

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

### **September 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)  
 Gardner Bent, United States Geological Survey (USGS)  
 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  
 Adam Kautza, DFG, MassWildlife  
 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)  
 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)  
 John Scannell, DCR  
 Michael Botelho, Department of Agricultural Resources (MDAR)

#### **Other Attendees:**

Aaron Miller	Town of Wellesley	Emilia Dick Fiora	CRWA
Aisha Revolus	EEA	Emily Maynard	City of Worcester
Alan Taubert	SBWSB	Erin Graham	DCR OWR
Allyssa Lane	Dedham-Westwood Water District	Giovanna Recinos	City of Salem
Anna Nagy	Town of Dover	Heather Stayton	Westfield DPW
Bailey Mullins	DCR OWR	Heather Clish	Mass Rivers Alliance
Becca Solomon	Ashland Conservation Department	Jack Collins	Oak Bluffs Water District
Becca Dahl	CT Office of Policy and Management	Jason Pollender	USGS
Bob Daley	Town of Chester	Jason Duff	DCR OWR
Brad Chase	DMF	Jimmy Powell	Jones River Watershed Association
Brittany Segill	MassDEP	Jon Gervais	City of Worcester
Bruce Broisman	DPH	Justine Kent-Uritam	Town of Dover
Caitlin Spence	EOEEA	Karyn Lothrop	DCR
Caitlin LeDuc	Town of Natick	Matthew Lanen	Falmouth Water Department
Carys Lustig	Town of Needham	Megha Sudheendra	Worcester Water Operations
Chris McCarthy	McCarthy Realty Trust	Melissa Nowitz	Concord Water
Demetrios Vidalis	Wellesley Water and Sewer	Michael Retzky	Town of Needham
Diane Young	Ipswich Resident	Michael Souza	MEMA
Elizabeth McCann	MassDEP	Michael Blanchard	Town of Dover

Patrick Cunningham	Worcester DPW	Sharon Clement	Town of Danvers DPW
Paul Cicchetti	USGS	Shavaun Callahan	City of Gloucester
Pine duBois	Jones River Watershed Association	Steve Cusick	Town Of Needham
Purvi Patel	EEA	Thomas Trainor	Sherborn Groundwater Protection Commission
Rachael Belisle-Toler	Ipswich Water Department	Todd Melanson	Billerica DPW
Rob Faley	Town of Chatham DPW	Toni Stewart	DCR OWR
Ron Strohsahl	Oxbow Associates, Inc.	Vanessa Curran	DCR OWR
Sam Banas	USGS		
Sara Cohen	DCR		

## 1. Introduction

Rao called the meeting to order at 10:06 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. Hiltunen also thanked everyone for joining the meeting and lending support to the Task Force initiatives. He reminded agency representatives to review the state's DMP and the specific action items required by each agency.

## 2. Approval of August 6, 2025 DMTF Meeting Notes

Rao invited a motion to accept the August 6, 2025 meeting notes. Pederson made the motion with a second from Siri. The vote passed unanimously of those present.

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

In August, precipitation departures were generally 1-2 inches below normal for most of Massachusetts. There were some pockets of near- to above-normal precipitation in central MA. The 3-month deficits for most of the state are 40-80% of normal, while the 6-month precipitation is near-normal. Sections of the Cape and Islands are also still below normal (40-60% of normal). The 7-Day Outlook is very dry with a chance for precipitation over southeast MA/Cape on Wednesday and no strong signal for above or below normal precipitation in the long-range forecast (beyond 10 days).

Maguire asked Dellicarpini to comment on whether Fitchburg and North Adams broke their all-time low precipitation record for the month of August. Dellicarpini said he was not sure, but that he could follow up after the meeting. He indicated that the data Maguire was seeing was most likely accurate.

### Hydrologic: Gardner Bent – USGS

August streamflow conditions generally declined as conditions in the northwest, north central, southeast parts of the state, and Cape Cod were mainly below normal. Streamflow conditions in southwestern and south central Massachusetts were mainly normal. August groundwater level conditions in the northwest, north central, northeast, southeastern parts of the state, and Cape Cod and the Islands were mainly below normal. An area across the southwest and south central parts of the state into the metro-west area

had groundwater level conditions that were mainly normal with a few wells having below normal conditions.

Pederson asked why there was an extra dot on the Cape on the August map. Bent explained that the Yarmouth 93 well was converted to real-time data collection in August. Here is a link to the data: [Ma-yaw 93 Yarmouth, MA - USGS Water Data for the Nation](#)

Siri asked why the Chicopee well was lower than surrounding wells. Bent explained that the recharge tends to be slower in that location because of the geology. Pollender added the following link for the Chicopee data: [Ma-cmw 95R Chicopee, MA - USGS Water Data for the Nation](#)

**Water Supply: Duane LeVangie – MassDEP**

151 PWS's are currently implementing restrictions (compared to 143 last meeting). 13 are voluntary and 138 mandatory. Of the mandatory, 46 are limiting to 1 day or less, and 92 are allowing 2 days or more. As of September 5<sup>th</sup>, 37 stream gages are below the trigger level. Three of the USGS monitoring wells were below trigger for July/August. 24 stream gages have hit the 7-day low flow. Two systems have emergency declarations, but both are water quality driven and not drought related. LeVangie reminded that MassDEP's restrictions go through September, but they encourage communities to continue restrictions depending on drought conditions.

