Use of the Palmer Index and Other
Water Supply Indexes for Drought Monitoring
in Colorado

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Abstract

The Colorado Drought Response Plan of 1981 assigned drought monitoring responsibilities to a special intergovernmental technical working group called the Colorado Water Availability Task Force (WATF). The intent of this group is to use existing data sources and information products to monitor Colorado's water supplies. The information assembled and interpreted by the WATF is then used by State decision makers to guide State government's response to drought.

The Palmer Index, developed in the 1960's, has become a credible tool for monitoring drought and assessing drought severity on the national scale. It reasonably depicts soil moisture conditions using a simple hydrologic balance accounting for precipitation, evapotranspiration, runoff and soil moisture recharge. However, experiences of the WATF have revealed that Palmer Index values, currently generated weekly through the growing season by the National Climatic Data Center for 5 climatic divisions in Colorado, were only marginally useful for drought monitoring. The regions were too large and climatically diverse, and input temperature and precipitation data were not adequately controlled to produce consistent and meaningful results.

With the encouragement and cooperation of the WATF this project was undertaken to adapt the Palmer Index model to Colorado. The original program was brought to Colorado, the state was broken down into 25 climatically similar regions, and a simple routine for adjusting input data to correct for missing data and station moves was implemented. The

existing model was then used to generate 30 years of monthly Palmer Index values for all 25 regions of the state.

A thorough examination of these new Palmer Indexes has been performed. Comparisons with the original indexes show noticeable differences and considerable small scale detail which previously could not be resolved. With the new smaller regions it is now reasonable to use contour analysis of Palmer Index values to visually describe local variations in drought severity across Colorado. Two case studies were conducted to show how the new indexes compared to original index values during severe drought situations: 1) the end of the 1956 drought on the Eastern Plains, and 2) the 1976-1977 winter drought in the Colorado mountains.

A particular application of the Palmer Index was given special attention. Palmer Index values were correlated with dryland winter wheat yields. The best correlations with annual yields were obtained using June 1 or July 1 Palmer Index values. Good correlations were obtained in most of the major wheat growing areas but especially in the northeastern counties of Colorado. Better correlations were obtained using indexes calculated for the new areas than were obtaining using the original index values.

The WATF agreed that the capability to calculate Palmer Indexes here in Colorado, with our own choice of climatic divisions, greatly increases the utility of this drought monitoring tool. More refinements are possible, and further study conducted jointly with agricultural interests would be desirable. This index is already of sufficient value to the WATF to justify the low cost required to produce it on a routine monthly basis.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Drought is not a rarity in Colorado. It happens -- all too often.
When it does occur it can have devastating effects.

Little skill has been shown in forecasting drought episodes long in
advance. (Drought, for the purposes of this study shall be defined as
any prolonged -- a few months or longer -- period of dry weather
resulting in reduced supplies of available water.) Predicting local
variations; the difference in drought severity between adjacent counties
during a large scale drought period; is essentially impossible.
possible, however, to monitor the emergence of drought and to anticipate
possible impacts.

Serious droughts take months and sometimes even years to
materialize. Hence, by monitoring the current status of water
supplies -- precipitation, snowpack, streamflow, reservoir levels,
moisture -- it is possible to detect developing drought, observe the
areas most susceptible to impacts, and in some cases take action to
avoid or minimize these impacts. This is the philosophy behind the
Colorado Drought Response Plan (Lamm, 1981) -- a plan which was
formulated during and after the severe winter drought of 1976-1977 in
the West and which was completed during the lesser but equally alarming
drought winter of 1980-1981.

A. Current Drought Monitoring Activities in Colorado.

The entire Plan hinges on information supplied to State government
by the Water Availability Task Force (WATF); a special intergovernmental

mix of State and Federal agency representatives with access to weather, climate, and/or water supply information. This group (see Appendix A) which is chaired by the Colorado Division of Disaster Emergency Services has been operating continuously since early 1981, voluntarily sharing data, developing information products, disseminating appropriate information to State officials and others interested in Colorado's water concerns, and generally striving to attain an ongoining drought monitoring capacity for the State. The information supplied by the WATF is used to trigger various levels of action and decision making which compose the State's response to drought. So far since 1981, water supplies have remained very good in Colorado and little action has been required. The mechanism is in place, however, and will hopefully continue to be, as drought will most certainly reappear.

Several existing information products are currently used by the WATF. They include:

1) Colorado Climate -- a monthly summary report of precipitation and temperature prepared by the Colorado Climate Center, Colorado State University (Office of the State Climatologist),

2) Water Supply Outlook -- a monthly summary report published (January-May) by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Soil Conservation Service (SCS) which summarizes mountain snowpack conditions, streamflows, and reservoir storage, and predicts summer streamflows in the State's major watersheds,

3) 30-day Outlook -- a bi-monthly forecast of temperature and precipitation for the entire country prepared by the National Weather Service.

In addition to these, wind erosion information compiled by the SCS, a new surface water supply index developed jointly by the Colorado Division of Water Resources and the SCS Snow Survey Unit (Shafer and Dezman, 1982), Palmer Index information calculated for 5 Colorado regions by the National Weather Service in cooperation with the U.S.

Department of Agriculture, and ground water data made available by the State Engineer and the U.S. Geological Survey, are all examined routinely by the WATF to monitor water supplies affecting all areas of Colorado's economy. All of this information is summarized in a brief monthly statement currently being developed by the Colorado Climate Center. If found useful, this statement called "Colorado Water Availability Status Report" (see example in Appendix B) will be produced regularly and will incorporate all current drought monitoring capabilities and information.

B. Directions for Development of Colorado's Drought
   Monitoring Capabilities

There is considerable room for improvement in State drought monitoring. Communication of pertinent data is currently painfully slow, often relying on mail service rather than high speed computer links. This is not a problem when water is plentiful, but when water is in short supply a crisis could emerge.

Communication links are very people dependent with the cooperation of key individuals in several agencies being prerequisite to a functional drought monitoring system. It is a credit to the present leadership and to the key individuals involved, that the current high level of cooperation has been maintained, even in times of plentiful water and scant budgets. Eventually a more formal, less individual-dependent, cooperation must be developed to assure ongoing drought monitoring and data dissemination. The idea of an interagency Water Availability Task Force was excellent. The continued existence of this working group is necessary if Colorado is to maintain a comprehensive

drought monitoring program taking fair advantage of the considerable expertise already available in the State.

Finally, a strong program of drought monitoring must be linked to ongoing research. Through applied research in Colorado and elsewhere, new data sources can be explored such as satellite imagery, new technology can be incorporated such as improved data transmission, and new information products can be developed similar to the water supply indexes currently being tested.

Colorado is fortunate to be at the headwaters of considerable water resources research. It is the State's responsibility to encourage this work and make use of it.

This particular research project described in the chapters which follow, examines the use of the Palmer Index for drought monitoring. This is just one small example of the opportunities to apply the results of research to policy-making and decision-making processes within Colorado.

