Supply: John Gregoire – MWRA

Wachusett Reservoir is in its normal range and the Quabbin Reservoir is below normal at 84.5% capacity. The Salem and Beverly Water Supply Board reported 100% capacity.

Water Supply: Jennifer Pederson – MWWA

Feedback from 13 suppliers in the Northeast region indicated variable conditions, though surface water systems are generally in good shape. While Haverhill reported its lowest levels for this time of year in 35 years, overall conditions across the surveyed northeast suppliers have not yet reached a critical threshold from a water supply perspective.

Massachusetts Rivers Alliance: Lydia Olson

Streamflows are very low across the Northeast, but Mass Rivers has heard specifically from the Charles River and the Ipswich River Watershed Associations that there are areas of their watersheds where they can't measure water depth because it is so low.

3. Presentation of Index Severity Levels per MA DMP

Zoltay reported that the U.S. Drought Monitor introduced D2 (MA Level 3) status across half of the Northeast region, with the remaining half tracking at D1 (MA Level 2). Overall precipitation trends remain below normal, highlighted by a cumulative deficit of 16.5 inches on the mainland since June 1, 2025. All look-back periods near the one-year mark show impacts across the board, placing the precipitation index at the 2nd percentile. The two-month ET index and topsoil moisture remain normal due to cooler weather, though recent hot conditions and active vegetation leaf-out are expected to accelerate precipitation uptake and further impact the hydrology. Streamflow presents the most severe decline, showing widespread 0 to 2 percentile conditions across the Northeast; out of 16 active gauges, 10 recorded 0 to 2 percentile levels, with several experiencing record lows. This reduced the regional streamflow median to the 1st percentile. This drop is driven by impaired groundwater base flows, with most regional monitoring wells tracking well below normal to place the groundwater index in the middle of the Index Severity Level (ISL) 2 range. ISLs declined significantly over the past two weeks, with both precipitation and streamflow degrading to Level 4 status, leading to a recommendation for a Level 3 – Critical Drought designation.

5. Discussion of Drought Level Recommendations by Region

Northeast – Rao opened the discussion by stating that a Level 3 – Critical Drought designation is warranted for the Northeast region due to plummeting hydrologic conditions, entering high-demand summer months, and an uncertain long-term forecast. Rao highlighted that while larger surface water reservoir systems are currently performing well, unrecovered regional groundwater storage has caused the Northeast to repeatedly backslide to critical drought thresholds after only a month or two of below-normal rainfall.

Gregoire asked if a decision to change the declaration mid-month would impact the reassessment of conditions in the Northeast Region in early June. Rao confirmed that this mid-month meeting would be followed by a standard review at the next scheduled DMTF meeting on Monday, June 8th. Pederson raised concerns regarding the administrative complexity of mid-month messaging changes for public water suppliers. Pederson noted that most regional systems had just finalized and distributed their public water restriction communications on May 8th making an immediate mid-month pivot highly difficult. Pederson emphasized the strict operational difference between Level 2 hand-held restrictions and Level 3 outright bans, adding that stable surface water systems do not currently require emergency measures, and vulnerable groundwater systems will independently escalate local restrictions regardless of the state's baseline declaration. Olson mentioned predictions of a strong El Niño pattern pointing toward hotter and drier weather, although there was discussion surrounding the issues with being able to predict how El Niño will affect summer weather patterns.

The staff recommendation was to move the Northeast Region to Level 3. After discussion, most Task Force members agreed to move to Level 3 – Critical Drought.

Summary of Recommendations:

Northeast: Level 3 – Critical Drought

6. Recommendations for Drought Level Response Actions

Rao summarized the recommendations for drought levels that had been discussed. Rao also outlined several immediate action items developed during a recent meeting of the Interagency Drought Mission Group. In accordance with the MA Drought Management Plan for Level 2 or higher declarations, there will be a statewide stakeholder conference call to take place during the second or third week of June. Because local drought enforcement often involves municipal councils, boards, and commissions, the state will use MEMA's emergency distribution lists within the next 10 days to alert Northeast municipal officials, emergency managers, police chiefs, and fire chiefs regarding changing conditions, water restrictions, and conservation actions. EEA will issue an official press release within the next few days. At Pederson's recommendation, EEA will look into utilizing the MA Municipal Association mailing list and will develop a companion fact sheet to explicitly clarify the drought status for local officials. Pederson also commented that communication with municipal officials should be sooner than mid-June. To address fire danger, DCR Fire Chief, MEMA, and the Division of Fire Services will design and distribute a database survey to local fire chiefs to collect ground-level, qualitative assessments of small, ungauged water bodies that fire departments traditionally rely on for fire suppression. Department of Public Health representatives will coordinate outreach to local Boards of Health to distribute information regarding private well impacts.

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 June.

Meeting Ended: The meeting adjourned at 10:40 am.