



**State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations  
Water Resources Board**

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**RI Drought Steering Committee  
Meeting Minutes**

**November 19, 2007**

**Attendees:** Robert Griffith, Ph.D, Chairman; Juan Mariscal, General Manager, Kathleen Crawley, & Beverly O'Keefe, Water Resources Board; Harold Ward, Brown University, Retired; Nicole Belk, National Weather Service, Robert Breault & Emily Wild, US Geological Survey; Henry Meyer, Kingston Water District & RIWWA; Nancy Hess, Statewide Planning Program; Rich Blodgett, Providence Water Supply Board, Vasilios Harritos, Quonset Development Corporation; John-Paul Verducci, Budget Office; Ray DiSanto, East Smithfield Water; Rich Amirault, Health Department, Eugenia Marks, Audubon society RI, & Neal Personeus, DEM.

**Call to Order and Introductions**

The Drought Steering Committee, held at the Department of Administration. Second Floor, Conference Room C, was called to order by the Chairman Robert Griffith, at 10:07 a.m., Monday, November 19, 2007. Dr. Griffith welcomed members to the meeting, and reviewed the meeting agenda. He noted the Drought Steering Committee has been convened to review the meteorological-agricultural and hydrological current conditions and to make an advisory recommendation on the current drought phase based on the presented information.

**Approval of October 15, 2007 Meeting Minutes**

Chairman Griffith asked for a motion to approve the minutes of the October 15, 2007 meeting. Two members requested amendments to the meeting minutes as presented. Dr. Harold Ward made a motion to approve the amended minutes with a second by Mr. Henry Meyer. The vote in favor was unanimous.

**Evaluation of State and Local Conditions**

Dr. Griffith introduced Ms. Nicole Belk, Meteorologist, National Weather Service, who provided the Current Conditions Report. Ms. Belk reported continued moderate drought conditions across southern New England. Specifically, the National Oceanographic Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) monthly "Drought Monitor" identifies most of Connecticut, all of Rhode Island, and parts of Massachusetts remaining in a moderate drought condition. The Palmer Drought Index which is updated more frequently continues to show Rhode Island in a moderate drought category. The unusually warm and dry autumn has recorded only fifty percent of normal rainfall throughout the last three months, with the 7<sup>th</sup> warmest September recorded for Rhode Island.

Ms. Belk referred members to the National Weather Service Precipitation handout stating southern Rhode Island is experiencing drought conditions with three drought regions of the state meeting the "drought watch" indicators because of poor ground water conditions. She noted similar conditions are being experienced in Massachusetts and the Massachusetts "Drought" Committee just yesterday elected to stay in a "drought advisory" condition. Ms. Belk reported precipitation has improved during this month (November) but Providence precipitation remains at 80% of normal. Ms. Belk next reviewed the "Standardized Precipitation Index (SPI)" showing a "normal" 30-day time period; a "moderate drought" for the 60-day time period; and a "moderate/severely dry" period for the past 90 days.

Ms. Belk presented the short and long-term forecast for Rhode Island. Over the short term the forecast is for ¼" precipitation with the long term forecasting "equal chances" of precipitation. Members asked for clarification on several items of her presentation. The Chairman thanked Ms. Belk.

The Chairman introduced Rob Breault, Deputy Director, US Geological Survey. Mr. Breault distributed a Rhode Island map which summarized current conditions of the stream gage and ground-water wells. He stated there are 28 groundwater wells that provide hydrologic information - two wells are within "normal" limits; seven wells meet the "advisory" indicators; 16 wells meet the "drought watch" indicators; and 1 well meets the "warning" indicators. He added 6 wells are recording new historical low levels including Richmond Well #29 and Exeter Well # 32. After discussion and questions, the Chairman introduced Mr. Richard Amirault, RI Department of Health.

Mr. Amirault reported there have been sporadic reports of shallow community supply wells going dry. For example, Split Rock Mobil Home Park has a dry well. At a recent "private well" workshop eight to nine people reported they had dry wells. Steering Committee members discussed the increasing incidence of wells going dry especially in the southern ground-water dependent areas of Rhode Island, and agreed to increase monitoring of both the public and private ground water supply wells. It was agreed increasing land development patterns in the southern part of the state must also be affecting the available water supply.

Dr. Griffith next asked the water suppliers to report on local hydrologic conditions. Mr. Henry Meyer, Kingston Water District, stated all sites have stabilized and two streams in his service area have improved slightly. Mr. Ray DiSanto, East Smithfield Water District, stated the district purchases water from Providence Water Supply Board (PWSB) so he has nothing to add. Mr. Rich Blodgett, PWSB, distributed a copy of a letter sent to the RI Water Resources Board in 2002, which changed the drought indicators for the Scituate Reservoir system based on the time of year. He described the changes which included changes in the terminology and definitions. For example, reservoir levels for drought indicators will vary depending on the time of year. After discussion, the Chairman recommended the Providence Water Supply Board update the website to provide sufficient explanation and information to as to inform the public. Currently, the Scituate Reservoir water level, as reported on the website is 67% (two-thirds) of capacity which has concerned some Rhode Islanders.

#### **Action Item**

Chairman Griffith introduced Ms. Beverly O'Keefe, Supervising Planner, RI Water Resources Board, who provided summary information on the RI Drought Management Program drought phases and indices. Referring to a color-coded template, she reviewed the current indices (NOAA products: Palmer Drought Index, Crop Moisture Index, and National Weather Service Precipitation reports; US Geological Survey products: Groundwater well and stream flow gages; and reservoir reports). She summarized the statewide assessment of hydrologic conditions and recommended the drought level remain as "drought advisory." After discussion which focused on the low groundwater conditions, the decrease of evaporation in the colder months of the year, and methods for improved "indoor water conservation," the Chairman asked for a motion to remain in a "drought advisory" status at this time. Mr. Meyer made a motion to remain in a "drought advisory" status with a second by Ms. Hess. The vote in favor was unanimous.

#### **Discussion Item**

Members discussed measures to offset drought, and agreed to reconvene in January. Staff will continue to receive information from the NOAA National Weather Service, the U.S. Geological Survey, state agencies, and water suppliers throughout the next month. Staff will prepare a press release which will focus on "water efficiency" to increase the public's awareness of the need to practice good water conservation throughout the year.

Members discussed best water management practices. Florida was mentioned for work with injection wells, use of wastewater effluent, and out-of-basin transfer practices. Ms. Marks noted Clayton County Georgia has attempted to recharge the watershed using best water management practices. Mr. Personcus stated a change in building codes to require the use of rainwater harvesting methods (cisterns, rain barrels) and reuse of gray water would be a new water supply. He also recommended improving irrigation systems. Ms. Blodgett agreed stating the University of Rhode Island has a series of Healthy Landscapes and sustainable landscapes programs which are informative to the general public. Members concurred and continued the discussion on improving irrigation systems using automatic system controls, soil – moisture

sensors, backflow prevention and code enforcement actions. Ms. O'Keefe noted Governor Rell from Connecticut had issued a proclamation asking residents to decrease their water use by ten percent.

**Adjournment**

At 11:57 a.m., Chairman Griffith asked for a motion to adjourn until next month when the committee will reconvene to review the indicators and recommend the current drought status. Mr. Henry Meyer made this motion with a second by Mr. Rich Blodgett. The motion carried and the meeting adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted By,

Beverly O'Keefe  
Supervising Planner

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. 574-8400/TDD 574-8401, at least 72 hours in advance of the meeting date.