II. THE PALMER INDEX

A. History and General Description

In the early 1960's, Wayne C. Palmer developed a methodology to quantitatively assess prolonged unusual wet and dry periods. The method, developed at the U.S. Weather Bureau's Office of Climatology, was described in detail in the paper "Meteorological Drought" published in 1965 (Palmer). The method was based on the concept of a simple water balance. Using measured precipitation, estimated evapotranspiration (Palmer and Havens, 1958) and by determining climatically characteristic runoff and soil moisture recharge in the topsoil and root zone, it is possible to perform hydrologic accounting. Partitioning the actual precipitation (on a weekly or monthly basis) and residual soil moisture into runoff, evapotranspiration, and recharge, yields much more information pertinent for assessing drought than would precipitation information alone. For example, an inch of precipitation in early spring when temperatures are cool adds much more moisture to the soil than an inch of rain in mid summer when temperatures are hot and evapotranspiration rates high. Similarly, an inch of rain when the ground is dry will contribute much more moisture to the soil than an inch of rain when the soil is saturated.

This hydrologic accounting procedure was originally tested by Palmer on three experimental areas: one in western Kansas, one in Iowa, and one in North Dakota. Using monthly temperature (to estimate evapotranspiration) and precipitation for these areas over periods ranging from 32 to 76 years, climatic characteristics of the water balance were calculated. These characteristics were expressed in terms of a series of coefficients (Table 1). The purpose of these

coefficients was to define the long term "normal" for a specific

for a specific time of year (weekly or monthly).

Table 1. Coefficients Used in the
Calculation of Palmer Indexes

Coefficient	Definition
Coefficient of Evapotranspiration	average evapotranspiration divided by the average potential evapotranspiration
Coefficient of Recharge	average recharge divided by the potential recharge.
Coefficient of Runoff	average runoff divided by the potential runoff.
Coefficient of Moisture Depletion	average depletion divided by the potential depletion.

Departures from the climatically "normal" state for a given area

could then be defined as contributing to wet and dry periods. The

magnitude and duration of these departures both need to be considered

when assessing the severity of drought or wet periods. Palmer

these into account as he developed a weighting factor called the

"Climatic Characteristic." This final coefficient was employed to

adjust the results of the hydrologic accounting to produce an index

which ranged from about -6 for extreme drought situations to +6 for

extremely wet periods. The "Climatic Characteristic" was used to adjust

different areas of the country with much different water balances to

this same consistent scale (Figure 1). The final index value is what

has become known as the Palmer Index.

Many details of Palmer's procedure are not mentioned here. His

original paper is required reading for anyone seriously interested in

the specifics of the procedure.
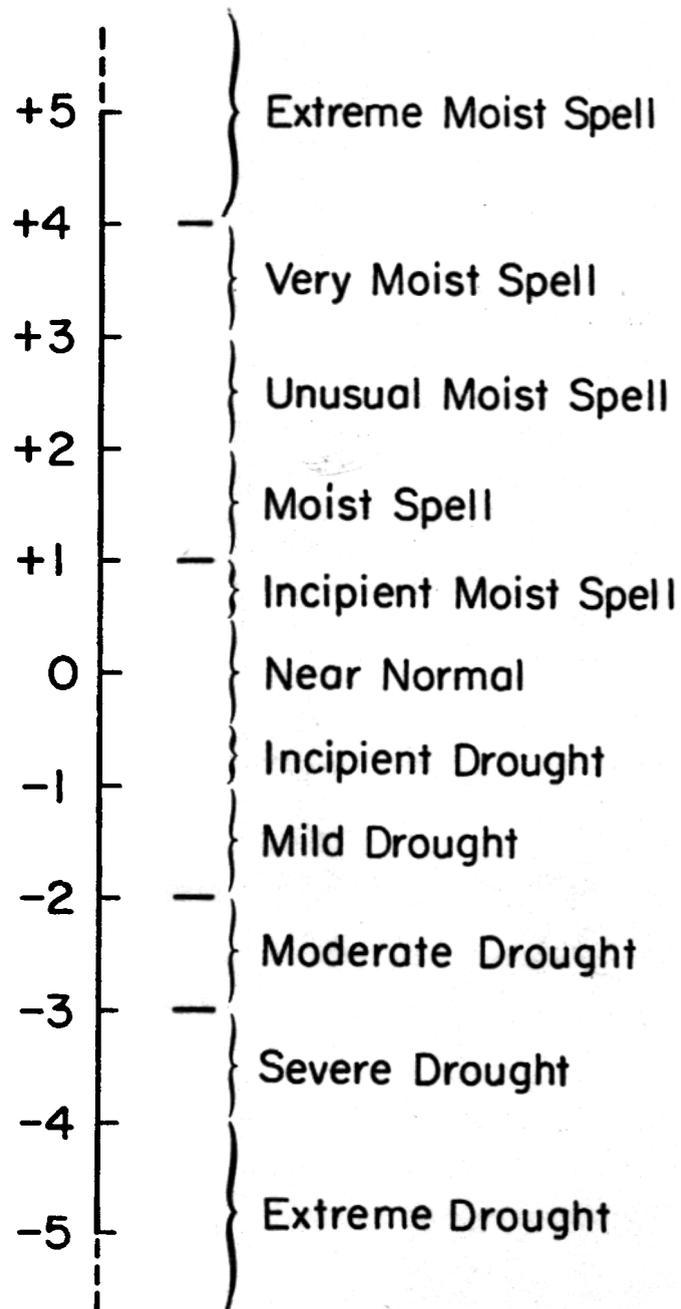
Figure 1. Interpretation scale for the Palmer Index.

The results of this original work for particular small areas of the country were very informative. Large negative values of the Palmer Index, when calculated from monthly temperature and precipitation data for the area, coincided with periods of documented drought with significant economic impacts. Based on this outcome, the method was deemed useful for the entire country. The country was broken down into 344 regions using the traditional climatic divisions constructed by the National Climatic Center in the 1940's (Figure 2). Coefficients were generated for each area based on monthly temperature and precipitation data obtained by averaging the data from all the reporting stations (both staffed weather stations and cooperative substations) in each division.

Due to the apparent usefulness of this index as a nationwide indicator of moisture excesses and deficits, the Palmer Index was eventually calculated and published on a routine basis. This activity has been carried out as a cooperative effort between the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the U.S. Department of Commerce, National Weather Service

A second index called the Crop Moisture Index was developed after the Palmer Index. The Crop Moisture Index is very similar except that it focuses on the water balance in approximately the top one foot of top soil. It responds much quicker than the Palmer Index to changes in soil moisture that might affect vegetation and field operations. As a result, the Crop Moisture Index is considered a better indicator of drought for most agricultural applications.
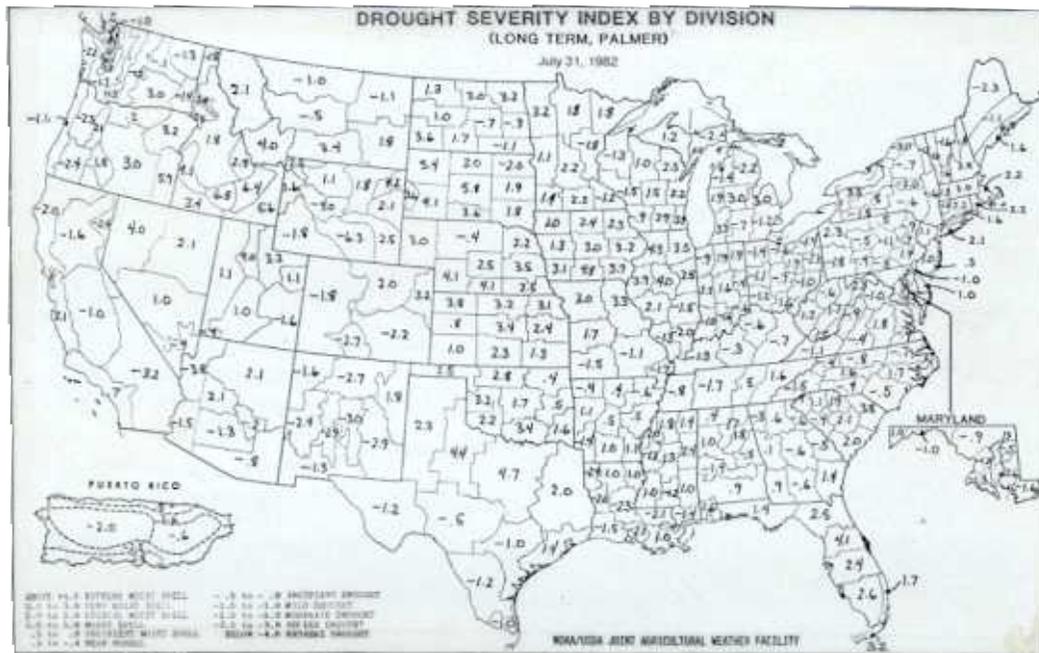
Figure 2   State Climatic Divisions for the United States and
            an example of weekly Palmer Index values, July 31, 1982
            (NOAA/USDA, 1982).

