

# **Massachusetts Drought Management Task Force – Meeting Summary**

## **October 8, 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  
 Todd Melanson, 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  
 Dave Celino, DCR Fire  
 Dalene LaPointe, Department of Public Health (DPH)  
 Joe Dellicarpini, 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)  
 Caulin Lauzon, Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA)

### **Other Attendees:**

Alan Taubert	Salem/Beverly Water Supply Board	Jimmy Powell	Jones River Watershed Association
Alex Taylor	DPU	Joe Holbeche	DMF
Allyssa Lane	Dedham-Westwood Water District	Karyn Lothrop	DCR Fire
Bailey Mullins	DCR	Michael Blanchard	Town of Dover
Barbara Moran	WBUR	Michael Souza	MEMA
Becca Dahl	State of CT	Mike Xavier	Citizen
Brad Chase	DMF	Mike Retzky	Town of Needham
Brittany Segill	MassDEP	Molly Herring	Boston Globe
Bruce Broisman	DPH	Patrick Cunningham	Worcester DPW
Caitlin LeDuc	EEA	Peter King	Town of Newburyport
Caitlin Spence	Town of Natick	Pine duBois	Jones River Watershed Association
Carys Lustig	Town of Needham	Purvi Patel	EEA
Crystal Stiles	CIRES/NOAA NIDIS	Rob Faley	Chatham DPW
Don Cooper	Medway Water Dept	Rob Megnia	NWS Boston
Elizabeth McCann	MassDEP	Sara Cohen	DCR OWR
Emilia Dick Fiora	CRWA	Steven Cheney	Whitinsville Water Company
Emily Maynard	City of Worcester	Thomas Trainor	Sherborn Groundwater Protection Commission
Erin Graham	DCR OWR	Toni Stewart	DCR OWR
Giovanna Recinos	City of Salem	Vanessa Curran	DCR OWR
Heather Stayton	City of Westfield	William Bercume-	Town of Needham
Jack Collins	Oak Bluffs Water District	Brisbois	
Jason Duff	DCR OWR		

## **1. Introduction**

Rao called the meeting to order at 10:05 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, 2025 DMTF Meeting Notes**

Rao noted that the notes were not sent out in time for review and that next meeting would include votes on two sets of meeting notes.

## **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)

In September, there was 3-6" precipitation accumulations across the Commonwealth. Departures generally ranged from 0.5-1.5 inches below normal. Southeast MA received 0.5 – 1.5 inches above normal, with the Cape/Islands 1.5 to 3" below normal. Longer range precipitation departures are calling for 3-month deficits for most of the state (40-80% of normal) and 6-month precipitation within 20% of normal across most of MA, except Nantucket (40-60% of normal last 6 months). The 7-Day outlook is favorable for appreciable rainfall.

### **Hydrologic:** Gardner Bent – USGS

Not present at the meeting.

### **Water Supply:** Duane LeVangie – MassDEP

MassDEP has not heard specifically about any concerns from suppliers. MassDEP Restrictions in WMA permits generally ended on September 30th. Permitted suppliers implement restrictions based on their system's conditions after September 30<sup>th</sup>. Registered suppliers should continue to communicate to the public that the state is still in a drought (if applicable for their Regions) and to advise efficient use of water.

Rao asked if there was a way for MassDEP to encourage suppliers to continue sending the state updates on the restrictions they have in place. LeVangie explained they would be sending out a letter with that information. Melanson noted that many residents have already scheduled their systems to be winterized and so outdoor water use has already started dropping.

### **Water Supply:** Caulin Lauzon – MWRA

Quabbin is at 83.6% full. MWRA updated their webpage to notify people that the state is in drought and encouraging people to use water efficiently. Wachusett is in the normal range and the Quabbin transfer is still active. Precipitation in the watersheds is still below long-term averages for the month of September and has been for a lot of the summer. Sudbury and Foss Reservoirs are both at the low-end of normal. They have not been moving water out of these two reservoirs due to the limited rain this summer.