Melanson asked if the trigger LeVangie mentioned is for suppliers that choose the stream gage triggers instead of calendar restrictions, which LeVangie confirmed was correct.

Solomon noted that Hopedale is shown as 1 day or less on that map, whereas as of July 18, 2025 they banned all outdoor water use. Ashland also increased their ban five days ago, banning all use as well. Stayton noted that as of the removal of the drought declaration in May of 2025, Westfield removed their restrictions as of May 22, 2025. Belisle-Toler noted that Ipswich is in their local severe drought status. Rao commented that the information presented on the maps was only what was submitted by suppliers. Pederson provided the link to the restrictions reporting form: <https://www.mass.gov/doc/notification-of-outdoor-water-use-restrictions-0/download>.

DuBois asked what trigger Brockton responds to, to which LeVangie responded that MassDEP is working on Brockton's permit currently.

**Water Supply: Caulin Lauzon – MWRA**

Quabbin is at 86.6% full, which is still above normal, although they expect some drop with recent dry weather. Wachusett is in line with the 10-year average and the Quabbin transfer is still on so it is staying steady. Precipitation in their combined watersheds is in line with long-term averages mostly due to one big rain event, but numbers are dropping because of the recent dry weather. Sudbury and Foss Reservoirs are staying steady and within their normal operating bands.

**Water Supply: Jennifer Pederson – MWWA**

The only PWS in the MWWA network that has concerns currently is Ipswich, which has a total watering ban in place. Pederson encouraged any PWS's that are in the meeting to put comments in the chat.

Belisle-Toler requested language be added to the drought status webpage to explain the retroactive nature of drought designations, and why some water suppliers might declare more severe drought

statuses than the state. She also suggested meeting more frequently during the summer and for an easier way for water suppliers to directly sign up to be on a drought information distribution list.

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

Not present at meeting. The following updates were provided by email. Aquarion Water Company has the following water restrictions in place:

- Millbury: Non-essential outdoor water use is allowed **three or four days per week** between 5:00 pm and 9:00 am
- Ponds of Plymouth and Dover: Non-essential outdoor water use is allowed **two days per week** before 9:00 am and after 5:00 pm
- Pine Hills: 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 shared several photos showing low streamflow and pond levels, primarily in the Sudbury River (Northeast Region); Becca Solomon (conservation agent for the Town of Ashland) provided additional comments on the photos. He showed Bloods Pond in Hopkinton which has dropped significantly. The Central and Southeast Region also had low streamflows which were highlighted.

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

Bentsen showed data from two monitoring stations in the Central Region (Browns Brook and Parkers Brook). Browns Brook is typically more responsive to low precipitation, whereas Parkers Brook is typically more buffered from drought conditions. Parkers Brook is showing levels similar to the 2020 and 2022 droughts. Streamflows for Browns Brook have been much more variable this year. Bentsen also noted that she has seen water levels dropping at other sites around the state.

Kautza added that streams across the state are getting dry which has concern for fish spawning habitat. Chase reiterated the concern over low flows causing concerns for juvenile river herring migration.

Pederson asked what Chase meant when he referred to “water supply watersheds”. Chase explained that these are watersheds which have river herring runs in coastal watersheds but also have water supplies, which tend to be difficult locations to get juveniles river herring out in the summer and fall. These systems often need managed releases to maintain fish migrations.

**Massachusetts Rivers Alliance: Lydia Olson**

Twelve watersheds reported concerns across the state, including sites on the Hoosic River in Downtown North Adams (Hudson River Watershed), the North River in Shelburne (Deerfield River Watershed), the Fall River in Otis (Farmington River Watershed), Cascade Brook in Worcester (Blackstone River Watershed), the Concord River in Concord (Concord River Watershed), the Ipswich and Parker Rivers (Ipswich/Parker River Watersheds), the Charles River in Newton (Charles River Watershed), Unquity Brook in Milton (Neponset River Watershed), Fall Brook in Freetown (Taunton River Watershed), and Sand Lake in Harwich (Cape Cod Watershed).

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

Siri explained discussions that the water conservation subcommittee for WSCAC has been having including the possible benefits of irrigation metering.

**Agricultural: Michael Botelho – DAR**

Not present at meeting.

**Fire Danger: Dave Celino – DCR**

There have been 21 fires over the last seven days, which is not unexpected because of the dryness. The largest fire was only three acres, and the rest were all under one acre. There have been six lightning strike fires which is a pattern they are monitoring. They expect ignition to be low over the next several days because of the recent rain event. The biggest concern for the rest of the month is the potential for a substantial dry period similar to last fall. No fire restrictions are in place yet for southern New England.

**Engineering: John Scannell – DCR**

No updates to report.