B. Current Status

Both the Palmer and the Crop Moisture Index continue to be produced
weekly for the March through October period for the entire country by
the National Climatic Data Center. Input temperature and precipitation
data are assembled for each of the nearly 350 climatic divisions in the
contiguous United States by state forecast offices of the National
Weather Service. Input data consist of the weekly mean temperature and
total preciptation for each area as calculated from available daily data
for a select set of stations within each area.

The calculated Palmer and Crop Moisture Indexes are made available
to the National Weather Service by means of their regular facsimile
communication circuit. General dissemination is accomplished by the
publication, "Weekly Weather and Crop Bulletin" published jointly by the
U.S. Department of Commerce and the U.S. Department of Agriculture

C. The Palmer Index in Colorado

Of the nearly 350 areas nationwide for which index values are
calculated, Colorado is divided into just 5 areas as shown in Figure 3.
With the exception of the Kansas drainage, these areas all include
dryland agricultural areas, irrigated areas, forested regions, and high
rugged mountains.

Palmer Index values for Colorado by month have been calculated back
to 1931. Considerable interest in this index in the 1960's and early
1970's has since given way to apathy. This apathy is understandable
when you consider:

    1) the apparent crudeness and subjectivity of the Palmer
        calculations when compared to current water budget models,
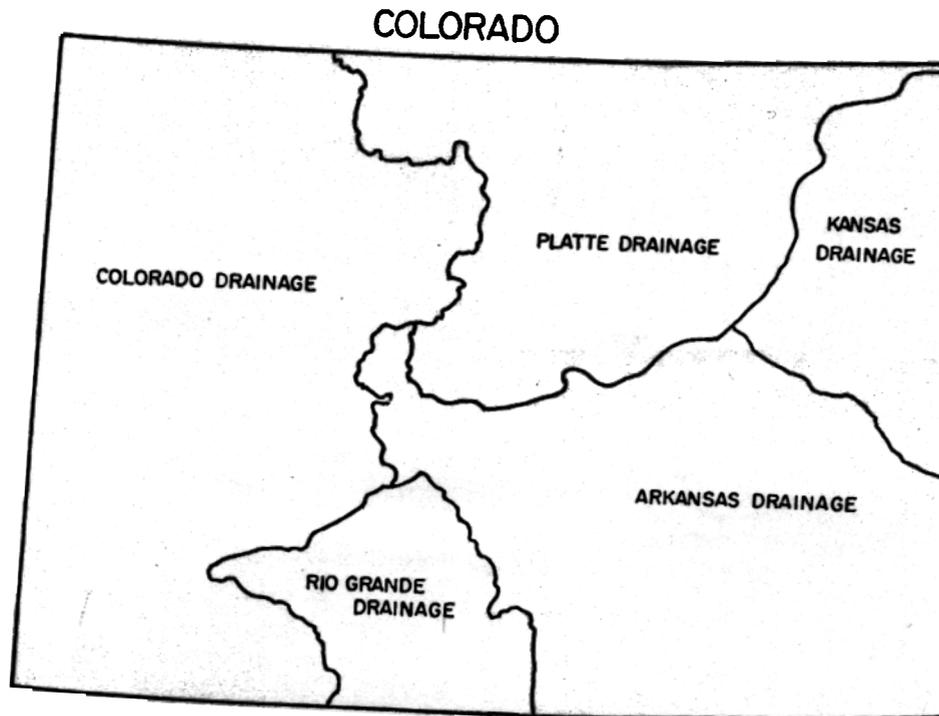
Figure 3. Original State Climatic Divisions for Colorado developed by the National Climatic Data Center, Asheville, North Carolina.

2) the climatic diversity which are apparent within the
traditional climatic divisions. (The Colorado drainage, for
example, includes areas which average less than 7 inches of
precipitation annually and areas which average more than 60
inches per year. Likewise, average annual temperatures in the
Colorado drainage range from below 30°F in the mountains to
more than 52° in several western valley locations.)

3) the inconsistencies inherent in the input data. (With such
climatic diversity it is impossible to select representative
data points. Weekly input data is required for the national
calculations, but most data are transmitted by mail, most data
are collected by unpaid cooperative observers, and a strict
time schedule is required to get data into the weekly
calculations. The result is, the number of stations used to
calculate division averages may be very few and the stations
may vary from week to week.)

These are major weaknesses of the current method, particularly as
it applies to Colorado. As a result, use of the index has been limited
Nevertheless, the Palmer Index has attained national recognition and
credibility as a consistent, simple indexing method. Examination of 50
years of Palmer Index values for the 5 state climatic divisions shows
that the Palmer Index does give a reasonable general picture of
Colorado's moisture conditions which might be useful on a regional or
national scale. However, spatial resolution is inadequate for in-state
applications where local differences are important.

D. Goals of this Project

This project was undertaken with the overall goal of improving
drought monitoring capabilities within the state of Colorado. Specific
tasks included the following:

• Develop capability to calculate the Palmer Drought Index in
Colorado.

• Verify index calculations against federal calculations.

• Develop new geographical subdivisions for the State of
Colorado.

- Introduce the newly defined Palmer Drought Index for use by the WATF.

Compare the Palmer Drought Index with winter wheat yield.

The last item was a change from the original proposal. Originally, other indexes were to be examined. However, interaction with the WATF lead to a concentrated effort to compare Palmer Index values with winter wheat yields to help demonstrate the benefits of using this type of index.

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PROCEDURE -- PALMER INDEX CALCULATIONS FOR COLORADO

A. The Computer Program

No effort was made by the Colorado Climate Center to develop our

local version of the Palmer Index computer program. Instead, a copy

of the computer program written in FORTRAN was obtained from the U.S.

Department of Agriculture North Central Forest Experiment Station in

East Lansing, Michigan. According to William Main (1982), who

originally wrote this particular version of the program, and contacts at

the National Climatic Data Center (Lewis, 1982), the U.S.D.A. model was

consistent with the operational model being run at the National Climatic

Data Center. Some minor differences were possible due to differences in

computers. The U.S.D.A. model was also the version of the program used

by the State of Kansas for special drought monitoring work (Brown,

1979a, 979b).

