LINCOLN—Nebraska farmers, ranchers and water system managers are being encouraged to monitor weather conditions as spring progresses and temperatures rise.

The Nebraska Climate Assessment Response Committee (CARC) met this week to discuss current weather conditions and the outlook for the remainder of 2012. Committee members reviewed information provided by the state climatologist, as well as representatives of the National Drought Mitigation Center (NDMC) and the National Weather Service.

“The Panhandle and part of eastern Nebraska currently are in either early drought or abnormally dry on the U.S. Drought Monitor map,” said Bobbie Kriz-Wickham, CARC chair and assistant director of the Nebraska Department of Agriculture. “The Committee is encouraging farmers, ranchers and water system managers to take note of these circumstances as they gear up for the production season.”

State Climatologist Al Dutcher said precipitation across the state in April has not been enough to erase moisture deficits caused by a relatively dry winter and above normal temperatures.

“In some parts of the state, the rain we have been receiving has been lost rather quickly, either as runoff from a hard precipitation event, from high winds, or due to the above normal temperatures,” Dutcher said. “While the summer forecast is somewhat uncertain, conditions at present will dictate the need for timely rains, especially in the Panhandle and northeast Nebraska.”

According to the U.S. Drought Monitor, 12 percent of Nebraska is in a Class 1 drought.
Mark Svoboda with the NDMC said the U.S. Seasonal Drought Outlook map, valid through July 31, predicts the dry Panhandle conditions will persist. Streamflow is low in the Republican and Platte river basins, although reservoirs are in fairly good shape due to good precipitation the past couple years, Svoboda said.

“Water supply conditions are fairly stable for now, but regular precipitation events will be critical as we move forward into the summer,” Svoboda said.

“What we were told this week is that conditions could deteriorate quickly. We just want folks to be paying attention and planning ahead as much as possible,” Kriz-Wickham said.

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension already has put out some information related to water management for farmers and ranchers. It is archived at: http://marketjournal.unl.edu/april13 and http://marketjournal.unl.edu/april20. Other on-line resources can be found at: http://www.extension.unl.edu/crops-future and http://water.unl.edu/. The NDMC web site also contains information at http://drought.unl.edu.

The Committee plans to meet for an update in June. CARC information, including presentations from the April 24, 2012, meeting, can be found at www.agr.ne.gov/carc.