

Water Planning Council Advisory Group

April 19, 2016
Meeting Minutes

A meeting of the Water Planning Council Advisory Group (WPCAG or group) was held at the [Public Utility Regulatory Authority](#) (PURA), in New Britain, Connecticut.

Members Present:

Curtis Anderson	Connecticut Irrigation Contractors Association
Virginia de Lima	USGS CT Water Science Center
John Hudak	South Central CT Regional Water Authority
Margaret Miner	Rivers Alliance
Richard Sobolewski	OCC
Robert W. Wesneski	Avon Water Company
Bob Young	Middletown Water & Sewer Department

Members by Phone:

Karen Burnaska	Endangered Lands Coalition/CFE
Josh Cansler	Southeastern CT Water Authority
Len DeJong	Pomperaug River Watershed Coalition
Vin Ringrose	Fisheries Advisory Council
Maureen Westbrook	Connecticut Water Company

Other Attendees:

Steve Anderson	DoAg
Jonathan Avery	Hazardville & Jewett City Water Co.s
Bart Halloran	MDC
Dave Kuzminski	Town of Portland (by phone)
Eric Lindquist	OPM
Gail Lucchina	PURA
Matthew Rose	Milone & MacBroom
Martha Smith	West River Watershed Coalition
Glenn Warner	UConn (by phone)
Bruce Wittchen	OPM

Members Absent:

Gil Bligh	City of New Britain
Eric Brown	CBIA
James Butler	SCCOG
David Knauf	Darien Health Department
Denise Savageau	Town of Greenwich
Robert Silvestri	PSEG
Kevin Sullivan	Green Industry
Henry Talmage	CT Farm Bureau

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 1:50 p.m.

2. Approval of Minutes – March 15, 2016

There was not a quorum initially but, after an 11th member joined the meeting, a motion was made and seconded to approve the January minutes and the motion was approved unanimously, with John Hudak abstaining because he had not attended the meeting.

3. Drought Plan Update

Virginia de Lima provided an overview of the history of the state's current drought plan and the process for implementing it. She said the plan did not work when tested several years ago in a [tabletop exercise](#) hosted by the [Pomperaug River Watershed Coalition](#) and did not work last fall, when others recognized the area as being in drought but the state did not because of the overly prescriptive drought criteria.

Virginia noted that ground water levels began to fall rapidly in late summer, but remained in the normal range until September because of wet weather earlier in the summer. The state drought plan reacted too slowly because ground water is not considered to have a problem until it has been below normal for three consecutive months. Virginia also said the current plan uses the same drought stage names as water companies' individual plans, which can be confusing. A water company's drought status is based on system-specific criteria and it could be better off or worse off than the surrounding area.

Virginia said the draft plan includes a long-term planning and preparedness section. That section lists preparation steps that, in the future, we should be able to assume have been completed. The plan's Table 1 list such actions and the plan highly recommends the establishment of enforcement mechanisms, municipal ordinances and the establishment of municipal water coordinators.

Virginia described a number of other things changed in the updated plan. First, given the potential confusion of the state plan using the same drought terminology as water companies, the update uses different names. Virginia added that the word "drought" is not used for the initial two stages. She said the 1st stage is intended to be a heads-up to agencies and others, while the 2nd is a heads-up to the general public. The word "drought" is used in the subsequent three stages.

Virginia said a key goal of the plan update was to build in more flexibility by calling for the use of professional judgment and encouraging the consideration of qualitative data, such as reports of increased activity by well drillers. She added that the proposed update also divides the current drought criteria into primary and secondary criteria. Precipitation, stream flow and ground water levels are considered the primary criteria, while other criteria are considered secondary. She noted the inclusion of weather forecasts and explained that it might make little sense to declare a drought when wetter weather is expected.

Virginia said that, in addition to allowing for greater professional judgment in determining drought, the updated plan would allow for greater judgement in determining the response to drought. Rather than specify lengthy lists of what must be done at each stage, like the current plan, the update allows the response to fit the actual needs. Virginia added that the update also clarifies that drought can be declared on a regional basis. There was a discussion of looking at droughts regionally or locally.