The currently used values of the coefficients described in Section

II.A. used for each climatic division in Colorado were obtained from the

National Climatic Data Center (1982). Very little additional work was

required to adapt the program to run on the Colorado State University

CDC mainframe computer.

B. Program Verification

To verify that the U.S.D.A. program was working properly, a simple

test was performed. Using the original coefficients supplied by the

National Climatic Data Center, monthly Palmer Index values were

generated for the Kansas Drainage in east central Colorado. This area

was chosen since it was the most climatically homogeneous of the 5

existing Colorado divisions and because there was only a handful of

input data points in the area. Monthly index values were calculated
using monthly temperature and precipitation data for all weather
stations in the area during the 1931 to 1972 period. Our results were
then compared to the monthly index values previously generated for that
area by the National Climatic Data Center.

The results of this comparison test are shown in Figure 4 for the
10-year period 1951-1960. Identical values were not obtained throughout
the period. However, with few exceptions, differences were small enough
(<0.2) to be considered trivial. From available information there is no
way to fully explain the few instances such as early 1957 when
significant differences occurred. It can probably be assumed that our
input data at some time during that period was not identical to the
original input data. This is a reasonable explanation since additions
and corrections to the original data base have occurred over the years.
There is no reason to expect, based on this test, that any differences
or errors exist in the actual Palmer Index program adapted to Colorado.

C. Development of New State Climatic Divisions

A major element of this project was to devise a new, more
appropriate, set of climatic divisions for the state. Originally a set
of 12 areas was proposed including 3 plains regions, 2 foothills areas,
3 mountain regions and 4 western valley zones. Actual examination of
climatic averages for weather stations within these 12 areas still
indicated insufficient climatic similarity and uniformity (homogeneity)
Finally, 25 separate areas were chosen (Figure 5). Table 2 names and
identifies each of these areas. This breakdown most effectively
separated climatically and economically different areas of the state.
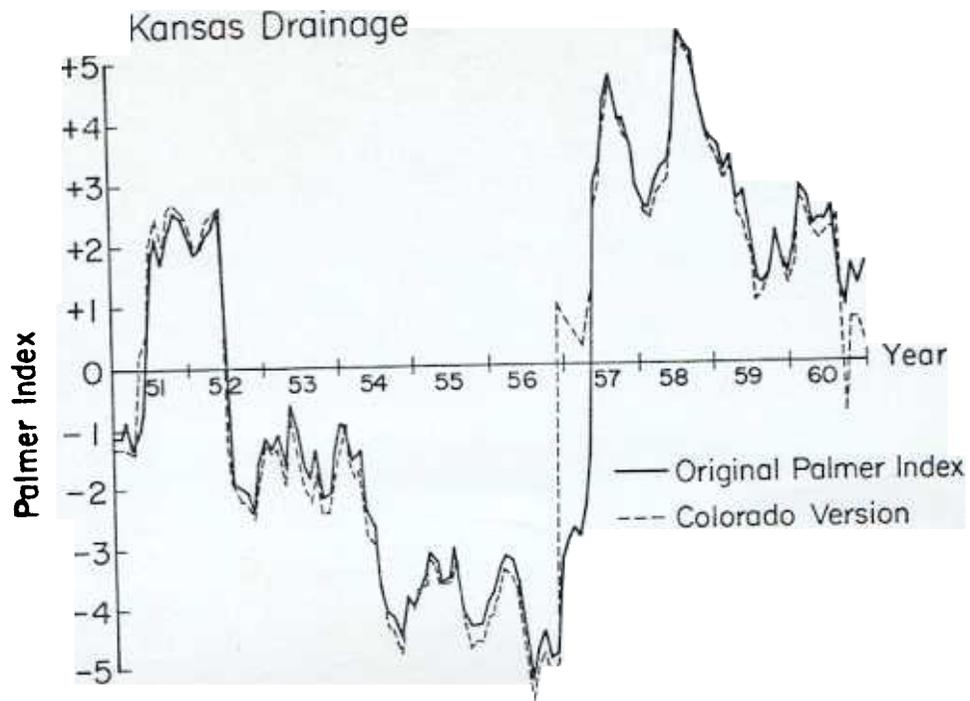
Figure 4. Monthly Palmer Index values, 1951-1960, for the
Kansas Drainage. Original National Climatic Data
Center values (solid line) compared to values
calculated by the Colorado Climate Center (dashed line).
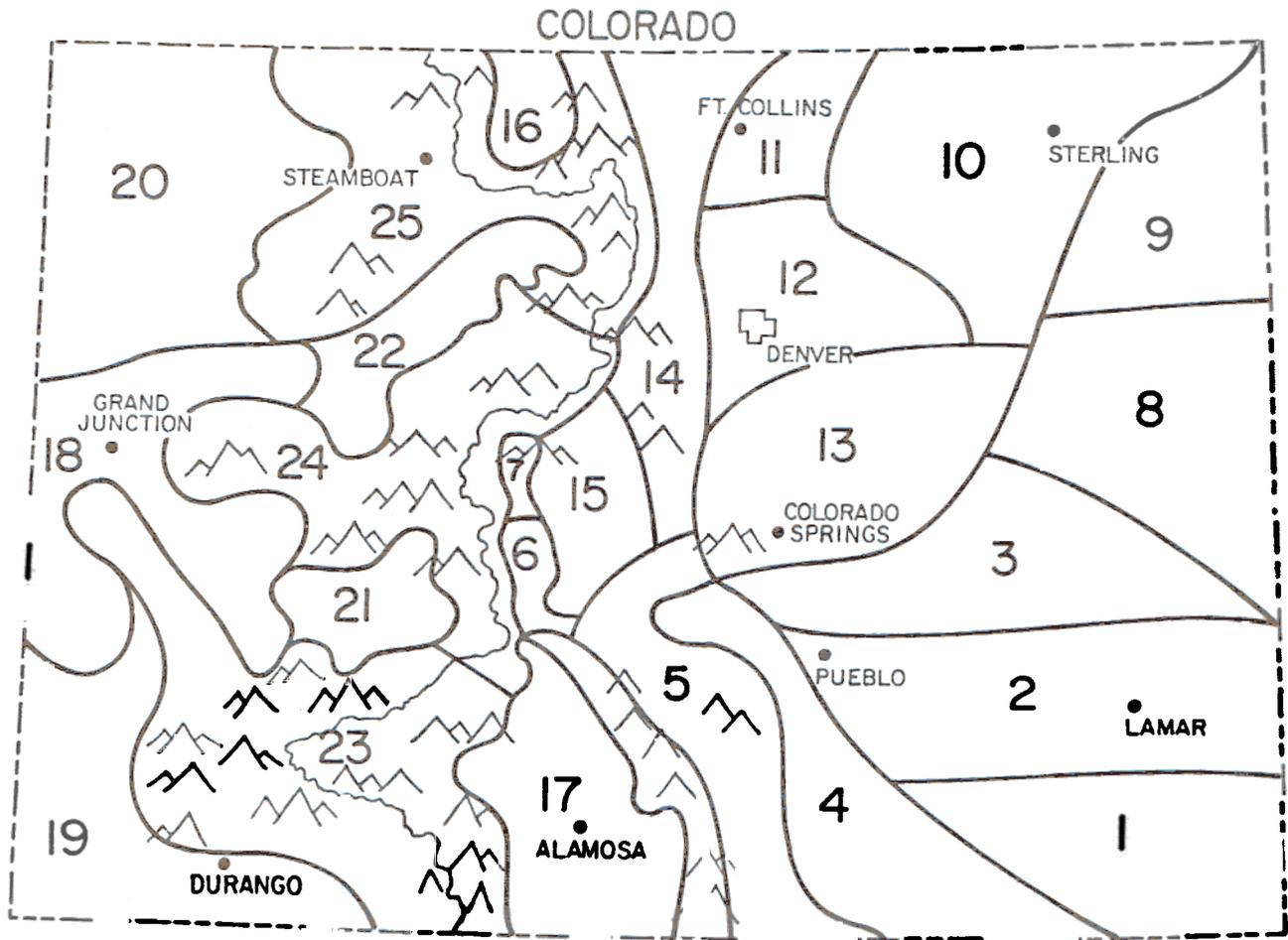
Figure 5. New climatic divisions for Colorado chosen for calculation of local Palmer Index values. Names and additional divisional information are given in Table 2.

