

Massachusetts Drought Management Task Force – Meeting Summary

November 6, 2025, 10:00 am – 12:00 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
 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
 Karyn Lothrop, DCR Fire
 Adam Kautza, DFG, MassWildlife
 Dalene LaPointe, Department of Public Health (DPH)
 Rob Megnia, NOAA – National Weather Service
 Moussa Siri, Water Supply Citizens Advisory Committee (WSCAC)
 Marcos Pareto, Department of Public Utilities (DPU)
 Caulin Lauzon, Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA)
 Michael Botelho, Department of Agricultural Resources (MDAR)

Other Attendees:

Aaron Miller	Town of Wellesley	Michael Souza	MEMA
Amber Siegel	CRWA	Patrick Cunningham	City of Worcester
Brad Chase	DMF	Paul Anderson	Brewster Water Department
Brittany Segill	MassDEP	Pine duBois	Jones River Watershed Association
Bruce Broisman	DPH		
Caitlin LeDuc	Town of Natick	Purvi Patel	EEA
Caitlin Spence	EEA	Rob Faley	Town of Chatham
Elise Tarnauskas	Springfield Water and Sewer Commission	Ron Strohsahl	Oxbow Associates, Inc.
		Sara Cohen	DCR OWR
Elizabeth McCann	MassDEP	Steve Cusick	Town of Needham
Ellie Kowalski	Town of Wellesley	Thomas Trainor	Sherborn Groundwater Protection Commission
Emily Maynard	City of Worcester		
Giovanna Recinos	City of Salem	Tim Pasakarnis	Cape Cod Commission
Jack Collins	Oak Bluffs Water District	Toni Stewart	DCR OWR
Jason Duff	DCR OWR	Vanessa Curran	DCR OWR
Jimmy Powell	Jones River Watershed Association	Vincent McCarthy	Company
		William Bercume-Brisbois	Needham Public Works
Justine Kent-Uritam	Town of Dover	William Chapman	Edgartown Water Department
Michael Blanchard	Town of Dover		

1. Introduction

Rao called the meeting to order at 10:03 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. Rao introduced herself and her co-chair from MEMA, Ben Hiltunen.

2. Approval of September 8 and October 8, 2025 DMTF Meeting Notes

Pederson made a motion to approve the September 8 meeting notes with a second by Lothrop. The vote to accept was unanimous.

Minor edits were requested to the October 8 meeting notes, including: 1) slight wording changes to clarify how WMA restrictions apply to registrants vs. permittees; 2) adding the year “2025” next to August in Zoltay’s summary of hydrologic conditions for clarification; and 3) correcting Todd Melanson as the representative for MWWA in place of Jen Pederson. LeVangie made a motion to accept the October 8 meeting notes with a second by Olson. The vote to accept with the minor edits was unanimous.

3. 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– NOAA National Weather Service (also representing the Northeast River Forecasting Center)

October brought 3-10” precipitation accumulations across the Commonwealth. Southeast MA received 3-6” above normal, while Central/Western MA and Nantucket received 0-1” below normal. Longer range precipitation departures show the 3-month lookback near normal for most of the state, below normal for central/west MA and Nantucket, and above normal for the South Shore. The 6-month lookback shows mostly near normal precipitation since May 1st, except the South Shore which is well above normal (120-140%) and Nantucket which is only 40-80% of normal. The 7-Day outlook is favorable for appreciable rainfall (0.25 – 0.75”), while the outlook is leaning near or below normal beyond 7 days.

Hydrologic: Gardner Bent – USGS

Not present at the meeting.

Water Supply: Duane LeVangie – MassDEP

No suppliers have notified MassDEP of any issues.

Water Supply: Caulin Lauzon – MWRA

Quabbin is at 82.4%. The transfer to Wachusett was recently shut off, so the Quabbin elevation is starting to stabilize. The Wachusett elevation was coming up with the rain in October, but with the transfer getting shut off and flow testing it is starting to come down. Precipitation in their watersheds is near the long-term average, which is much higher than September. Sudbury and Foss are at or near their normal operating range. Foss will be lowered through the month of November for planned gatehouse work and invasive species management.

Water Supply: Jennifer Pederson – MWWA

No suppliers have notified MWWA of any issues.

Private Water Supply: Marco Pareto – DPU

- Millbury, Oxford, and Sheffield Customers are in a Drought Level 2 - All non-essential outdoor water uses are banned, except the watering of ornamentals and flower gardens with drip irrigation, hand-hold hose or watering cans may be permitted.
- Dover Customers are in a Drought Level 1 - Non-essential 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 - 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 has had no communication with Conservation Commissions regarding low flows or low water levels.

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

No updates to report from Bentsen or Kautza. Chase noted that DMF is still seeing issues with juvenile river herring unable to migrate due to low flows. The eastern Cape ponds especially are struggling.

Massachusetts Rivers Alliance: Lydia Olson

Mass Rivers received verbal reports of conditions improving in certain parts of the state, especially in the Southeast, and some improvement in the Northwest (specifically the Hoosick River Watershed). However, despite the recent improvement, water levels in the Hoosick River Watershed are still below normal. DuBois noted the ongoing issues with the water levels in Silver Lake.

Water Supply Citizens Advisory Committee: Moussa Siri

Siri showed photos of streamflow conditions improving at multiple sites within the Quabbin watershed with rain in October.

