



DROUGHT COORDINATION TECHNICAL COMMITTEE

Draft meeting summary– subject to revision

Overview of Meeting

The DCTC met virtually on Wednesday, July 24, 2024, to discuss drought and water supply conditions in the region, the rapid expansion of dryness in the Potomac River Basin, and the potential issuance of a Drought Watch per COG's Water Supply and Drought Awareness Response Plan. A Drought Watch is the second stage in COG's Plan and is triggered when moderate drought, as defined by [NOAA's U.S. Drought monitor](#), is widespread in the Potomac River Basin.

Members received reports from ICPRB's CO-OP, NOAA, USGS, water utilities, and state agencies, and discussed the possibility of entering the Drought Watch stage. The CO-OP utilities, including Fairfax Water, the Washington Aqueduct, and WSSC Water, expressed support for declaring a drought watch. Plans for regional messaging and communication, including a pending press release, were also discussed. A meeting is scheduled on Friday, July 26 at 2:00 p.m. with the Drought Coordination Committee (DCC), the delegated authority to approve entering this stage, to provide a briefing about current conditions and bring forth the recommendation from the regional Drought Coordination Technical Committee about issuing a Drought Watch.

Additional Meeting Details

CO-OP Systems Update

Alimatou Seck, representing ICPRB, mentioned that they publish a Water Supply Outlook monthly from April to October to determine the probability of reservoir releases. The most recent Water Supply Outlook showed a higher-than-normal probability of reservoir releases for the summer and fall season. The CO-OP system reservoirs which include the water supply account of Jennings Randolph Reservoir are currently about 90% or more full.

ICPRB has been actively monitoring drought status since July 5, providing daily email reports on current conditions. The next stage of ICPRB drought activities would be to enter drought operations, during which they send twice daily email reports and coordinate water withdrawals and potential reservoir releases. Up until recently, they were close to entering the drought operation stage, but rainfall over the past week caused Potomac flows to rise temporarily and delay the need to begin drought operations. If they enter drought operations, ICPRB will issue a press release, and recommend at the time that water utilities in coordination with COG issue a press release as well.

Climate Conditions Update

Richard Tinker, representing the Climate Prediction Center, delivered a comprehensive update on drought conditions in the Potomac Basin. He emphasized the swift deterioration of dryness over the past six to eight weeks, presenting data on the severity and coverage of the drought, historical comparisons, and precipitation and temperatures trends.

Streamflow and Precipitation Forecast Update

Mr. Tinker highlighted that streamflow percentiles are generally low, with some areas experiencing the lowest levels on record. The precipitation forecast for the next seven days is near normal precipitation, while the temperature outlook suggests above normal temperatures.

USGS Update on Stream Flow and Groundwater

Chuck Walker from the Maryland Delaware DC Water Science Center presented aggregated streamflow maps from April to June, indicating a shift from normal to below normal stream flow in the region. He also discusses the hydrograph of the last month's flows, cumulative discharge by year, and groundwater well levels, highlighting that many wells are in the zero to ten percentile range for water levels.

Water Utility Status Reports

Fairfax Water

Fairfax Water General Manager Jamie Bain Hedges mentioned that the Occoquan Reservoir is about 95% full. That is just under eight billion gallons. They have experienced higher than normal production levels throughout the month of June and up to this point in July. They are averaging about 220 million gallons a day being delivered to their system. Both of their treatment plants are fully operational at this point. There are no issues from a treatment or transmission standpoint in their system.

Washington Aqueduct

Rudy Chow, General Manager of the Washington Aqueduct, mentioned that they are producing water around 140, 150 million gallons of drinking water a day. They continue to draw water from Little Falls Pumping Station as well as Great Falls. He also mentioned that they are still dealing with issues related to recent algae blooms upstream. As a result, they are using at times double or triple the amount of alum. Steve Bieber mentioned that he will check in with some members during an NCR WARN call on Friday to inquire about any potential supply issues related to alum.

WSSC Water

WSSC Water Deputy General Manager Aklile Tesfaye presented data on water production and demand, highlighting the significant increase in production during June 2024, with daily production reaching up to 240 MGD. The peak demand during the week of July 4th was 276 MGD, and the overnight lows remained high, emphasizing the importance of storage recovery at night. The Patuxent River Reservoir's gradually declining storage capacity was also mentioned, with a plan to minimize further decline. He discussed the proactive approach of engaging customers through social media and bill inserts to raise awareness about water conservation during dry and hot months. Mr. Tesfaye also mentioned the collaborative regional effort to conserve water and reduce costs for customers.

Loudoun Water

Jessica Edwards-Brandt, Director of Water Operations, provided an update on the challenges faced by Loudoun Water due to high demands and issues with algae but mentioned that they are now back to normal operations after recent rain.

Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ)

Trevor Lawson, representing Virginia DEQ, provided an update on the current drought status, noting significant drought conditions in Northern Virginia, Northern Piedmont, and Northern Shenandoah

Valley regions. He discussed short-term precipitation deficits, rapid intensification of flash drought conditions, and the impact on surface water and groundwater indicators, emphasizing the need for more widespread rainfall events to benefit the region in the long term. Here is a link for additional information: <https://www.deq.virginia.gov/our-programs/water/water-quantity/drought>

Maryland Department of Environmental Quality (MDE)

MDE was not represented on the DCTC call. However, information from a recent press release and their website indicates that Maryland is in a drought watch for the Eastern and Western parts of the state. This includes Washington, Allegany, and Garrett counties, which are part of the Potomac River basin. They have not declared any kind of drought watch for the Central region but may do so at the end of the month depending on conditions. There is also a chance that if conditions in Western MD worsen, they may move into a warning stage based on the groundwater indicators. Here is are some links for additional information:

<https://news.maryland.gov/mde/2024/07/23/maryland-department-of-the-environment-encourages-water-conservation-with-drought-watch-for-western-maryland/>

<https://mde.maryland.gov/programs/water/droughtinformation/pages/index.aspx>

Discussion on Entering Drought Watch Stage

Steven Bieber, COG Staff, led a discussion on the recommendation to enter a Drought Watch stage due to the rapid expansion of drought conditions in the Potomac Basin. CO-OP utilities, including Fairfax Water, the Washington Aqueduct, and WSSC Water, expressed support for this recommendation. Plans for regional messaging and communication, including a pending press release and coordination with the Drought Coordination Committee, were also discussed.

Action Items:

- COG staff will draft and share a draft press release about the pending decision on the drought watch with the CEC and water PIOs
- COG staff will work with water PIOs and other staff to craft additional graphics, infographics, and social media messaging for promoting wise water use.
- COG staff will share the copies of the slides shared during the meeting once they are available for distribution.
- Water Utilities will communicate wise water use messages to customers.
- ICPRB will share copies of press releases directly with water utilities if drought operations mode is entered.
- A DCC call is scheduled for Friday, July 26 at 2:00 p.m. to obtain approval to enter the Drought Watch Stage.