

June 1997

From the Director: June 1997

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Drought

Network News

June
1997

**A Newsletter of the International Drought Information Center
and the National Drought Mitigation Center**

Volume 9
No. 2

From the Director

Drought policy continues to be a topic of much discussion in the United States. On June 12, the Western Drought Coordination Council (WDCC) met for the first time and adopted a work plan for 1997–98. The WDCC is committed to improving drought management in the western states through mitigation and preparedness. It is hoped that this Council, representing a partnership between federal, state, local, and tribal government, will serve as a model for other drought-prone regions of the United States. Four working groups (preparedness and mitigation; monitoring, assessment, and prediction; response; and communications) established by the Council will meet in late July to assign priority to action items identified by the Council as important to the WDCC's mission. The administrative leadership for the WDCC is housed at the National Drought Mitigation Center.

The WDCC was formed as a result of a memorandum of understanding (MOU) signed by the Western Governors' Association and federal agencies with primary programming responsibility in drought management and response. The initial federal agencies that signed this MOU were the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Department of Interior, Federal Emergency Management Agency, and Small Business Administration. The Department of Commerce recently signed the MOU and other federal agencies are likely to sign as well.

If you would like to know more about the Council or serve on one of the working groups, please let me know. We are creating a web site for the WDCC (<http://enso.unl.edu/wdcc/>), which should be online in early July. The WDCC web site will contain the annual work plan for the Council and the membership of the steering committee and the four working groups. (A discussion of the WDCC and its work plan is included in this issue of *Drought Network News*.)

The National Drought Mitigation Center is organizing a series of workshops on drought contingency planning under sponsorship of the Bureau of Reclamation. The first workshop is scheduled for July 28–30, 1997, in Albuquerque, New Mexico. At least four workshops are planned over the next two years for locations throughout the United States, and several organizations from regions throughout the country have expressed an interest in hosting these workshops. The purpose of these workshops is to train persons from local, tribal, state, and federal government in the mechanics of drought contingency planning. More information on the

workshop series can be obtained by contacting our office.

In January 1997, Senator Pete Domenici (New Mexico) introduced the National Drought Policy Act in the U.S. Senate (S. 222). A hearing on this bill is scheduled for July 21, 1997. The bill notes that “Congress finds that, although the United States often suffers serious economic and environmental losses from severe regional droughts, there currently exists no coordinated Federal strategy to respond to these emergencies. . . . Therefore, the Congress finds that the President should appoint an advisory commission to provide advice and recommendations on the creation of an integrated, coordinated Federal policy designed to prepare for and respond to serious drought emergencies.” Senate Bill 222 is currently being

rewritten to include comments from various parties and has numerous sponsors in the Senate.

These and other changes in drought management in the United States are long overdue. These changes are largely the result of the devastating impacts of the 1996 drought, the acceptance of our current and increasing vulnerability to extended drought periods, the realization of the ineffectiveness of previous response efforts, and the political will of elected officials to finally address the policy issues associated with drought management.

Other countries are also striving to better monitor, respond to, and prepare for drought events. In May, I participated in the Workshop on Drought and Desertification in Bet-Dagan, Israel, sponsored by the World Meteorological Organization. Forty-four persons from Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and eastern Europe attended this event. A workshop summary report is included in this issue of *Drought Network News*, along with recommendations for future actions.

This issue of *Drought Network News* also contains articles about drought impacts in central India; impacts of weather on crop production in Kashmir, India; a case study of the Deficit Spell Index in the capital region of India; and a progress report on the North American Natural Hazards Map project.

Members of the drought network are encouraged to submit articles and reports for publication in *Drought Network News*. The feedback I receive at international meetings always serves to confirm the value of this information to the scientific and policy community. It is critical that we share information and lessons learned with others. **The deadline for receipt of articles for publication in the October issue of *Drought Network News* is September 1, 1997.**

Donald A. Wilhite

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