



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

April 3, 2008

Attendees: Robert Griffith, Ph.D, Chairman; Juan Mariscal, General Manager, & Beverly O’Keefe, Supervising Planner, Water Resources Board; Henry Meyer, Kingston Water District & RIWWA, Jon Schock, Town of South Kingstown, Harold Ward, WRB Board Member, Nicole Belk, National Weather Service, Robert Breault, US Geological Survey; Nancy Hess, Statewide Planning Program; Alisa Richardson and Eugene Pepper, Department of Environmental Management, Rich Amirault, Health Department, Robert Pesapane, RIEMA, & Richard Fennessey, Bristol County Water Authority.

Call to Order and Introductions

The Drought Steering Committee, held at the Department of Administration, Conference Room C, was called to order by the Chairman Robert Griffith, at 10:05 a.m., Thursday, April 3, 2008. Dr. Griffith welcomed members to the meeting, and reviewed the meeting agenda. He noted the Drought Steering Committee has been convened to continue the review of state and local current conditions (meteorological-agricultural and hydrological) and to make an advisory recommendation on the current drought phase based on the presented information.

Approval of February 14, 2008 Meeting Minutes

Chairman Griffith asked for a motion to approve the minutes of the February 14, 2008 meeting. Ms. Nicole Belk made a motion to approve the minutes with a second by Mr. Richard Fennessey. The vote to approve the minutes was unanimous.

Evaluation of State and Local Conditions

Dr. Griffith introduced Ms. Nicole Belk, Senior Service Hydrologist, National Weather Service, who presented the National Weather Service update supplemented by handout materials and information taken from the NOAA National Weather Service Forecast Office, <http://www.erh.noaa.gov/box/hydrofcsts.shtml>. She reported February received copious amounts of precipitation. The long-range outlook is showing higher than normal temperatures and normal precipitation patterns throughout the United States.

Table 1: Rhode Island Current Weather Conditions Report			
RI Drought Indicator	Past Month-February	Current Month- March	Forecast
Precipitation	Above normal - 2.00	+ 5.5 to +6.5 inches normal – for Northern & Central East RI; some flood conditions	14-day forecast + 1.0 to 2.0 ” rain expected. Increased temperature and precipitation
Crop Moisture	Abnormally moist		
Palmer Drought		Moderate-extreme moist	

Ms. Belk reported the National Weather Service partnership with the “Community Collaborative Rain, Hail, & Snow Network” and the Water Resources Board to set up additional data points using trained citizen observers. Through the efforts of Ms. O’Keefe, two training workshops have been scheduled in April, one for the University of Rhode Island Master Gardeners and one workshop for citizens across the state. Mr. Griffith thanked Ms. Belk for her report.

The Chairman introduced Rob Breault, Deputy Director, U.S. Geological Survey, MA-RI District. Mr. Breault distributed handout materials which include a summary map on stream gages and groundwater observation well levels (Attachment A). He presented a detailed summary of current hydrologic conditions in Rhode Island. Rob reported there has been some improvement in the groundwater observation wells but that the State Guide Plan #724 – Drought Management Plan – requires that improvements in precipitation and groundwater levels be scrutinized carefully and the reduction of a drought level in any given region should be limited to no more than one reduction every two months. That being said, he reported the Pawtuxet and Pawcatuck wells are in a “warning” phase while the Chipuxet well remains in an emergency status. He summarized by stating 19 wells are responding in a positive direction to the increased precipitation. Mr. Griffith thanked Mr. Breault for his report.

Members discussed the facts of Mr. Breault’s presentation and implications for drought management response and recovery. Members agreed increased land use and development has resulted in less groundwater recharge and more storm-water runoff.

Table 2: April 3, 2008 Rhode Island Stream Gage Status Report – 16 Gages/28 stations Current Stream Gage Summary: 4 Warning, 12 Emergency					
REGION	NORMAL	ADVISORY	WATCH	WARNING	EMERGENCY
Northeast – 3/5	3				
Northwest – 2/3	2				
Central East – 4/5	3			1	
Central West – 5	No Information Available				
Southern –7/10	5			1	1
Eastern	No Information Available				

Table 3: April 3, 2008 Rhode Island Ground Water Observation Well Status Report – 25 Wells Current Ground Water Summary: 2 Watch, 6 Warning, 17 Emergency					
REGION	NORMAL	ADVISORY	WATCH	WARNING	EMERGENCY
Northeast – 3/3			1	2	
Northwest - 2/7				1	1
Central East – 2/4			1		1
Central West – 3/4				1	2
Southern – 15/18				2	13
Eastern	No Information Available				

The Chairman received a report from Eugene Pepper from the agricultural community. Water conservations measures are being used with increased irrigation needs starting in mid-May. Farmers are increasingly aware of storm-water runoff (pesticides and fertilizers) issues and use best farming practice to prevent high runoff. He noted Jesse Rodriques., WRB Board member, uses GPS control and drip irrigation for pots in plants. He also stated fire danger is increasing across the state with one-two acres burned in the Big River Management Area. Juan Mariscal stated the mutual aid fire departments installed a dry hydrant in the area which was used to put out the fire. The Chairman received reports from the water supply community. Mr. Henry Meyer reported his groundwater wells are within normal range at this time but the maple trees have begun to use the water for “green-up.” He stated he monitors all water sources within the basin, and that the river used to be a non-regulated stream. United Water reported all groundwater systems are back to normal, and Providence Water Supply Board (Rich Amirault) reported all reservoirs are full.

Members discussed the presented information.

Action Item

Chairman Griffith introduced Ms. Beverly O'Keefe, Supervising Planner, Water Resources Board, who summarized the statewide assessment of hydrologic conditions. She noted today's presentations have focused on the increased precipitation received during the past two months which have improved both ground and surface water conditions. She distributed copies of the "Regional Drought Analysis, February 2008," and recommended, based on the scientific information gathered and presented at today's meeting, the drought phase be moved from a "drought watch" to a "drought advisory" phase. The committee discussed the presentations, reports, and drought recommendations.

The Chairman accepted a motion to approve the recommendation to move to a drought "advisory" for all of Rhode Island including the groundwater-dependent Southern region which has not yet demonstrated long-term improvement. The motion carried. Staff was asked to prepare press release material and include information on the water supply community response to the current drought conditions.

Adjournment

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. The motion was made, seconded, and carried. The meeting adjourned at 11:15 a.m.

Respectfully Submitted ,

Beverly O'Keefe
Supervising Planner