TABLE 2.

Regions Selected for Calculation of Palmer Index

Region Number	Region Name[1]	Number of[2] Weather Stations	Average[3] Latitude (deg. min.)	Average[3] Elevation (feet)
1	Arkansas – Southeast Plains/Mesas	5	37°21'	4295
2	Arkansas – Valley Bottom	12	38 6	4132
3	Arkansas – Plains North of Valley	8	38 34	4631
4	Arkansas – Adjacent Plains/Mesas	9	37 30	5708
5	Arkansas – Foothills	5	37 53	7665
6	Arkansas – Collegiate Valley	2	34 42	7709
7	Arkansas – Upper Valley	3	39 11	9659
8	Kansas – Southern Plains	8	39 21	4457
9	Kansas – Northern Plains	6	40 19	4066
10	Platte – Northeast Plains	8	40 34	4531
11	Platte – North Front Range Adjacent Plains	6	40 35	
12	Platte – South Front Range Adjacent Plains	11	39 48	
13	Platte/Arkansas – Pikes Peak and Palmer Divide	12	39 04	6390
14	Platte – Foothills	13	39 51	7645
15	Platte – South Park	2	38 58	8718
16	Platte – North Park	2	40 36	8248
17	Rio Grande – San Luis Valley	10	37 36	7814
18	Colorado – Lower Valleys (Colorado, Gunnison, Dolores)	19	38 58	5408
19	Colorado – Lower Valleys (San Juan, Dolores, Animas)	10	37 27	6846
20	Colorado – Lower Valleys (Yampa, White)	8	40 18	6012
21	Colorado – Upper Valley – Gunnison	6	38 24	7890
22	Colorado – Upper Valley – Colorado	6	39 54	7251
23	Colorado/Rio Grande – San Juan Mountains	13	37 43	
24	Colorado/Arkansas – Central Mountains	12	39 12	8969
25	Colorado – Northern Mountains	7	40 08	8509

[1]Name based on traditional drainage basin name followed by description for local area.

[2]Weather station statistics based on active weather stations in each region as of 1 January 1983.

[3]Averages obtained by averaging latitudes and elevations of the weather stations used in each region.

It also complemented reasonably well the divisions already selected by the USDA-Soil Conservation Service and the Colorado Division of Water Resources for calculation of their new Surface Water Supply Index (SWSI).

D. Input Data

It was the expressed intent of this project to make use of only consistent input data to avoid the problems of the current national method. Currently divisional input data are formed by averaging the weekly or monthly data from a set of stations in each area. These stations may change over time as individual stations are moved or are terminated and new stations are added. While this may not be a problem in many areas of the country, this has contributed significantly to the lack of credibility of the Palmer Index in Colorado.

A simple procedure was developed to minimize this problem. First of all, by making the areas smaller and more climatically uniform, much of the problem goes away immediately. However, in making areas smaller the number of stations averaged to produce the division input is also reduced. This can make the Palmer calculation even more sensitive to missing data or station moves. To deal with that problem, long-term monthly averages of temperature and precipitation for all currently reporting weather stations in Colorado were calculated based on the 1961-1980 period. If 20 years of data were not available, available averages were adjusted to 20-year averages using nearby stations. The result was a set of monthly averages for 203 regularly reporting weather stations. Twenty-year division averages were then calculated for each

of the 25 regions based on the reporting stations in each area (see

Table 2)

Monthly input data were then generated for the period 1951 through
1980. Values were obtained for each area by calculating the temperature
departure from the 20-year average for each station (degrees
Fahrenheit). An average departure was calculated for any area by
summing the individual station departures and dividing by the number of
stations reporting that month. The average departure was then added to
or subtracted from the long-term average for that month for the area as
a whole. The end result was a single mean temperature for the area for
the month, which was not affected adversely by missing data.
Precipitation was handled in a similar way using percent of average
rather than departure from average.

This is not the only and perhaps not even the best way to minimize
the effects of station moves, changes, and missing data. It is a simple
method, however, and an appropriate one for developing consistent input
data for a model which is more sensitive to consistency than to absolute
numbers.

E. Coefficients

The original coefficients required for the Palmer Index program
were developed for the traditional state divisions. They were no longer
appropriate for the new set of divisions. New coefficients are
generated internally by the existing program simply by running the model
on a long time series of data. This was done for each of the 25 regions
using 1951 through 1980 monthly data.

The new coefficients will not be presented here. However, one example is appropriate to point out just how much climatic differences were hidden in the old division breakdown. Table 3 compares the 5 basic coefficients prerequisite for Palmer Index calculations for the several areas which compose the original Colorado basin. Major differences are apparent. Even without a good understanding of the exact meaning and interpretation of these coefficients, it is still obvious that the original values were not appropriate for specific subregions within the Colorado drainage basin

F. Index Calculations

All the preliminary work described in the previous sections had to be completed before it was possible to begin the actual calculation of Palmer Index values. This final step was very straightforward and simple. Using the newly generated area coefficients and the carefully prepared input data, the program then generated monthly index values for the entire 1951 through 1980 record. An example of the output is shown in Figure 6. The program keeps track of all the hydrologic accounting and prints out these values monthly.

Estimates of the Crop Moisture Index are also generated by this program. Possible applications of these results will be discussed in a later chapter.

Index values were calculated for all months, 1951-1980 for all 25 areas except if no input data at all were available for a given region. The following chapter will examine some of the results.

TABLE 3.