Agricultural: Michael Botelho – DAR

No updates to report as it is the end of the agricultural season.

Fire Danger: Karyn Lothrop– DCR

No significant updates to report. There are still some drought impacts in the Central Region with higher KBDI, but there have been no serious impacts recently.

Engineering: John Scannell – DCR

Not present at meeting.

Public Health: Dalene LaPointe – DPH

No updates to report. Rao noted that she presented to the Boards of Health at their monthly meeting about the current drought and discussed impacts to private wells.

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. The most recent U.S. Drought Monitor showed some recovery in the southeastern part of the state.

The Standardized Precipitation Index (SPI) for September was mostly normal to above normal across the state. The precipitation deficit has improved but is still up to 6" in certain locations. Zoltay explained that in the final summary table, the 9-month lookback would be used for most of the state, except for the Cape and Islands for which we would be using the 12-month because the drought began earlier in those Regions. Evapotranspiration (ET) ranged from index severity level (ISL) 0 to level 3 across the state but is not a significant factor this time of year. Streamflow in October ranged from much below normal to above normal across the state, ranging from ISL 0 to ISL 2 depending on the Region. Zoltay explained that the Parker station is missing in the Northeast because a dam was breached for dam removal and the gage needs to be rebuilt. Groundwater is mixed, but there have been some improvements, especially in the Southeast Region. ISL for groundwater ranged from 0 to 3. KBDI has improved a lot across the state, with all Regions moving to either ISL 0 or 1. Lakes and Impoundments are mixed with mostly normal conditions except ISL 1 in the Northeast Region and ISL 2 in the Western Region.

5. Discussion of Drought Level Recommendations by Region

Western – Four of the six indices are still clearly in level 2. The staff recommendation was to hold at Level 2. All Task Force members agreed to hold at Level 2 – Significant Drought.

Connecticut River Valley (CTRV) and Central – Conditions have improved to an extent, although not all indices have recovered. Streamflow and groundwater are still at ISL 1 for both Regions. The staff recommendation was to improve these Regions to Level 1 – Mild Drought. There was discussion on how the conditions in certain basins might be impacting the Regional averages. After discussion, all Task Force members agreed to move to Level 1 – Mild Drought.

Northeast – The Region has seen improvement since last meeting, particularly for precipitation and streamflow. However, groundwater has gotten worse, and three indices are still at level 1. The U.S. Drought Monitor also shows drought conditions remaining in the Northeast. It was also noted that this is one of the most urbanized Regions and therefore a lot of the recent rain probably ran off instead of recharging the groundwater. The staff recommendation was to hold at Level 1. All Task Force members agreed to hold at Level 1 – Mild Drought.

Southeast – Conditions have improved overall. The staff recommendation was to move the Southeast to Level 0 – Normal Conditions. All Task Force members agreed to move to Level 0 – Normal Conditions.

Cape Cod – There has not been as much improvement on the Cape. Four indices are still at ISL 2, and there are still reports of low streamflows impacting fish migrations. The staff recommendation was to hold at Level 2. All Task Force members agreed to hold at Level 2 – Significant Drought.

Islands – The two islands are still experiencing different impacts, so were considered separately again. Nantucket County is still lagging in recovery, with groundwater still at ISL 2. Precipitation is also still much below normal. However, groundwater is trending upward. The staff recommendation was to discuss either holding Nantucket County at Level 3 or moving to Level 2. There was discussion on the fact that Nantucket received a decent amount of precipitation in October, but that it will take time for the 12-month deficit to recover. Groundwater for Dukes County has decreased and is now at ISL 2, and precipitation is still at ISL 1. The staff recommendation was to move Dukes County to Level 2 – Significant Drought. After discussion, Task Force members were asked to vote on Level 2 – Significant Drought for both counties, which would result in a Regional declaration of Level 2 for the Islands. All Task Force members agreed on Level 2- Significant Drought for the Islands Region. Pederson requested that it be noted that Edgartown reported no water supply issues.

Individual River Basins – The Deerfield Basin saw considerable improvements. There was unanimous support for Level 1 designations at the watershed scale, which would align it with the Regional declaration.

The Millers River Basin has not seen the same improvements and still has streamflow, groundwater, and ET at ISL 2. The staff recommendation was to continue to recommend a watershed-scale declaration for this basin. There was unanimous support for moving the Millers Basin to Level 2 – Significant Drought (compared to Level 1 – Mild Drought for the Central Region).

Summary of Recommendations:

Southeast: Level 0 – Normal Conditions

Northeast, CTRV, Central: Level 1 – Mild Drought

Western, Cape Cod, Islands: Level 2 – Significant Drought

Millers River Basin: Level 2 – Significant 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 interagency mission group will continue to meet because there are still Regions in Level 2. Messaging will start to pivot from outdoor water conservation to indoor water conservation because of the change in season. The drought alert will be issued and information from that alert will be pulled out for use on Instagram. Task Force members are encouraged to follow the @MassWaters Instagram page. There was a request to note that public water suppliers are not expressing supply concerns in all communications.

There was a note to be cautious about switching back and forth between communication about floods and droughts without proper framing to avoid confusing the public. This prompted discussion on continuing to work toward a coordinated communication strategy.

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 December.

Meeting Ended: The meeting adjourned at 11:44 am.