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## DROUGHT COORDINATION TECHNICAL COMMITTEE MAY 20, 2026 MEETING SUMMARY

Meeting Materials are posted on the DCTC meeting website located at:

<https://www.mwcog.org/events/2026/5/20/drought-coordination-technical-committee/>

### Overall Summary and Action Items

- **Recommendation to issue a Drought Watch for the COG region**  
COG will share a summary of the DCTC meeting, including the recommendation to issue a drought Watch, with the CAOs and seek their approval at their June 3 meeting.
- **Drought messaging and coordination with water utilities**  
COG will work with utility Public Information Officers (PIOs) to review, align, and approve the drought watch messaging before it is shared with leadership and the public.
- **Develop and distribute communication materials**  
COG will create a media kit and finalize an FAQ document to support consistent regional communication, along with coordinating timing for outreach to elected officials and stakeholders.

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**Potomac Basin Drought Status and Outlook:** Richard Tinker from the National Weather Service provided an update on the Potomac Basin drought status, highlighting record drought coverage, precipitation deficits, and the uncertainty in summer precipitation forecasts.

- **Drought Coverage:** Rich reported that 99.7% of the Potomac Basin is currently covered by drought, with severe drought or worse affecting almost 97% of the basin, levels not seen since 2002. Extreme drought coverage is limited to 1.27%, and there is no coverage in the highest drought category (D4).
- **Precipitation Deficits:** Rich explained that the Basin has experienced significant precipitation deficits, with some areas accumulating over 20 inches less than normal in the past two years. Shorter-term deficits (30, 90, 120 days) also show substantial shortfalls.
- **Short-Term Forecasts:** The Weather Prediction Center forecasts potential for beneficial precipitation in the next seven days, but Rich cautioned that previous similar forecasts have resulted in only brief relief, with rain amounts often below expectations and little lasting improvement.
- **Long-Term Forecast Uncertainty:** Rich presented various model outlooks for summer, noting

conflicting signals between American, European, and Canadian models. No strong indicators point to either above or below normal precipitation, resulting in a muddled outlook and high uncertainty for June-August.

- **Implications for Drought Monitoring:** Rich concluded that while limited short-term improvement is possible, the long-term drought outlook remains uncertain, and the region is entrenched in significant precipitation deficits, with no clear forecast for sustained recovery.

**Streamflow and Groundwater Conditions:** Chuck Walker from USGS presented data on streamflow and groundwater conditions in the Potomac Basin, noting widespread below-normal flows, recent precipitation impacts, and the introduction of a new forecasting tool.

- **Streamflow Status:** Chuck reported that 65 sites across the region are at all-time low streamflow for the day, with 26 sites much below normal and 4 just below normal, marking a significant departure from normal conditions observed in previous months.
- **Recent Precipitation Effects:** He noted that recent precipitation events temporarily improved streamflow, but flows quickly returned to below-normal levels, indicating a lack of sustained recovery.
- **Point of Rocks Data:** Data from Point of Rocks showed flows consistently below the 25th percentile for the year, with only brief increases following precipitation events, failing to reach normal levels for this time of year.
- **River Drought Cast Tool:** Chuck introduced the River Drought Cast tool, which uses historical and current data to forecast streamflow drought. At Point of Rocks, the site has been in extreme streamflow drought for 33 days, with projections indicating continued moderate drought in the coming weeks.
- **Groundwater Trends:** Continuous groundwater monitoring in Carroll and Washington Counties showed declining water levels, with recharge events in late winter and early spring insufficient to reach last year's levels, suggesting compounding effects from ongoing precipitation deficits.

**ICPRB CO-OP System Water Supply Report:** Alimatou Seck from ICPRB delivered the monthly water supply outlook, highlighting elevated probabilities of upstream reservoir releases due to record low flows and groundwater, current precipitation deficits, and reservoir storage status, with Steve inviting questions.

- **Probability of Reservoir Release:** Alimatou reported that the probability of upstream reservoir release is elevated at 23–34%, compared to 8–15% in a normal year, due to record low flows and low groundwater levels.
- **Precipitation and Flow Data:** As of May 1, the 12-month cumulative precipitation departure was 2.6 inches below normal, and basin average precipitation since May was 0.8 inches, 50% below normal. Adjusted flow on May 1 was 2.6–2.7 billion gallons per day, 15% below the historical low for that day.
- **Drought Monitoring Thresholds:** Despite low flows, current levels remain above the CO-OP

drought monitoring threshold (2000 CFS), indicating no immediate need for drought-triggered releases.