Comparison of Palmer Index Coefficients
for Areas in the Colorado Basin for October

Area	Coef. of Evaporation	Coef. of Moisture Recharge	Coef. of Runoff	Coef. of Moisture Depletion	Climatic Characteristic
Original Values					
Entire Colorado Basin	.7482	0406	.0000	.2237	2.4086
New Values					
18 Lower Valleys (Colorado, Gunnison, Dolores)	.5747	.0321	.0000	.4213	2.3077
19 Lower Valleys (San Juan, Dolores, Animas)	.7129	.1175	.0000	.2729	1.4903
20 Lower Valleys (Yampa, White)	.7067	.0479	.0000	.3133	2.2836
21 Upper Valley (Gunnison)	.6793	.0379	.0000	.3704	2.7489
22 Upper Valley (Colorado)	.7456	.0492	.0000	.3919	2.4475
23 San Juan Mountains	.9281	.2341	.0679	.1926	1.3244
24 Central Mountains	.8994	.1207	0064	.1956	1.9946
25 Northern Mountains	.9419	.2251	0280	1465	1.7839

ARKANSAS DRAINAGE --- VALLEY BOTTOM

STATION 2 YEAR 1980	JAN	FEB	MARCH	APRIL	MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUG	SEPT	OCT	NOV	DEC
PRECIPITATION /INCHES/	.73	.28	2.21	4.14	3.32	.87	.98	1.45	.88	.04	.62	.09
TEMPERATURE /DEGREES F/	28.20	36.80	40.00	48.10	57.90	74.00	79.60	76.40	68.10	53.70	41.80	41.60
POTENTIAL EVAPOTRANSPIRATION	0.00	.18	.44	1.27	2.7	5.41	6.54	5.56	3.67	1.68	.48	.45
AVAILABLE SURFACE MOISTURE	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	.14	0.00
AVAILABLE SUBSURFACE MOISTURE	1.36	1.46	3.22	6.00	6.00	2.97	.61	.25	.15	.12	.12	.11
POTENTIAL MOISTURE LOSS	0.00	.18	.44	1.12	2.52	4.78	2.77	.49	.13	.04	.01	.15
POTENTIAL RECHARGE	5.37	4.64	4.54	2.78	0.00	0.00	4.03	6.39	6.75	6.85	6.88	6.74
MOISTURE RECHARGE	.73	.10	1.77	2.78	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	.14	0.00
MOISTURE LOSS	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	4.03	2.36	.36	.10	.04	0.00	.14
EVAPOTRANSPIRATION	0.00	.18	.44	1.27	2.77	4.90	3.34	1.81	.98	.08	.48	.23
RUNOFF	0.00	0.00	0.00	.10	.55	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
EST. EVAPOTRANSPIRATION	0.00	.18	.41	1.05	2.74	2.77	3.09	2.39	1.42	.69	.38	.38
EST. MOISTURE RECHARGE	.09	.17	.36	.13	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.00	.00	.07	.36	.26
EST. RUNOFF	.14	0.00	0.00	.01	.01	.03	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
EST. MOISTURE LOSS	0.00	.09	.13	.51	.84	3.45	1.83	.32	.08	.02	.00	.08
EST. PRECIPITATION	.13	.27	.64	.67	1.44	-.64	1.27	2.07	1.34	.74	.74	.56
MOISTURE DEPARTURE	.10	.01	1.57	3.47	1.81	1.51	-.29	-.62	-.46	-.70	-.12	-.47
MOISTURE ANOMALY INDEX	1.14	.04	3.45	6.88	3.04	2.53	-.55	-1.43	-1.10	-1.68	-.29	-1.39
PROBABILITY SPELL ENDED	0.00	2.49	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	5.05	18.24	30.88	50.62	57.84	76.63
MOISTURE NEEDED TO END SPELL	.99	-.11	3.19	6.73	2.91	2.38	-.70	-2.28	-3.53	-5.36	-5.80	-7.33
WET SEVERITY INDEX	0.00	.01	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
DRY SEVERITY INDEX	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	-.18	-.64	-.94	-1.40	-1.35	-1.68
ESTABLISHED INDEX	2.18	1.97	2.92	4.91	5.43	5.71	4.94	3.95	3.18	2.29	1.96	1.30
FINAL INDEX	2.18	99.00	2.92	4.91	5.43	5.71	99.00	99.00	99.00	99.00	99.00	99.00
CROP MOISTURE INDEX	1.47	.21	3.81	7.02	3.14	2.56	-.55	-1.43	-1.09	-1.61	.07	-1.13

Figure 6.   Example output produced by the Palmer
Index computer program adapted to Colorado.

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IV. RESULTS

A. Monthly Palmer Index Values

All of the monthly Palmer Index values for the 1951 through 1980 period will be published as a part of the Colorado Climate Center's Climatology Report Series. All values appeared to be reasonable and consistent with the input data. Most values fell in the range of -6 to +6, the normal range for Palmer Index results. Extreme values of the index corresponded well with documented records of extreme conditions of drought and excess moisture. By all general indications, the program produces realistic results for Colorado

B. Geographical Variations

One of the reasons this research project was undertaken was to prove that the original basin size was too large to show local variations in moisture conditions. As expected, the smaller areas for index calculation did yield considerably more information.

Figure 7 compares monthly Palmer Index values for the smaller areas for a four year period (1965-1968) with the original PI calculated for the entire drainage basin of which they are a part. Significant differences are noted. In the Colorado River Basin for example (Figure 7a), the Northern Mountains and the Southwest Valleys seldom indicated similar moisture status relative to their long-term normals. During an extreme wet period in 1965 both areas experienced PI values above +3. The Southwest Valleys remained wetter than normal (PI > 0) throughout most of 1966 while the Northern Mountains quickly dropped to -2 and below. In the Platte Basin (Figure 7b) the northeastern plains experienced nearly an entire abnormally wet year from spring of 1967

A   COLORADO RIVER BASIN

B   PLATTE

Entire Platte Basin
Northeast Plains
South Park
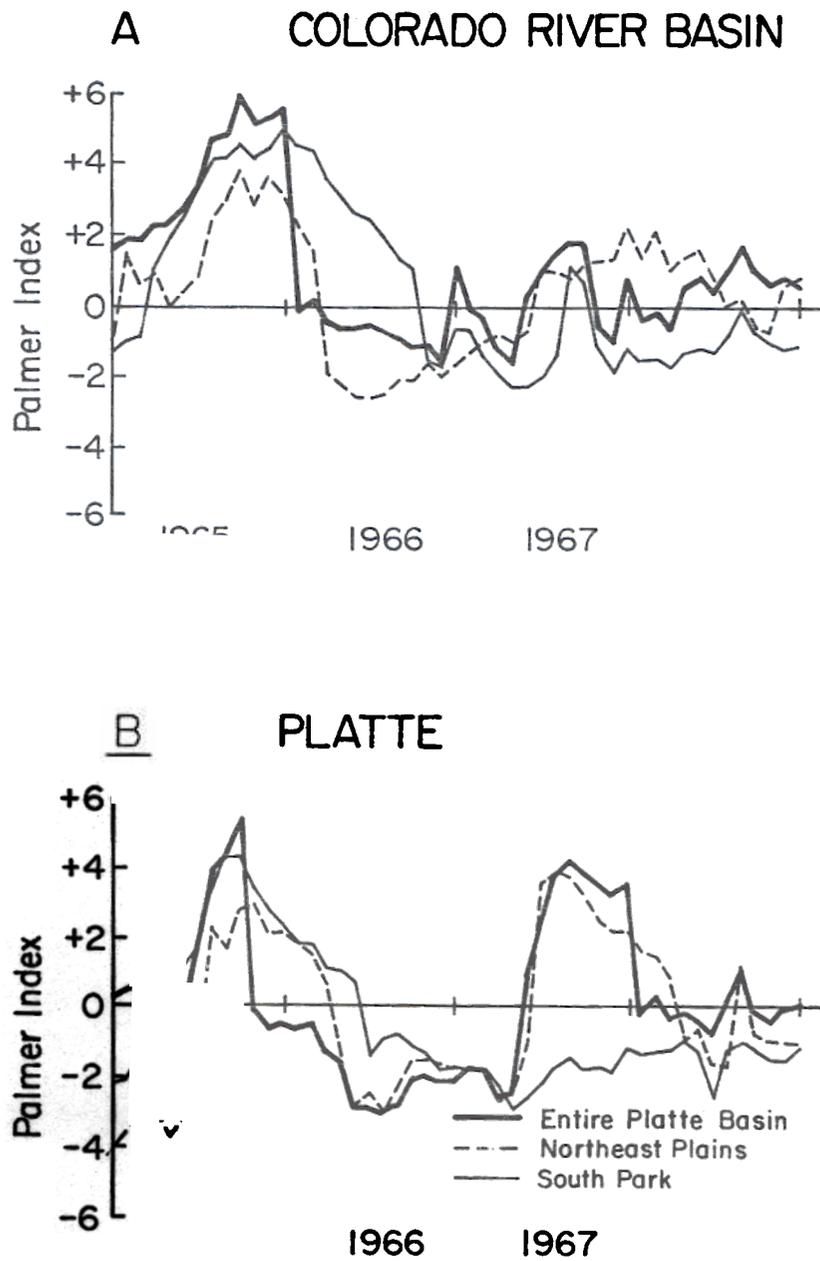
Figure 7. Monthly Palmer Index values 1965–1968, for the original large climatic divisions compared to values calculated for selected new small regions in the: a) Colorado River basin, and the b) Platte River basin.

