



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

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**RI Drought Steering Committee
Meeting Minutes**

October 15, 2007

(Approved 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; Robert Breault, US Geological Survey; Henry Meyer, Kingston Water District; Julia Forgue, Newport Water Works; Alisa Richardson, Department Environmental Management; al Bettencourt, Agricultural Community; Rob MacMillan, Providence Water Supply Board, Vasilios Harritos, Quonset Development Corporation; John-Paul Verducci, Budget Office; Ray DiSanto, East Smithfield Water; Joe Dellicarpini and Alan Dunham, National Weather Service

Call to Order and Introductions

The Drought Steering Committee, held at the Department of Administration, Second Floor, Conference Room A, was called to order by the Chairman Robert Griffith, at 1:35 pm. He welcomed members to the meeting, and asked members to continue the review of meteorological-agricultural and hydrological conditions since the October 2007 meeting and asked members to then make a determination of the proper drought phase based on the presented information. He stated the committee membership structure based on the Drought Management Plan guidelines makes it difficult to determine if a quorum is present and reminded members that all input is of equal value and is advisory in nature.

Approval of April 26, 2007 Meeting Minutes

Chairman Griffith asked for a motion to approve the minutes of the April 26, 2007 meeting. Mr. Henry Meyer made a motion to approve with a second by Mr. Bill Harritos. The vote in favor was unanimous.

Evaluation of State and Local Conditions

Dr. Griffith introduced Mr. Joe Dellacarpini, Meteorologist, National Weather Service, who provided the National Weather Service Current Conditions Report. Mr. Dellacarpini reported there have been deteriorating conditions across New England which is now in a "Drought 1" category noting the spring rain flooding in April helped to sustain the hydrologic conditions across the summer months until July. The lack of tropical systems, hurricane and other weather-maker events throughout the summer is now showing impacts. Temperatures are running 8 to 11 degrees above normal. He reported Providence experienced the 9th driest August on record with precipitation 3 inches below normal. Soil moisture index is well below normal for all of Rhode Island. He summarized his presentation by stating Rhode Island has experienced above normal temperatures and decreased precipitation. The dry conditions are predicted to last through November. The winter season is projected to be warmer than normal and dry in the south with less block buster storms to bring moisture up to southern New England. He noted both Connecticut and Massachusetts declared statewide "drought advisory" conditions last week.

The Chairman introduced Rob Breault, Deputy Director, US Geological Survey. Mr. Breault distributed a map of Rhode Island which provided a visual summary of the state stream gage and ground-water well current conditions. After providing basic definitions of the statistical method, he reported **some** stream gages were recording at below normal (historical) levels. He stated the natural tree defoliation may affect the groundwater levels since less evapo-transpiration occurs after defoliation, and it normally takes up to four months for groundwater to respond to weather conditions. He reported USGS staff is busy in the field clearing leaves from stream gages so real time data can be available. After discussion and questions, he stated stream flow is verified six to ten times a year.

Dr. Griffith asked for a report from the agricultural community. Ms. O’Keefe read a statement from Ken Ayars, Chief, Division of Agriculture, RI DEM:

“The Division of Agriculture received in September/October a small number of inquiries from farmers concerning emergency wetland permits for pond expansion/construction and/or as to whether the state had made a drought declaration. Those who made inquiry did not follow through to full permit request primarily due to the lateness of the season, though had they the Department would have facilitated issuance of emergency permits where need and condition allowed. Nearly all annual crops are now out of the ground and irrigation where it occurs is primarily for turf production for which the season extends later in the year. Cooler temperatures and the rainfall that occurred this week will substantially moderate irrigation demand.”

Brief statements were also made from Al Bettencourt who noted the turf farms still need to irrigate turf.

Dr. Griffith next turned to the water suppliers to report on local hydrologic conditions. Rob MacMillan, Providence Water Supply stated the Scituate Reservoir System has not yet been affected as it takes a couple of years of drought before the reservoir shows drought affects. Julia Forgue, Newport Water Works, stated the Newport reservoir system is 66% of capacity although typically the October rains begin the period of recharge. She noted water demands are down and one of the island’s major user – Rhode Island Nurseries – had talked about building an irrigation pond. Mr. Ray DiSanto, East Smithfield Water District reported he had been selling water to Aquafil, a water trucking company, to fill the Ocean State Power holding ponds. He stated his concern that processed public drinking water was being used to generate electricity, and if the need arose to declare an outdoor water ban, many people in his district would be understandably upset at this use of processed water. Mr. Henry Meyer, Kingston Water District, reported water levels in groundwater wells were slightly lower than recorded in 2002, and there has been a 1.5 foot drop in the observation well **that was installed in 2005**. He reported on Genesee Brook, the Chickasheen, the Queen-Usquepaug, Chipuxet, and Wolf Rock water levels noting some temporary **beaver** dams were most likely keeping some water levels lower than they actually are. After discussion on possible sources of water reuse, the Chairman turned to the next agenda item.

Action Item

Chairman Griffith introduced Ms. Beverly O’Keefe who provided information on the RI Drought Management Program drought phases and indices. Referring to a color-coded template, she review 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 stated a statewide assessment of conditions and recommended drought level shows the state is in a “drought advisory” phase for all indicators. After discussion, the Chairman asked for a motion on moving from the “normal” phases to a drought “advisory.” Mr. Meyer made a motion to move from the “normal” phase to “drought advisory” phase with a second by Mr. Bettencourt. The vote in favor was unanimous.

Discussion Item

The Chairman recognized Juan Mariscal, General Manager, Water Resources Board who reviewed the required steps to be taken in a “drought advisory.” He stated staff will develop announcements and press release materials which will be forwarded to the Office of the Governor. Staff will continue to monitor hydrologic conditions. He noted some concern with the process, and queried members for their opinion on fine tuning the current process asking “what should be for improved water management and water conservation. He asked members to make recommendations in the area of demand management and water conservation. Dr. Harold Ward recommended the drought plan should be revised with more specific water supply system actions. Mr. Mariscal noted the individual water supply systems can declare their own emergency and that systems do declare emergency water restrictions for several different reasons in addition to lack of water supply. It was noted efficient use of water is not part of a drought plan, and that a series of community meetings may be scheduled across the state to develop a statewide water conservation program. Mr. DiSanto noted Providence Water Supply Board must require water conservation before the wholesale purchasers will impose restrictions because there is no advantage to selling less water – water suppliers must sell water to make money. Dr. Griffith recommended looking at climate change trends as related to water supply as the implications for groundwater dependent systems will come sooner rather than later. Ms. Kathleen Crawley noted the drought regions were set up by type of supply and hydrologic impacts so the question under study is whether we are entering into a drought of record or talking about water resource management. She stated the state is routinely using more water due to development as

opposed to excessive water use. Members discussed some solutions to increased demand and water efficiency measures.

Adjournment

At 2:25 pm, Chairman Griffith asked for a motion to adjourn until next month when the committee will reconvene to review the indicators and discuss the drought management process and demand management. Mr. Henry Meyer made this motion with a second by Dr. Harold Ward. The motion carried.

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.