### **Water Supply:** Todd Melanson – MWWA

No concerns have been reported over supply. Only water quality issues have been reported. In the Northeast, Groton reported that they do not have any supply side issues at this time – consumption is going down as irrigation systems are coming off-line. Overall, pumping has been reduced by 15% to 20% since their peak. In the Central Region, Leominster reported that they last checked their reservoir levels on September 18 and they were at 66.4 % Reservoir Capacity. That was before the 1.7 inches of rain received last Wednesday and Thursday (9/24 & 9/25), so conditions are looking acceptable at this time.

**Private Water Supply: Alex Taylor – DPU**

Aquarion updates:

- 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**

Maguire reviewed the September and last 14 days reports from WaterWatch (USGS) which show below-normal streamflows for much of the state. Over the last 7 days and as of yesterday, the low streamflows have intensified. He also showed photos showing perennial rivers with essentially no flow due to the drought conditions.

Taylor noted that he is on the Shawsheen River almost every day and said he could start providing photos of water levels. DuBois noted that southeastern MA has been experiencing extremely low streamflows and noted that environmental issues should be considered more with considerations of water use restrictions. Melanson reminded that there are implications for water quality in addition to water supply that have to be considered.

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

Bentsen gave a brief update including a report from DER staff in the Southeast Region of some dry streams in Weymouth, as well as a report of a recent fish kill due to low flow conditions on a tributary to the Monaquot River in Braintree.

Chase noted that they are keeping an eye on gage stations and river flows and are trying to get juvenile river herring out of spawning grounds. The recent rain only gave a brief improvement to river flows and then they receded, so it is still a concerning year for fish migrations.

**Massachusetts Rivers Alliance: Lydia Olson**

Olson showed photos from reports demonstrating low flows and/or water levels in the following watersheds: Hudson River Watershed (Brown Street in North Adams); Housatonic River Watershed (Bel Air Dam in Pittsfield); Deerfield River Watershed (Cold River in Savoy); Westfield River Watershed (Keystone Arches in Chester); Mystic River Watershed (Alewife Brook, in Arlington); Neponset River Watershed (Unquity Brook in Milton); South Coastal Watershed (Silver Lake in Kingston); Taunton River Watershed (Assawompset Pond Complex in Lakeville); and Cape Cod Watershed (Cornelius Pond in Harwich).

**Water Supply Citizens Advisory Committee: Moussa Siri**

Siri showed photos from the Quabbin area which show low streamflows, including near the entrance to the reservoir, Atherton Brook on 202, Keystone Bridge, North Quabbin at Gate 36 low levels (with note that this is somewhat artificial because of the transfer to Wachusett), Swift River Each Branch, and the CT River at Northampton.

**Agricultural: Michael Botelho – DAR**

No reports of concerns. The field season has ended and the first frost is expected soon. It was a good production year overall. Rao asked about hay production, which Botelho responded that MDAR does not track.

**Fire Danger: Dave Celino – DCR**

There have been 1,022 fires so far for the year with a little over 900 acres burned. There have not been very strong winds which has helped. The fuels are still very dry which has caused some fires starting overnight. They are keeping an eye on the coastal storm over the weekend.

**Engineering: John Scannell – DCR**

No updates to report.

**Public Health: Dalene LaPointe – DPH**

LaPointe provided the following link for the most recent update on cyanobacteria blooms:

<https://www.mass.gov/alerts/harmful-cyanobacterial-bloom-advisories-in-massachusetts-current-as-of-october-6-2025>. Moran asked how drought impacts Harmful Algal Blooms. LaPointe replied that drought and heat cause blooms to last longer.

Rao noted that the Interagency Drought Mission Group has been discussing how to better assist private well owners that have issues during droughts and will keep the Task Force posted as information becomes available.

**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). She noted that the most recent U.S. Drought Monitor was now showing drought across all of the state.