into early 1968 while South Park approached moderate drought throughout the period. The original PI didn't even give a hint of the dry conditions occurring in that small area of the state.

The magnitude differences of PI's within the large basins were typically 1 to 2 units but were sometimes more than 4. There were more than a few cases of PI values indicating moderately wet in one subregion while a nearby subregion indicated moderate drought. Assuming these calculations are correct, the implications for an effective drought monitoring program are significant.

C. Case Study: 1976-1977 Winter Drought

Another way to even more clearly examine the geographical variations across the state is by looking at the entire state at a series of specific times. Figure 8a-d follows the evolution of the severe winter drought of 1976-1977. When PI values are produced for 25 subregions of the state it becomes practical to use contour analysis to describe the statewide pattern. The national analyses of the PI is shown for comparison.

On October 1, 1976 (Figure 8a) much of the state indicated near normal moisture except for a small wet area in the mountains west of Pueblo and Colorado Springs. The national analysis was unable to resolve this small wet area. The moderate to severe drought area in northeast Colorado was more extensive than indicated by the national analysis.

By January (Figure 8b) conditions were rapidly deteriorating from the mountains westward. East of the mountains remained near average

COLORADO

I OCTOBER 1976

Figure 8a. Palmer Index pattern for Colorado for 1 October
1976 based on the 25 new regions (top) compared
to the Palmer Index information for the entire
U.S. derived from the original climatic divisions
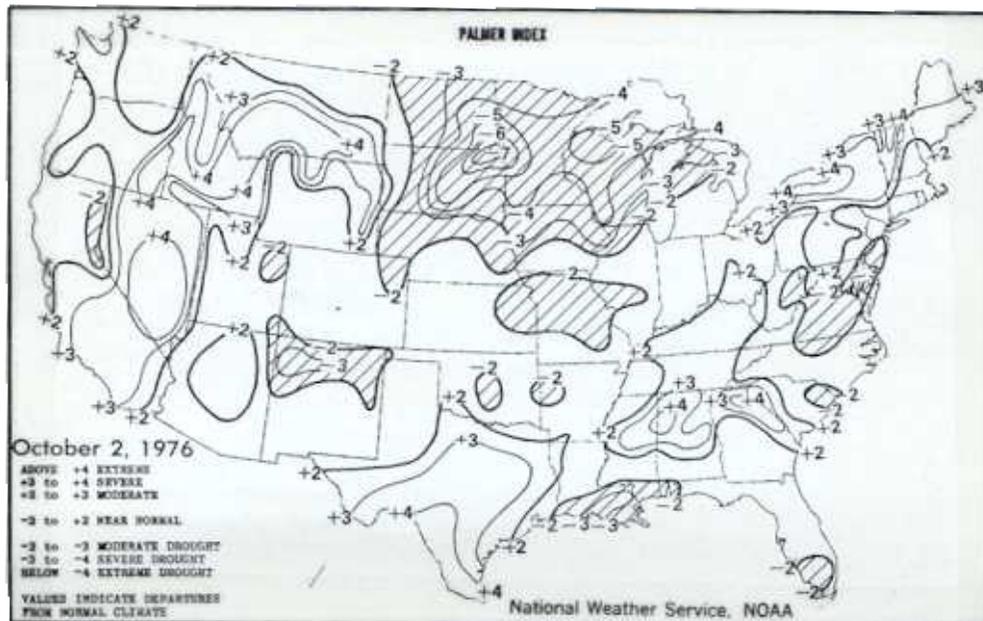(bottom).

Not Available

Figure 8b. Palmer Index pattern for Colorado for 1 January
1977 based on the 25 new regions. No U.S.
information available.

except, again for the northeast plains where moderate to severe drought conditions prevailed.

Already by April 1977 (Figure 8c), severe to extreme drought was indicated nearly everywhere along and west of the Continental Divide Dry conditions prevailed in northeastern Colorado although not as severe as before. The moist area in the southeastern part of the state gradually shrunk.

The peak of the drought was reached in mid summer (Figure 8d) as the entire western portion of the state reached extreme drought levels with values approaching all time low figures. A smaller pocket of severe to extreme drought was observed along the Front Range northward from Denver. The remainder of eastern Colorado was in much better shape. Northeastern Colorado had actually improved somewhat since winter.

During this particular drought period, the national analyses were fairly consistent with the higher resolution Colorado data. However, the detail, and the confidence associated with that detail, was much greater with the local analyses. The national analyses were unable to pick out the variations in eastern Colorado. In fact, the national PI analysis for July 2, 1977 (Figure 8d) gave no indication at all of the local extreme drought area near Fort Collins. That analysis was very accurate and is clearly indicated in the accumulated precipitation map for Colorado presented in Figure 9 (Doesken and McKee, 1978). The July 1 PI pattern as a whole was very consistent with the pattern of the October 1976 - June 1977 accumulated precipitation as a percent of a average.

