



Missouri River Basin Drought Early Warning System (DEWS) Partners Meeting

September 15–16, 2026 | Bismarck, North Dakota

Meeting Location

North Dakota's Gateway to Science, 1600 Canary Ave, Bismarck, ND 58501

Purpose

This meeting will bring together Tribal, state, federal, and local partners to review progress and build actionable next steps for a next-generation Missouri River Basin Drought Early Warning System.

Meeting Goals and Outcomes

- Foster strategic networks and new collaborations among Missouri River Basin DEWS Partners.**
 - Outcome: Connect with partners to expand engagement, identify collaborative funding, and build capacity for drought monitoring, assessment, resilience, and preparedness.
- Share drought early warning successes, challenges, and lessons learned.**
 - Outcome: Identify current pain points, operational gaps, and successes that partners can build upon to advance drought early warning.
- Advance next-generation monitoring and tools.**
 - Outcome: Share and prioritize emerging drought research, resources, and regional issues to drive advancements.
- Introduce the concept of a Regional Assessment Framework.**
 - Outcome: Gather feedback on the usability and feasibility of a shared regional drought assessment framework.
- Evaluate operational applications and limitations of drought indicators.**
 - Outcome: Capture the most relevant drought indicators based on location, season, and/or sector at a scale relevant to local and state decision-making.

Day 1 — Tuesday, September 15, 2026

Time (CT)	Topic	Speaker
7:45 a.m.	Registration, Coffee, and Networking	
8:00 a.m.	Meeting Welcome & Logistics	Jason Gerlich <i>Cooperative Institute for Research in Environmental Sciences (CIRES) and NOAA/NIDIS</i>

2026 MRB DEWS Partners Meeting

Time (CT)	Topic	Speaker
Setting the Stage: North Dakota Drought Task Force		
8:30 a.m.	North Dakota’s Coordinated Drought Actions and Efforts	Miranda Meehan <i>North Dakota State University, North Dakota Drought Task Force</i>
Session 1 — Looking Back on Our Progress and Lessons Learned <i>Moderator: Britt Parker NOAA/NIDIS</i>		
9:00 a.m.	Evolution and Advancement of Drought Early Warning in the MRB: Drought Metrics, Assessment, Coordination, Monitoring, and Tribal Resilience	Britt Parker <i>NOAA/NIDIS</i> Crystal Stiles <i>CIRES and NOAA/NIDIS</i>
9:15 a.m.	Exercise: Assessing Drought Early Warning Systems Participants will use an interactive whiteboard and sticky-note exercise to map out the advancements in drought assessment, monitoring, and coordination—identify gaps and opportunities for future improvement.	Britt Parker <i>NOAA/NIDIS</i>
10:00 a.m.	Break (refreshments provided)	
Session 2a — Cross Regional Drought Assessment in Practice: Interactive Exercise <i>Moderator: Jason Gerlich CIRES and NOAA/NIDIS</i>		
10:15 a.m.	Warm-Up and Setting the Stage, the Impetus of Drought Assessment	Jason Gerlich <i>CIRES and NOAA/NIDIS</i>
10:20 a.m.	Navigating the USDM: Best Practices, Indicators, and Process for Weekly Recommendations	Brian Fuchs <i>National Drought Mitigation Center</i> Curtis Riganti <i>National Drought Mitigation Center</i>

2026 MRB DEWS Partners Meeting

Time (CT)	Topic	Speaker
10:35 a.m.	Exercise: Drought Monitoring and Assessment Map Development Participant groups will assess recent drought-condition changes across regional boundaries using the U.S. Drought Monitor intensity scale (D1 Moderate to D4 Exceptional). Groups will delineate specific indicators, justify their severity classifications, and compare findings across overlapping and adjacent territories to evaluate methodology differences and cross-boundary challenges.	Kyle Bocinsky <i>Montana Climate Office</i>
12:00 p.m.	<i>Lunch (provided) — open networking</i>	
Session 2b — Drought Assessment in Practice: Report Out <i>Moderator: Kyle Bocinsky Montana Climate Office</i>		
1:00 p.m.	Exercise: Report Out - Decision Drivers, Operational Trust, and Best Practices Participant groups will report their key takeaways from the activity from tailored questions to facilitate understanding of indicators, challenges, methodology, and boundary differences.	Kyle Bocinsky <i>Montana Climate Office</i>
Session 3a — State and Tribal Assessment I: Current Practices and Coordination <i>Moderator: Kelsey Jensco Montana Climate Office</i>		
1:45 p.m.	Understanding Drought Assessment Across Tribal Nations and States Lightning Talks Navigating Drought Assessment Differences Across Boundaries - Panel Discussion	Lokilo St. Clair <i>Tribal Water Engineer, Wind River Reservation</i> Peter Goble <i>Assistant State Climatologist, Colorado Climate Center</i> Michael Downey <i>Drought Program Coordinator, Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation</i> Julian Scott <i>Hydrologist, Bureau of Land Management</i>

2026 MRB DEWS Partners Meeting

Time (CT)	Topic	Speaker
2:45 p.m.	Break (refreshments provided)	
Session 3b — State and Tribal Assessment II: Impacts, Representation & Gaps Moderator: Shawn Johnson University of Montana Center for Natural Resources and Environmental Policy		
3:00 p.m.	Framing Impacts Reporting in Drought Monitoring and Assessment	Kelsey Jensco Montana Climate Office
3:10 p.m.	Current Impact Assessment Protocols and Needs	Kelly Smith National Drought Mitigation Center
3:30 p.m.	Exercise: Discussion of Drought Impacts Assessment across Tribal Nations and Resource Managers Participants will be part of small group discussions and report out, to assess the specific impacts of drought monitoring on key groups—such as Tribal sovereign governments, agricultural producers, water districts, and federal land managers.	Kelsey Jensco Montana Climate Office Kelly Smith National Drought Mitigation Center
Day 1 Synthesis and Day 2 Preview Moderator: Jason Gerlich CIRES and NOAA/NIDIS		
4:00 p.m.	Capturing Key Insights into Regional Drought Monitoring Efforts	Jason Gerlich CIRES and NOAA/NIDIS
4:30 p.m.	Adjourn	
5:30 p.m.	Optional Informal Gathering at Laughing Sun Brewing Company at 1023 E Front Ave, Bismarck, ND 58504	

