



**State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations  
Water Resources Board**  
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## RI Drought Steering Committee Meeting Minutes

**April 20, 2006**

### Quorum

The Drought Steering Committee, held at the Rhode Island Water Resources Board (WRB), 100 North Main Street, 5<sup>th</sup> Floor Conference Room, was called to order by Chairman Robert Griffith at 9:05 am. Mr. Griffith noted the lack of precipitation for the past three months requires the Drought Steering Committee to convene, review information gathered by the WRB to assess the impact of dry conditions, and make recommendations on drought phases and appropriate responses to drought-related impacts.

Attendees included: Robert Griffith, Chairman, Drought Steering Committee, WRB General Manager Juan Mariscal, staff members Kathleen Crawley, Romeo Mendes, and Beverly O'Keefe. Nicole Belk and Alan Dunham, NOAA National Weather Service, Jim Campbell, District Chief, U.S. Geological Survey, Richard Amirault, Alfred Bettencourt, Russ Chateaneuf, Vasiliios Harritos, Eugenia Marks, Henry Meyer, Eugene Pepper, Robert MacMillan, Lawrence Macedo, and Benjamin Gedan, Reporter, Providence Journal were also in attendance.

### Approval of October 12, 2005 Meeting Minutes

Chairman Griffith asked for approval of the October 12, 2005 meeting minutes. A motion was made by Al Bettencourt to approve the minutes as submitted and seconded by Jim Campbell. Minutes were approved unanimously.

### Evaluation of State and Local Conditions

Chairman Griffith recognized Beverly O'Keefe, WRB Supervising Planner, who provided a brief overview on the Rhode Island Drought Management Program. During her presentation she referred to the meeting handouts which included a history of drought in Rhode Island and March Drought Conditions Report. Ms. O'Keefe provided updates on the state's reservoir systems, noting the small reservoir systems are generally below full capacity and are being closely monitored.

The Chairman next introduced Ms. Julia Forgue, Director, Newport Water Department, who discussed the Newport small reservoir system which provides water to the communities of Newport, Middletown, and Portsmouth. The Newport Water Department obtains its raw water supply from a system of nine ponds and storage reservoirs which are interconnected through a complex network of pipelines and pumping stations. She noted Nonquit Pond and the Harold E. Watson Reservoir, located on the mainland across from the Sakonnet River, comprise more than half of the total system storage, and are used when water demand increases. She concluded her presentation by stating continued low precipitation going into the high tourist season will increase the need to utilize the mainland water resources earlier in the year.

Nicole Belk, Service Hydrologist, National Weather Service Forecast Office, provided a report on Rhode Island Weather and Water Analysis and Forecast. Ms. Belk reported precipitation totals of 3 months or less are below normal while precipitation totals of 6 to 12 months remain above normal as a result of increased precipitation received October 2005. Ms. Belk noted Providence experienced the second driest March on record, and the low precipitation through April will be reflected in next month's six month precipitation figures. The North American Drought Monitor for March 31, 2006 shows Rhode Island in an abnormally dry condition with warmer than normal average temperatures January through April 18<sup>th</sup>. She concluded by stating the long range forecast shows equal chances of seasonal precipitation.

Mr. Jim Campbell, District Chief, US Geological Survey, provided a geological report on surface and ground water conditions through March 2006. He reported conditions were one month below normal with

streamflow conditions slowly heading down. He noted the extreme low precipitation in March was bad as we enter the summer months of low groundwater recharge. He noted streamflow in the Newport area may be relying on ground water at this time which is not a good sign.

Mr. Eugene Pepper provided a brief report on agricultural conditions stating he mirrored the concerns expressed by Ms. Belk and Mr. Campbell. He reported March soil moisture conditions were similar to what would normally be experienced in July, and turf farmers are ready to begin using irrigation systems to support turf growth. He stated there has been no “green up” this year, and turf farmers are harvesting earlier rather than irrigating.

Mr. Griffith recognized Mr. Alan Dunham, National Weather Service, who presented information on Fire Danger. Mr. Dunham stated fuel moisture is down creating a fairly dry condition going into the summer season. He noted Connecticut is experiencing well above average fire danger, and these dry conditions will create fires which burn deep and long.

The Chairman recognized Ms. O’Keefe who provided a brief description and assessment of conditions by Drought Region based on the drought indices (Palmer Drought Index, Crop Moisture Index, Precipitation, Ground Water, Streamflow, and Reservoir levels). Table 1 provides the analysis matrix which can be used to assess conditions by region. (This table provides an example only, and has not been updated to include current precipitation conditions). Ms. Belk noted she would be able to provide precipitation figures by drought regions at the next meeting.

#### **Discussion and Next Steps**

Chairman Griffith polled the committee for a determination of moving the current drought phase from a “normal” condition to an “advisory” condition. He noted this advisory committee is charged with making recommendations to the Rhode Island Water Resources Board who will in turn make a recommendation to the Governor. A change in the current drought phase from “normal” to “advisory” will be statewide, even though some regions may be experiencing increasing drought conditions more than other regions. Committee members discussed current conditions and the current drought phase. The Chairman encouraged the committee to not be complacent in their considerations as portions of the state are clearly in the early stages of a drought. After due consideration a motion was made to continue in a “normal” and convene a meeting during the second week in May to review conditions. The motion passed unanimously.

#### **Adjournment**

The Chairman asked if there were any New Business, there being none, Chairman Griffith made a motion to adjourn which was seconded and approved by all those present .

Respectfully Submitted By,

Beverly O’Keefe  
Supervising Planner

Meeting materials accessible on the Water Resources Board website – [www.wrb.state.ri.us](http://www.wrb.state.ri.us)

The meeting place is accessible to the handicapped in conformance with RIGL 42-46-2. Individuals requesting interpreter services for the hearing impaired must notify the Board office at tel. 222-2217/TDD 222-4707, at least 72 hours in advance of the meeting date. If requested, tapes of the meeting will be made available.

**Table 1: Rhode Island Drought Indices by Region - Example**

<b>Drought Region</b>	<b>Palmer Drought Index Value</b>	<b>Crop Moisture Index Value</b>	<b>Precipitation (Percent of average)</b>	<b>Ground Water</b>	<b>Stream flow</b>	<b>Reservoirs</b>
Northeast Region	Near Normal (-1.9 to +1.9)	Slightly Dry/Favorably Moist	1-month= % 2-Months= %	Normal	Normal	Normal
Northwest Region	Near Normal (-1.9 to +1.9)	Slightly Dry/Favorably Moist	1-month= % 2-Months= %	Normal	Normal	Normal
Central East Region	Near Normal (-1.9 to +1.9)	Slightly Dry/Favorably Moist	1-month= % 2-Months= %	Normal	Normal	Normal
Central West Region	Near Normal (-1.9 to +1.9)	Slightly Dry/Favorably Moist	1-month= % 2-months= %	Normal	Normal	Normal
Eastern Region	Near Normal (-1.9 to +1.9)	Slightly Dry/Favorably Moist	1-month= % 2-Months= %	Normal	Normal	Normal
Southern Region	Near Normal (-1.9 to +1.9)	Slightly Dry/Favorably Moist	1-month= % 2-months = %	Normal	Normal	Normal
New Shoreham Region	Near Normal (-1.9 to +1.9)	Slightly Dry/Favorably Moist	1-month= % 2-months = %	Normal	N/A	Normal