Margaret Miner asked if any WPCAG members who called in have any questions or comments. Vin Ringrose said the updated plan makes more sense than the current plan. Maureen Westbrook said she agrees with increasing the reliance on professional judgement and added that the first two stages can help change public and utility behavior. She also agreed with increasing the reliance on professional judgment in interpreting drought and in looking regionally.

Glenn Warner said there has to be a strong emphasis on long-term preparedness and planning. There was further discussion of proposed changes, with general support for the regional approach. Virginia de Lima called attention to the plan's large "non-essential uses" section and explained that it has been demoted to being an appendix. Best management practices and other items are now provided as website links.

Virginia pointed out that important role of a municipal water use restriction ordinance and provided some background regarding the roll-out of the state's current model ordinance. She said that such a model might be more successful if it provides towns with a menu of options.

Margaret Miner asked if the updated plan includes any information about how often we would expect to reach each stage and Virginia said it does not. Margaret said there should be an objective set of criteria that we can point to. The combination of multiple criteria and a reliance on professional judgement will lead to argument during the decision-making process. She also asked why the [US Drought Monitor](#) (USDM) is not one of the primary criteria and there was a discussion of the USDM's potential benefits and limitations.

Virginia also explained that the Department of Public Health (DPH) expressed concerns about the plan encouraging the Interagency Drought Work Group to use professional judgment. DPH is concerned that such decisions might be challenged and Virginia said her response is that the agencies in that work group do not take this role lightly and can support their decisions.

John Hudak said he also likes the new approach, but asked why reservoir data would only be one of the secondary criteria. Virginia explained that this measure is an average of system averages, which is meaningless, and it is not calculated in a way to allow for a regional analysis. Bruce Wittchen said that the current measure only considers reservoir levels, so does not indicate the condition of systems that use wells.

Virginia noted that some systems have reservoirs and wells and Bruce added that reservoir levels reported for such systems can be biased if a utility has changed its use of ground water. Glenn Warner mentioned that he has advocated for having utilities calculate a "days of supply remaining" measure in the future. Virginia said DPH's Mike Hage is looking into that.

John Hudak asked how the first two stages will be implemented. Virginia noted that the current plan does not officially convene the Interagency Drought Work Group until after the group has decided to issue a drought advisory. She said OPM's Dave LeVasseur found a solution to that conundrum – the interagency group never disbands, so is able to meet whenever necessary. She explained that the various agency staff and others monitor drought criteria and any of them can start the system by requesting that the group meet. There was a discussion of how that approach has worked in the past.

John Hudak referred to a statement in the proposed plan regarding limitations on hydrant flushing and noted the potential impact on flushing necessary for water quality. There was further discussion of the proposed changes and John recommended something be added to the non-essential uses appendix to say that it is non-binding. Virginia de Lima read the proposed disclaimer from the appendix that explains that information may be outdated and that it has been included for reference. She said it can be strengthened to clarify the intent.

Margaret Miner asked who will have the final decision-making authority and recommended that the USDM be the core criteria for identifying drought. Virginia de Lima pointed out that the proposed plan's reference to the USDM is one of the additional factors and described its possible use. Margaret Miner responded that focusing on it might help avoid disagreement regarding the severity of conditions. There was further discussion of the USDM. Glenn Warner said he believes that stream flow is the best single measure of drought, given the widespread network of gages and the variety of factors that can be assessed from stream flow data.

There was a discussion of authority for drought decision-making and the process to be followed. Virginia said the Policy Committee might take up this issue. Margaret suggested that the plan clarify the decision-making process and Bob Young said the proposed changes are heading in the right direction and we can rely on it for now the way it is. It should be a living document and be adjusted as we see how it functions. He added that decisions announced at the state level can help in making decisions at the local level. Town leaders need to hear concerns from someone other than the local utility.

Bob Young said there might be "indicator utilities" whose response to drought are reliable indicators of more widespread conditions, although he notes that some utilities' systems have zones that experience impacts differently. He said this update is not the be all and end all and Virginia agreed, adding that this plan must be integrated with the state water plan. There was further discussion of the update and of the need for someone to be responsible for documenting each time the plan is used and lessons learned.