2026 MRB DEWS Partners Meeting

Day 2 — Wednesday, September 16, 2026

Time (CT)	Topic	Speaker
8:00 a.m.	Coffee, welcome, and Day 1 Recap	Jason Gerlich <i>CIRES and NOAA/NIDIS</i>
Session 4 — Towards a Regional Drought Assessment Framework <i>Moderator: Britt Parker NOAA/NIDIS</i>		
8:30 a.m.	Gauging Interest and Feasibility: A Regional Drought Assessment Framework Exercise: Through revisiting the sticky-note thematic mapping and small-group discussions, participants will explore/discuss opportunities, usability, and feasibility for a regional framework. In small groups participants will discuss barriers, concerns, and limitations.	Britt Parker <i>NOAA/NIDIS</i> Kelsey Jensco <i>Montana Climate Office</i>
Session 5 — Next-Generation Monitoring I: UMRB Mesonet Project and the Data Value Study <i>Moderator: Elise Osenga CIRES and NOAA/NIDIS</i>		
9:30 a.m.	Advancing Drought Early Warning: Mesonet Insights, Buildout Update, and Data Value Study Takeaways	Elise Osenga <i>CIRES and NOAA/NIDIS</i>
9:50 a.m.	Mesonet Operators' Panel Discussion of Network Growth, Water Balance, and Field Realities	Ginger Paige <i>Wyoming Mesonet</i> Nathan Edwards <i>South Dakota State University Mesonet</i> Ruben Behnke <i>University of Nebraska Mesonet</i> Daryl Ritchison <i>North Dakota Agricultural Weather Network</i> Kelsey Jensco <i>Montana Mesonet</i>
10:30 a.m.	Break (refreshments provided)	

2026 MRB DEWS Partners Meeting

Time (CT)	Topic	Speaker
Session 6 — Next-Generation Monitoring II: Integrating Observations, Remote Sensing, Models and Decisions <i>Moderator: Zachary Hoylman Montana Climate Office</i>		
10:45 a.m.	Setting the Stage: Current Status of Next Generation Technologies in Drought Early Warning	Zachary Hoylman <i>Montana Climate Office</i>
11:00 a.m.	Flash Talks: Latest Advances in Data Assimilation and Applications	John Bolten <i>Chief of the Hydrological Sciences Laboratory, NASA Hydrological Sciences Laboratory</i> Michael Cosh <i>Research Hydrologist, USDA – Agricultural Research Service</i> Eric Hunt <i>Extension Educator, University of Nebraska</i>
11:30 a.m.	Facilitated Discussion: Closing the Gaps: Data Needs, Standards, and Integration for Drought Early Warning	Zachary Hoylman <i>Montana Climate Office</i>
12:00 p.m.	<i>Lunch Session with Drought Resilience and Tool Bazaar</i> <i>An interactive session, bringing together emerging drought research, technical innovations, and regional priorities to drive continuous scientific progress across our region. Attendees will have the opportunity to rotate through live demonstration stations set up around the room to learn about the latest test emerging drought assessment, monitoring, and planning tools firsthand, gain broader awareness of existing resources, and discuss practical applications directly with peers.</i> Janna Black - Great Plains Tribal Water Alliance - Tribal Technical Assistance Providers Curtis Riganti - NDMC - Drought Risk Atlas Nathan Edwards - South Dakota Mesonet - South Dakota Mesonet Map Explorer Brian Fuchs - NDMC - Composite Drought Indicators Michael Downey - Montana DNRC - Tracking Consecutive Dry Days as a Drought Precursor Ruben Behnke - Nebraska Mesonet - Station Advancements and Ribbon Cutting and Normals Calculations Julian Scott - Bureau of Land Management - BLM-Climate Engine Drought Reports Zachary Hoylman - Montana Climate Office - D3 Dashboard	

2026 MRB DEWS Partners Meeting

Time (CT)	Topic	Speaker
Session 7 — Northern Great Plains Regional Incubator for Drought Resiliency Overview and Capacity Building Kelsey Jensco Montana Climate Office		
1:30 p.m.	Northern Great Plains Regional Incubator for Drought Resiliency Overview	Kelsey Jensco Montana Climate Office
1:45 p.m.	Core Team Roundtable	Key state and regional partners part of the Northern Great Plains Regional Incubator for Drought Resiliency
2:30 p.m.	Break (refreshments provided)	
Session 8 — Synthesis and Path Forward Moderator: Jason Gerlich CIRES and NOAA/NIDIS		
2:45 p.m.	NIDIS 20th Anniversary Strategic Planning	Britt Parker NOAA/NIDIS
3:00 p.m.	Next Steps & Collaboration: Prioritizing Future Action Exercise: Participant breakout discussions prioritizing key takeaways, opportunities, and future collaborations, recording their thoughts and ideas.	Jason Gerlich CIRES and NOAA/NIDIS
3:50 p.m.	Closing Remarks	Jason Gerlich CIRES and NOAA/NIDIS
4:00 p.m.	Adjourn	