



DROUGHT COORDINATION TECHNICAL COMMITTEE (DCTC)

Meeting Summary April 11, 2025

All meeting materials and presentations are located on COG's DCTC meeting site:
<https://www.mwcog.org/events/2025/4/11/drought-coordination-technical-committee/>

Action Items

- DCTC members agreed to continue with the Drought Watch originally declared last summer with a regional focus on wise water use messaging.
- COG staff will coordinate with the water PIOs to enhance messaging around wise water use as the Memorial Day season approaches.
- COG staff will poll participants in advance to select a date for the next meeting of the drought committee.
- USGS staff will provide updates on the status of stream flow and groundwater data availability as federal funding situations evolve.

Summary

The meeting was held to discuss current drought conditions, provide updates from various stakeholders, and plan next steps as warmer weather approaches. The agenda included reports from the Interstate Commission on the Potomac River Basin (ICPRB) CO-OP staff, the National Weather service, United States Geological Survey (USGS), and updates from state representatives and water utilities.

A regional drought watch has been in place since July 2024 and the discussion focused on drought conditions currently affecting the Potomac River basin, with an update on streamflow and groundwater levels, which remain below normal despite recent rainfall. The ICPRB CO-OP staff stated that the likelihood of reservoir releases has increased, with current estimates ranging from 22 to 35 percent, compared to historical probability of 8 to 15 percent. Releases from Jennings Randolph and Little Seneca reservoirs are typically triggered when Potomac River flow falls below the combined water supply demand and the required environmental flow-by. The cumulative rainfall deficit has reached 6.2 inches over the past year, and the U.S. Drought Monitor indicates that 80% of the basin is experiencing moderate drought conditions. Maryland is under a statewide warning, except for the WSSC Water service area that follows the COG regional drought plan and is under a drought watch. Northern Virginia is also under a drought watch, highlighting the need for ongoing monitoring and regional communication regarding water usage.

Richard Tinker from NOAA presented a short-term outlook forecasting heavy precipitation in the lower basin, although overall drought conditions remain uncertain. He noted that while April may

bring some improvement, confidence in long-term forecasts is low. Chuck Walker from USGS emphasized the critical state of groundwater and streamflow in Maryland, particularly in the Potomac Basin, where many gauges are recording low levels.

Updates from water utilities indicated normal operational status. DCTC members agreed to continue with the Drought Watch originally declared last summer with a regional focus on wise water use messaging. The committee plans to reconvene in a few months, likely in June or July, to reassess the situation.

Drought Update and Forecast

Sarah Ahmed reported on the Potomac River's drought conditions, noting that while recent rainfall has occurred, streamflow and groundwater levels are still below normal. The probability of needing reservoir releases is estimated at 22 to 35 percent, higher than the historical range of 8 to 15 percent. The cumulative rainfall deficit over the past year has reached 6.2 inches below normal.

She reported that Maryland is currently under a statewide drought warning, with Virginia and Pennsylvania on drought watches. She noted low stream flows and groundwater levels, a significant precipitation deficit, and emphasized the need for ongoing monitoring due to an elevated drought risk this summer. The U.S. seasonal drought outlook suggests that drought conditions may persist in the upper basin while some improvement is possible in the lower basin.

Potomac Basin Drought Monitor Update and Forecasts

Richard Tinker discussed the upcoming weather patterns, highlighting significant precipitation expected in the lower basin over the next 24 hours. He mentioned that while there are signs of potential improvement in precipitation trends for April, the forecasts for the following weeks show uncertainty, particularly regarding drought conditions. He emphasized that confidence in these forecasts is relatively low.

Groundwater and Streamflow Update

Chuck Walker presented data on groundwater and streamflow, indicating that central Maryland is facing dry conditions, especially in the Potomac Basin. He explained that streamflow percentiles are predominantly low, with many gauges reflecting levels between 10 to 25 percent. Groundwater measurements also show a concerning trend, with many wells indicating low levels due to a lack of precipitation.

Water Utility Reports

- Fairfax Water reported that the Occoquan Reservoir is 100% full and the system is fully operational for the summer.
- WSCC Water mentioned that their reservoirs are at 70% capacity, and they have been maintaining minimum production on the Patuxent River.
- Loudoun Water reported normal trends for the season and a full Beaver Dam reservoir.
- The Washington Aqueduct indicated that operations are normal.

State Reports

- MDE indicated that Maryland is currently in a warning status for western and central Maryland.
- Virginia DEQ confirmed similar conditions in Virginia, maintaining a drought watch in Northern Virginia and Shenandoah Valley.

Recommendations and Next Steps

- COG staff recommended continuing the drought watch and enhancing messaging around wise water use as Memorial Day approaches.
- The meeting concluded with a consensus to maintain the current drought watch status and continue monitoring conditions closely.
- COG will plan the next DCTC meeting for June or July, based on drought conditions.

Helpful Links:

- ICPRB Water Supply Outlook and Status: <https://www.potomacriver.org/focus-areas/water-resources-and-drinking-water/cooperative-water-supply-operations-on-the-potomac/drought-monitoring-and-operations/water-supply-outlook-status/>
- MDE Drought Page: <https://mde.maryland.gov/programs/Water/DroughtInformation/Pages/index.aspx>
- DEQ Drought Page: <https://www.deq.virginia.gov/our-programs/water/water-quantity/drought>
- U.S. Drought Monitor: <https://droughtmonitor.unl.edu/CurrentMap.aspx>