The Standardized Precipitation Index (SPI) for September was mostly normal for a lot of the state, with the exception of the Islands Region. Zoltay explained that in the final summary table, the 3-month

lookback would be used for most of the state, except for the Cape and Islands we would be using the 9-month because the drought has been ongoing in those Regions. Evapotranspiration (ET) ranged from index severity level (ISL) 0 to level 3 across the state, but has not been a significant factor in the current drought. Streamflow in September was much below normal in many parts of the state ranging from ISL 1 to ISL 3 depending on the Region. Impact to groundwater is starting to be seen across the state, with levels ranging from normal in the Northeast to ISL 3 for the Islands. KBDI showed drying of the top eight inches of soil moisture, with all Regions in ISL 2 except the Southeast which is at ISL 1. Lakes and Impoundments are mixed with mostly normal conditions except ISL 1 in the Central Region and ISL 2 on Cape Cod.

## **5. Discussion of Drought Level Recommendations by Region**

**Western** – Precipitation has improved since the last meeting, but streamflow has gotten worse and now at level 3, and the other indices are also still below normal. The staff recommendation was for either Level 1 or Level 2, awaiting Task Force discussion. There were multiple recommendations to hold at Level 2 because of the very low streamflow levels and the fact that groundwater decreased by 14 percentile points since last meeting. All Task Force members agreed to hold at Level 2 – Significant Drought.

**Connecticut River Valley (CTRV)** – Conditions are still indicating significant drought with not much change since last meeting, so the staff recommendation is to hold at Level 2. All Task Force members agreed to hold at Level 2 – Significant Drought.

**Northeast** – The Region has seen improvement since last meeting, particularly for precipitation and streamflow. The staff recommendation was to move from Level 2 to Level 1. All Task Force members agreed to move to Level 1 – Mild Drought.

**Central** – Precipitation has improved to some extent, but groundwater has gotten worse and streamflow and KBDI are still at level 2. After discussion, all Task Force members agreed to hold at Level 2 – Significant Drought.

**Southeast** – Precipitation has improved, but overall, the Regional scale is still showing Level 1 drought conditions. The Staff recommendation was to hold at Level 1. All Task Force members agreed to hold at Level 1 – Mild Drought.

**Cape Cod** – Precipitation and streamflow have improved somewhat since last month, but most indices are still at ISL 2. 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 has extremely low precipitation and all other indices are at level 2 or 3. The staff recommendation was to move Nantucket County to Level 3. Most Task Force members agreed to move Nantucket County to Level 3 – Critical Drought, with one member recommending holding at Level 2 for consistency considering the rain in the forecast. Dukes County is not quite as impacted, with groundwater still normal. However, conditions have gotten worse since the last meeting. The staff recommendation was to move from Level 0 to Level 1. All Task Force members agreed to move Dukes County to Level 1 – Mild Drought.

**Individual River Basins** – The Deerfield and Millers River Basins are both clearly showing Level 3 conditions, so there was unanimous support for Level 3 designations at the watershed scale. Buzzards Bay is showing slightly worse conditions than the rest of the Southeast Region, especially streamflow and groundwater. However, there was discussion that basin-level designations should be reserved for very stark differences when compared to the rest of the Region. Most Task Force members agreed to aligning Buzzards Bay with the rest of the Southeast (Level 1 – Mild Drought).

**Summary of Recommendations:**

Southeast, Northeast: Level 1 – Mild Drought

CTRV, Western, Cape Cod, Central: Level 2 – Significant Drought

Islands: Nantucket County- Level 3 – Critical Drought; Dukes County- Level 1 – Mild Drought

Deerfield and Millers River Basins: 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 intra-regional differences would be noted. There was also a recommendation to add that the whole state is in some level of drought and so everyone should be prioritizing efficiency. Hiltunen reminded agencies to review the state’s DMP as a reminder of their responsibilities for more significant drought levels.

**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 November.

**Meeting Ended:** The meeting adjourned at 12:05 pm.