Jonathan Avery noted the ongoing public discussion of the proposed bottling plant in Bloomfield and said he is concerned about legislative action regarding special requirements for drought restrictions for such uses. He asked if a plan such as this over-ride a utility's Individual Water Supply Plan and Virginia said this plan is integrated with utilities' plans.

Virginia de Lima explained the possible role of local water coordinators, using recent experiences in Greenwich as examples, due to the WPCAG member Denise Savageau's role there. She noted that enforcement also has to happen at the local level. Bob Young described the impact of pronouncements made at the state level and how water companies can work with those. Margaret Miner said this plan should be presented to the WPC Steering Committee and planning consultant to become part of the state water plan. Comments should be provided and discussed.

Virginia de Lima listed changes that have been discussed today, including specifying that the USDM is to be a secondary drought measure and that the text should emphasize that this is to be a living document. Margaret Miner asked about authorities for implementing the plan and specifying the decision making process.

There was a discussion of the benefits of potential of and availability of additional supply and demand information from utilities. Margaret Miner said she and Gene Likens are concerned about the need for additional ground water data. There was further discussion of the drought plan change process and Virginia said she will make additional changes as discussed today. Bob Young said he only agrees with some, not all of the changes. There was further discussion of the desirability of being more specific about the decision-making process and about documenting the interagency drought group's decisions.

Margaret Miner said she is uncomfortable about adopting this ahead of the state water plan and Virginia disagreed, saying this needs to become a stand-alone document. She and OPM's Eric Lindquist can get it out with changes as discussed today. There was a discussion of the adoption process and Bob Young said the WPC can decide to adopt this plan or not; the WPCAG just provides a recommendation. Bob made a motion that the updated plan be approved, contingent upon WPCAG Drought Plan Work Group approval of the minor revisions discussed today, and then be submitted to the WPC. The motion was seconded and approved unanimously.

4. State Water Plan

a. Update on Project Management and Consultant Selection

Margaret Miners said people seem to be following this process and Virginia de Lima described an upcoming conference call with the [New England Interstate Water Pollution Control Commission](#) (NEIWPCC) and CDM Smith, the consultant that responded to the [request for qualifications](#) (RFQ) for state water plan consulting services. The consultant sent a list of eight questions and those will be discussed in the conference call on Friday and at a meeting next week. Len DeJong noted that the WPCAG co-chairs are on the WPC Steering Committee, so they can receive the draft Scoping Document and present it to the WPCAG members for comments prior to the Steering Committee's May 3, 2016 meeting.

c. Policy Committee Report

Margaret Miner said there was a drought presentation at the recent Policy Committee meeting and the committee discussed that water "needs" should include environmental needs. Margaret added that the committee has been discussing interconnections and she asked Bob Young to provide an overview of the discussion. He explained that the committee is considering their role in addressing emergency needs, sustainability and reliability.

d. **Technical & Science Committee Report**

Virginia de Lima said the committee has completed what it can prior to the consultant beginning its works and said the group is on hiatus.

e. **Discussion and recommendations from the WPCAG re State Plan/Process**

Margaret said alternative language is being considered for the plan adoption process proposed in [HB 5540](#). The WPC did not support the original bill. There was a discussion of the goal of the bill and of the CT Water Works Association taking responsibility for it being raised. Margaret asked if there are any other issues related to the plan and Maureen Westbrook said the group should keep an eye on [SB 422](#).

5. Old Business

There was no old business.

6. New Business

a. Other

There was no new business.

7. WPC Work Group Updates

a. Small Systems Work Group

There was no update.

b. Drought Plan Work Group

The update was in Item #3.

c. Green Industry Conservation Work Group

There was no update.

d. Watershed Lands Work Group

Margaret Miner noted that the group remains interested in [SB 300](#), the still active bill regarding possible mining of New Britain water company land.

8. Public Comment

There was no public comment.

9. Future Meeting Date

The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, May 17th, at PURA.

10. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 3:30 p.m.

Minutes prepared by Bruce Wittchen, OPM