- **Reservoir Storage Status:** Upstream reservoirs, including Jennings Randolph and WSSC's Little Seneca, are nearly full, with Jennings Randolph at 100% and Little Seneca at 98%, ensuring good water supply status for the Potomac System.

### State Drought Status Updates

- **Maryland:** Lainey Reid reported that Maryland is in drought warning for two of four regions in the Potomac River Basin, primarily due to low streamflow and groundwater levels, and Baltimore City DPW has implemented voluntary water use restrictions.
- **Virginia:** Weedon Cloe and Andrew Noyes stated that 12 of 13 drought evaluation regions in Virginia are in warning status, with one in watch. Persistent low precipitation has resulted in much below normal streamflow and low wells, though most reservoirs remain at normal levels except Smith Mountain Lake.
- **Criteria for Emergency Declaration:** Weedon explained that an emergency declaration would mandate localities to implement top-tier water conservation strategies, and the decision depends on whether forecasted rain materializes; otherwise, escalation to emergency status may occur.
- **Potomac System Carve-Out:** Jamie Bain Hedges of Fairfax Water asked about the carve-out for the Potomac system under the COG drought response plan, and Weedon confirmed that this is under discussion in drafting the executive order.

### Utility and Reservoir Status Reports

- **Fairfax Water Status:** Jamie Bain Hedges reported that the Occoquan Reservoir is 100% full and the system is fully operational for summer, with no current issues.
- **WSSC Water Planning:** Katherine Foreman described internal coordination for drought scenarios, maximizing flow, and noted that the Patuxent reservoir is at 74% capacity, with ongoing construction at the Potomac plant reducing maximum production rates. Algal activity has been observed at both sources since the beginning of the year.
- **Washington Aqueduct:** Trina Littlejohn stated that Washington Aqueduct is preparing for dry conditions, with Little Falls fully available for environmental flow if needed.
- **Loudoun Water:** Jessica Edwards Brandt reported that the Beaverdam reservoir is fully stocked and available for emergency use, with the utility monitoring rainfall closely.

**Recommendation and Support for Drought Watch:** Steve led a discussion on issuing a drought watch, citing severe drought conditions and historical comparisons, with Jamie Bain Hedges, Trina Littlejohn, Aklile Tesfaye, and Alimatou Seck expressing full support; Steve outlined next steps for presenting the recommendation to CAOs and coordinating messaging.

- **Rationale for Drought Watch:** Steven referenced severe drought conditions not seen since 2002

and recent negative trends, recommending the issuance of a drought watch to encourage voluntary conservation and preserve water resources.

- **Stakeholder Support:** Jamie Bain Hedges, Trina Littlejohn, Aklile Tesfaye, and Alimatou Seck voiced support for the drought watch, citing widespread severe drought and the need for coordinated conservation efforts.
- **Next Steps and Timing:** Steve explained that the recommendation will be presented to the CAOs for concurrence at their June 3rd meeting, with a written summary sent a week prior. Utilities' PIOs will review messaging before release.
- **Regional Messaging Coordination:** Steven announced a PIO call scheduled for the afternoon to discuss regional messaging and media kits, inviting participants to join and ensuring alignment on communication strategies.

#### **Communication and Media Coordination for Drought Watch**

- **Media Kit and Messaging Plans:** Lisa Ragain confirmed commitment to creating a media kit and unified messaging, inviting participants to the PIO call to discuss details and timing for press releases and informational materials.
- **Coordination with Elected Officials:** Katherine Foreman emphasized the need for timely communication to elected officials and alignment across utilities, with Steve agreeing and noting the absence of a COG board meeting in June due to the annual retreat.
- **Press Release and Additional Outreach:** Steve stated that previous drought watches were communicated via press release, but the group is open to more extensive outreach if desired, with further discussion planned during the PIO call and potential follow-up meetings.

#### **DCTC Recommendations and Next Steps**

- Prepare and send a written summary of the meeting, including the recommendation to issue a drought watch, to the CAOs one week before their June 3rd meeting for concurrence.
- **Utility Messaging Coordination:** Coordinate with utility PIOs to review and approve the wording of the drought watch recommendation before it is sent to the CAOs.
- **Media Kit Development:** Develop a media kit, including messaging and informational graphics, for consistent communication regarding the drought watch across all utilities and stakeholders.
- **FAQ Document Preparation:** Finalize and distribute an FAQ document to support communication and coordination as part of the drought plan and drought watch announcement.
- **Messaging Timing Coordination:** Coordinate the timing of drought watch messaging and materials to ensure alignment and advance notice to elected officials and stakeholders.