



## Oregon's Drought Readiness Council Sept. 13, 2018 Meeting Notes

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### **Participants in the Room:**

Brenda Bateman, Chair, Oregon Drought Readiness Council & Water Resources Department  
Ken Stahr, Chair, Water Supply Availability Committee & Water Resources Department  
Anna Pakenham Stevenson, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife  
Daniel Stoelb, Oregon Office of Emergency Management  
Jim Johnson, Oregon Department of Agriculture

### **On the Phone:**

Tom Elliott, Oregon Department of Energy  
Bruce Gilles, Department of Environmental Quality  
Jason Miner, Governor's Natural Resources Office  
Roxy Nayar, Oregon Department of Environmental Quality  
Kari Salis, Oregon Health Authority, Drinking Water Program  
Nick Yonker, Oregon Department of Forestry

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### **1. Welcome and Introductions**

Brenda Bateman welcomed participants and everyone introduced themselves.

### **2. Agenda Check**

No additions proposed.

### **3. Approval of August 2018 Meeting Notes**

Group approved with the following edits:

Correct Roxy's affiliation; should be DEQ.  
Remove question mark after first instance of "wildfires".  
Fix the spelling of Haines Index.  
Attribute the sentences regarding "heavy rigs for firefighting" to Brenda.  
Remove sentence on Prineville.

### **4. Water Conditions**

Ken Stahr, Chair of Oregon's Water Supply Availability Committee, briefed participants on recent and current water conditions. See handouts for details. Highlights are summarized below.

- At close to the end of the water year, precipitation is now at 85 percent of normal for the state. Precipitation for August as well as the entire summer was way below normal.
- Wetter weather passed to the north of us through the year.
- Of note, the north central and northeast part of the state had close-to-adequate snowpack, and ended the season with average levels.
- Soil moisture at SNOTEL sites is well below normal and in some instances, setting low records.
- For August, temperatures have been up to four degrees warmer than normal in some areas.
- The short-term (8-14 day) outlook is drier and warmer than normal across the Pacific Northwest.
- The long term outlook for October through December indicates drier and warmer than normal weather that may reflect a transition to El Niño-like conditions this fall and winter.
- If conditions shape up as forecast, it could create difficult water supply conditions in 2019.

- Fortunately, some communities had access to storage this year, which they fully utilized. The Bureau of Reclamation is forecasting that end-of-year water levels, in Prineville particularly, will be zero (no carry-over).
- Little precipitation in 2019 could prevent reservoirs from refilling and supplying water during summer 2019.
- Streamflow is 54 percent of normal for this time of year across the state.
- The USGS seven-day average runoff (streamflow) for the state is also way below normal.
- Oregon has 12 counties under primary drought designation at the federal level.
- There are nine counties with governor-declared drought at the state level.
- With regard to the U.S. Drought Monitor – Oregon lobbied hard for them to consider our observations.
  - Letter-writing campaign to NRCS re dust and fire.
  - Frustrated with lack of response.
  - Senators Wyden and Merkley sent a letter to the US Departments of Agriculture and Commerce (group asked for a [copy](#)).
  - Lobbied to get D3 drought designation expanded in Malheur County, but saw no change.
- As of today, the U.S. Drought Monitor shows this percent of Oregon in drought status:
  - D0 (abnormally dry) - 100%
  - D1 (moderate drought) - 93%
  - D2 (severe drought) - 84%
  - D3 (extreme drought) - 23%
- The U.S. Dept. of Agriculture and NOAA notes that only 3 percent of rangeland in Oregon is in good or very good condition. This ranking is among the worst in the nation.
- Looking at Oregon Department of Forestry’s Fire Condition Map, rain and cooler temperatures have brought down fire potential across the state. It’s low in the Willamette Valley, moderate in the south and east, and high potential in south central and north central. The Klondike and Terwilliger fires are still underway with no relief from moisture. This is compared to last year, when rains extinguished fires in mid-September. Starting to see frost and lower temperatures in some regions, helping to reduce fire potential along with the lower probability of lightning in September.

## 5. Consideration of County Requests for Drought Declarations

Gilliam County has submitted a request for Governor’s drought declaration. The Water Supply Availability Committee unanimously agreed that hydrologic conditions in Gilliam County warranted drought declaration.

Gilliam County has no stream gages, but it is sandwiched between two counties that have experienced very low streamflow conditions this summer. The best indicator is a stream gage on the Sherman County side of the John Day River for streamflow observations.

Q&A: What does a drought declaration this late in the season get you? They could be setting themselves up for funding under new the farm bill. It is as-yet unknown how the bill will work, but there may be automatic funding eligibility depending on your county’s status. This is wheat country, they are not going to drill any wells.

Watermaster comments submitted in support of the request noted earlier regulation and water distribution this season.

Will this be the last request of 2018? No, we wouldn’t be surprised to see more, for the reason noted above.

Participated asked that any recommendations to the governor’s office note that:

- hydrologic conditions warrant support of this request
- droughts have long-term, cumulative effects. Yes, Gilliam County is in drought.
- All season, precipitation passed to our north, leaving hot, dry conditions.

## 6. Roundtable and Discussion

Ken Stahr: Q: Should we invite others from USDA (National Ag Statistics Service) to sit in on these discussions? A: We already have FSA at the table. Let's put more energy into inviting OSU Extension.

Jim Johnson: Recent work has centered on documenting impacts of fires, looking at GIS layers.

Anna Pakenham Stevenson: ODFW is hosting workshop Sept. 25-26 to look at fish species distribution, as well as their flow and temperature needs. We're trying to understand current needs; and how they'll change under climate change scenarios. Technical workshop, with a first priority to identify data sources.

Daniel Stoelb. Stay tuned for a national test of the emergency broadcast/alert system. Mobile devices will buzz alerts if providers are network participants. Expect the broadcast to last for 30 minutes.

Brenda Bateman: Gibson Farms in Lincoln County received a temporary drought permit recently, allowing them to move water from low value crops to high value blueberries. This was a drought declaration success story.

Response: make sure this gets into the *Capital Press*!

Also, WRD's summer intern collected 30-40 drought impact stories this summer. She's building a story map that we will present to the Water Resources Commission during its November 16 meeting here in Salem. Thank you all, for allowing her to interview you and gather valuable information. Are there others who would like to hear this presentation?

Ken Stahr: The City of Vernonia monitoring streamflows, because low flows trigger outdoor watering and other curtailment programs. Folks are relying on our near real-time data and we don't always know it!

Roxy Nayar: DEQ's groundwater technical advisory committee met this week, and heard about potential new areas of study. The group plans to meet again in early 2019.

Tom Elliott: DOE has its biennial energy report due November. There were some water/energy nexus materials in the draft. Hopefully, we can build in more cross reference to water in the next report.

## **7. Next Meeting Date**

October 11 from 10:00 to noon at OEM.

## **8. Adjourned at 11:20**