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From the Director: February 1999

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Drought Network News

February 1999 | A Newsletter of the International Drought Information Center and the National Drought Mitigation Center | Volume 11 No. 1

From the Director

Many of the readers of *Drought Network News* are familiar with the "hydro-illogical cycle" cartoon that I use frequently in presentations and publications. This illustration has been translated into many languages and serves as a constant reminder of the crisis management mentality often displayed in responding to drought emergencies and the proverbial "window of opportunity" following a drought when planning for the next event is of high priority. I hear comments routinely from government officials that recognize the need to plan, but they express hesitancy in moving forward now if water supply conditions are normal or above. The concern is that actions to plan for drought might be viewed by political opponents or the public as misdirected. Politicians certainly do not want to be viewed as placing emphasis and expending resources on what may appear to be an issue that lacks urgency when other crises exist. As drought planners, perhaps we should pray for dry conditions so that proper attention will be given to this important component of water resources planning.

After experiencing droughts in 1996 and 1998, the Southwest and southern Great Plains states are bracing for another dry year in 1999. The long-lead forecasts of NOAA's Climate Prediction Center place considerable confidence in a very dry 3-month period from March through May in this region. Much concern exists in Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona about the potential threat of another year of drought. Texas and New Mexico have made considerable progress in drought planning since 1996, and these plans are likely to be tested severely if drought recurs this year.

In the last issue of *Drought Network News*, I discussed the National Drought Policy Act and the Commission that it creates to examine current laws and programs and make recommendations to the president and Congress on the creation of an integrated, coordinated federal policy designed to prepare for and respond to drought emergencies. The Commission is nearly in place; the selection of six at-large members is all that remains to launch this new effort. The first Commission meeting will likely be held in May or June in Washington, D.C. The National Drought Mitigation Center will be working closely with the Commission over the next 18 months, providing assistance as requested. For more details on the Commission, refer to the October 1998 *Drought Network News* or check out their web site (http://www.fsa.usda.gov/

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drought/). You can also get to their site through the NDMC's web site (see the last page of this newsletter for the web site address).

In early March, I participated in a workshop in Ispra, Italy, on drought and drought mitigation in Europe. The goal of this exploratory workshop was to analyze the state of drought research, drought planning, and drought mitigation strategies in Europe. The workshop was organized by the European Commission's Space Applications Institute in Ispra and the Institute of Hydrology in Wallingford, U.K. Scientists from many fields of study representing many countries were in attendance. The proceedings of this workshop, including papers presented and the workshop summary, will be published soon. One of the outcomes of the workshop may be the formation of a European network on drought research and mitigation. The goal of this network would be to stimulate and coordinate applied research in the fields of drought alert, monitoring, assessment, and mitigation.

The NDMC is in the final stages of organizing another in the series of workshops sponsored by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation on drought contingency planning. This workshop will be for the State of Hawaii; it comes at the request of Governor Benjamin J. Cayetano. Previous workshops in the United States have been regional in their emphasis. The goal of Hawaii is to move forward on the development of a drought plan at the completion of the workshop. Hawaii has been suffering one of their worst droughts on record since 1997.

This issue of the newsletter contains drought-related articles on Mexico, India, and Turkey. *Drought Network News* readers are requested to submit articles for the June 1999 issue to me no later than June 1. Readers are also encouraged to submit announcements and other information of interest to our network members.

Donald A. Wilhite

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