

Brief Summary of State Drought Task Force Meeting: August 19, 2021

The Minnesota State Drought Task Force conducted its third meeting on August 19, 2021.

Randall Doneen of the MN Department of Natural Resources (MNDNR) welcomed everyone and gave an overview of the agenda.

State Climatologist Luigi Romolo presented an overview of the current drought status, streamflow levels and lake levels, fire danger, a crop report and some questions. He noted that the Red River, Rainy River and Mississippi River Headwaters watersheds have entered the restrictive phase. Most of Minnesota is in high fire danger, with much of northwest Minnesota is in extreme fire danger. About 35% of the state corn crop is good to excellent, 29% of the soybean crop is good to excellent, with much of the rest in the poor to very poor categories. Five-day precipitation forecast shows a good chance of more than an inch of rain across most of the state, with about two inches forecast now for parts of the state that need it most.

Members introduced their representatives in the meeting and provided brief updates of drought-related actions they have been taking. Key items reported:

- Sharing information with public audiences.
- Pointing interested parties to the weekly drought update signup on the MNDNR drought webpage.
- MN Department of Agriculture Commissioner Petersen is meeting with farmers around the state. U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Commissioner Vilsack, Gov. Walz and Commissioner Petersen also toured and met with farmers.
- Metropolitan Council is closely monitoring flows. They report that low flows and low dissolved oxygen levels are common. Necessary aeration is costly. They are highlighting drought-tolerant turf species.
- National Weather Service is offering weekly drought information resources.
- University of Minnesota Extension is still answering a wide range of questions about home gardening and crops. They are making resource guides available on their website.
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is still holding normal minimum flows.
- USDA is working with 83 counties with primary or contiguous disaster aid and emergency haying and grazing of conservation reserve acres. There are also some flexibilities for non-emergency haying and grazing. They are offering financial assistance for livestock operations incurring higher costs due to water hauling.
- U.S. Geological Survey is watching about 120 gages displaying data. Some gages are not displaying discharges or have gone out of water.
- White Earth Indian Community has some emergency haying occurring, possible lawn watering restrictions, answering a lot of questions coming in about the availability of wild rice and access to lakes to harvest rice.

- Some cities are implementing one day per week lawn watering, some odd-even or limited daytime hours. Some have full watering bans. Some cities are implementing their first-ever restrictions. They are delivering water conservation messages to media. Minneapolis and St. Paul are already reaching their 25% above January water use goal.
- MNDNR notified the water suppliers in three watersheds that they are now in the restrictive phase (Red River, Rainy River and Mississippi River Headwaters watersheds) of the Statewide Drought Plan. Investigating 25 out of water complaints. Have suspended 177 surface water appropriations across the state due to low flow. Responding to continued media contacts and are releasing public information. Roughly tracking and investigating drought issues including a fish kill in Wright County; a major wildfire in Superior National Forest and persistent wildfires in parts of northern Minnesota; Little Pine River is completely dry; effects of drought on managing various invasive species.

Next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, Sept. 2. Possibly will be cancelled if conditions improve with forecast rains.