**Public Health: Irena Draksic – DPH, Bruce Broisman - DPH**

Broisman noted there are 40 active cyanobacteria blooms. Pederson asked how this number compares to past years. Draksic replied that they have been tracking blooms since 2008 and this year has the highest number since that tracking began. She noted that the data is posted online at:

<https://www.mass.gov/algae-blooms>.

**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. Zoltay noted that the most recent U.S. Drought Monitor was showing the northern half of the state experiencing very dry conditions, as well as parts of the Southeast, Cape, and Islands.

The Standardized Precipitation Index (SPI) for August was significantly below normal for a lot of the state. Zoltay explained that in the final summary table, the 3-month lookback would be used for most of the state, except the Cape and Islands 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 ISL 2 across the state. Streamflow in August was much below normal in many parts of the state, with the index ranging from ISL 1 to ISL 3 depending on the Region. Groundwater varied across the state, with mostly normal levels but drying conditions starting to be seen. The Cape and Islands are both still at ISL 2 for groundwater. Certain areas are starting to lower, especially the eastern part of the Cape and Nantucket. KBDI showed drying of the top eight inches of soil moisture, with all Regions in ISL 2 and one in level 3. Lakes and Impoundments was mixed with normal conditions in the Western, CTRV, and Southeast, ISL 1 in Central and Northeast, and the Cape at ISL 2.

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

**Western** – Precipitation is already at level 3 and streamflow, ET, and KBDI are at level 2. Groundwater is also trending down. The staff recommendation was to move the Western Region to Level 2 – Significant Drought. All Task Force members agreed on Level 2.

**Connecticut River Valley (CTRV)** – Precipitation has decreased significantly since last meeting and is now at level 2. Streamflow is also below normal, and ET/KBDI are both at level 2. Groundwater is also trending downward. The staff recommendation was to move the CTRV Region to Level 2 – Significant Drought. There was discussion on the difference between the northern and southern parts of the CTRV Region. The majority of Task Force members agreed on Level 2, with one recommendation for the press release noting the differences between the north/south.

**Central** – Precipitation and streamflow have both decreased significantly to level 2. The other indices have also gotten worse, with KBDI reaching level 3. The staff recommendation was to move the Central Region to Level 2 – Significant Drought. There was discussion on the fact that indices were showing the potential for Level 1 – Mild Drought last meeting and the decision was made to hold at Level 0. The majority of Task Force members agreed on Level 2.

**Northeast** – Similar to other Regions, precipitation and streamflow both decreased in the Northeast as well. All other indices have also decreased. The staff recommendation was to move the Northeast Region to Level 2 – Significant Drought. All Task Force members agreed on Level 2.

**Southeast** – The Southeast has slightly better conditions than other Regions. Precipitation and streamflow are both at level 1. Other indices are still normal, except KBDI which is at level 2. The staff recommendation was to move the Southeast Region to Level 1 – Mild Drought. All Task Force members agreed on Level 1.

**Cape Cod** – Conditions have worsened since last meeting. Streamflow is now at level 3 and all other indices are at level 2. The staff recommendation is to keep the Cape at Level 2 – Significant Drought. All Task Force members agreed on Level 2.

**Islands** – Groundwater, ET, and KBDI are all showing drying conditions. Groundwater is still normal, but the Islands have an especially long lag time for groundwater to reflect dry conditions. The first vote was for whether the two islands should still be designated at the county level (Nantucket County and Dukes County). Most Task Force members agreed that the two islands should be separated, with one member concerned with the separation because the data are aggregated. There was also discussion on whether the Task Force would ever go back to looking at the two islands together now that they have had separate designations for two months. Rao and Zoltay explained that the two islands have seen different impacts during this drought which is why they are being kept separate for now. The staff recommendation was to move Nantucket County to Level 2- Significant Drought and keep Dukes County at Level 0- Normal Conditions. The majority of Task Force members agreed.

### **Summary of Recommendations:**

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

Southeast: Level 1 – Mild Drought

Islands: Nantucket County- Level 2 – Significant Drought; Dukes County – Level 0 – Normal Conditions

## **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 communication should come out in the next couple of days.

Regarding the recommendation to meet more frequently during the summer, Rao explained that the Task Force meets more frequently when needed, but there are some limitations for when data is received. There are also considerations over messaging if declarations were to get changed on a weekly basis.

Another recommendation was made that the Task Force should work towards getting more “real time” data evaluation for declarations, as well as communicating to the public that they should follow the recommendations of their local water systems. Lastly, there was a recommendation to review the language in the letter on restrictions that MassDEP sends to suppliers for the last few weeks of the regulatory season.

Rao reminded attendees of the new Instagram account ([@MassWaters](#)) for water policy and other water-related topics that EEA is hosting. She also noted a good educational video for current conditions that EEA recently produced which explains how the state can still be in drought despite getting recent rain: <https://youtu.be/TOQ1TKczVkk>

## **7. Next Steps**

The recommendations would be share with the Secretary of EEA for a final decision on updated drought declarations. The Task Force will meet again in early October.

**Meeting Ended:** The meeting adjourned at 12:29 pm.