Figure 8c. Palmer Index pattern for Colorado for 1 April 1977 based on the 25 new regions (top) compared to the Palmer Index information for the entire U.S. derived from the original climatic divisions (bottom).
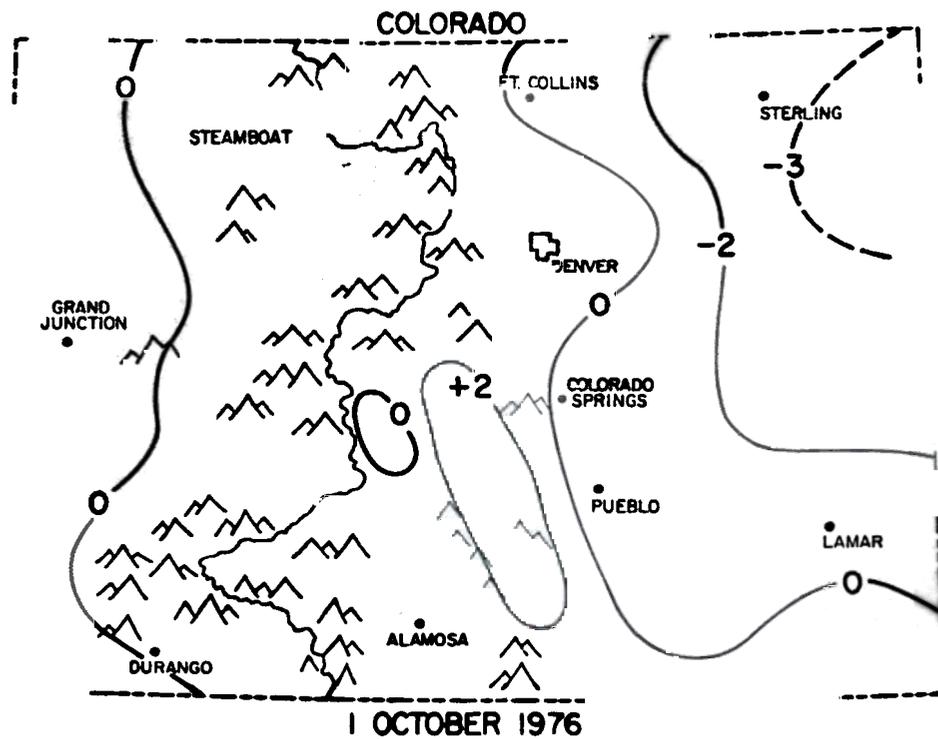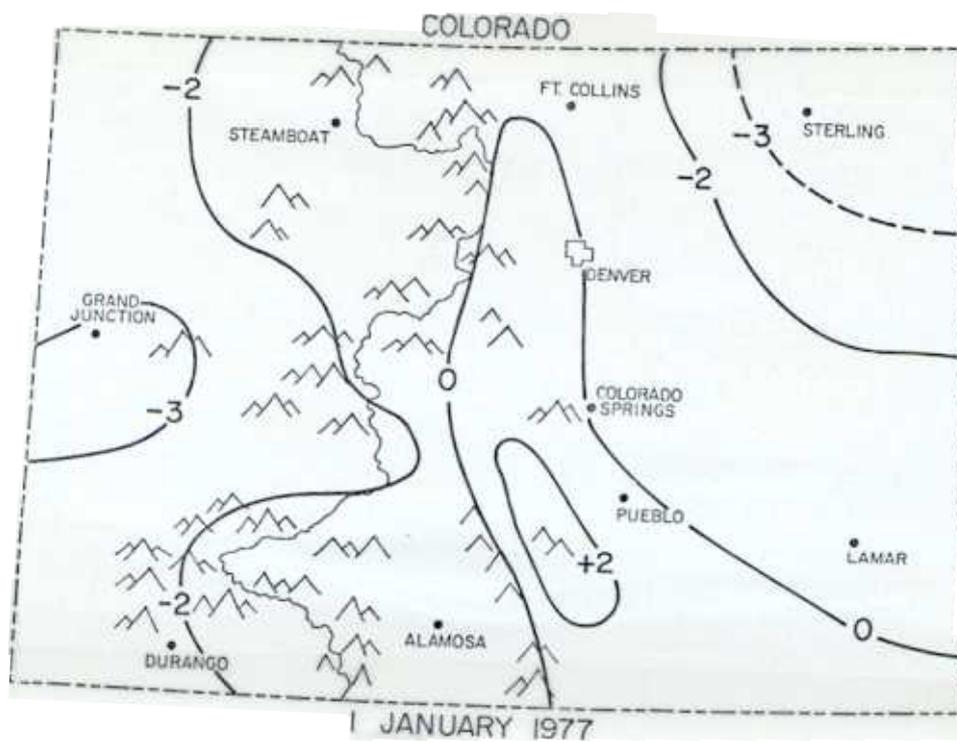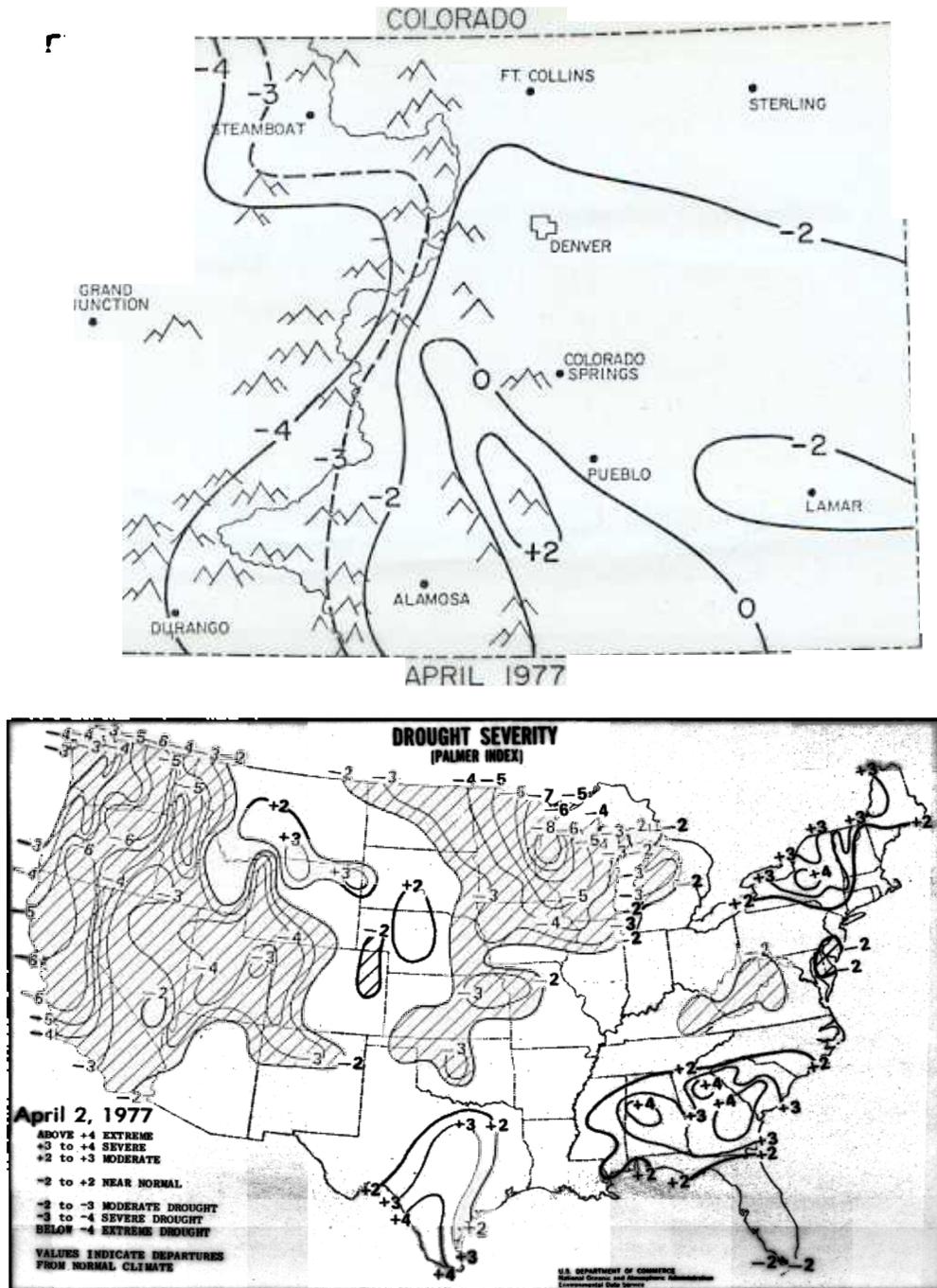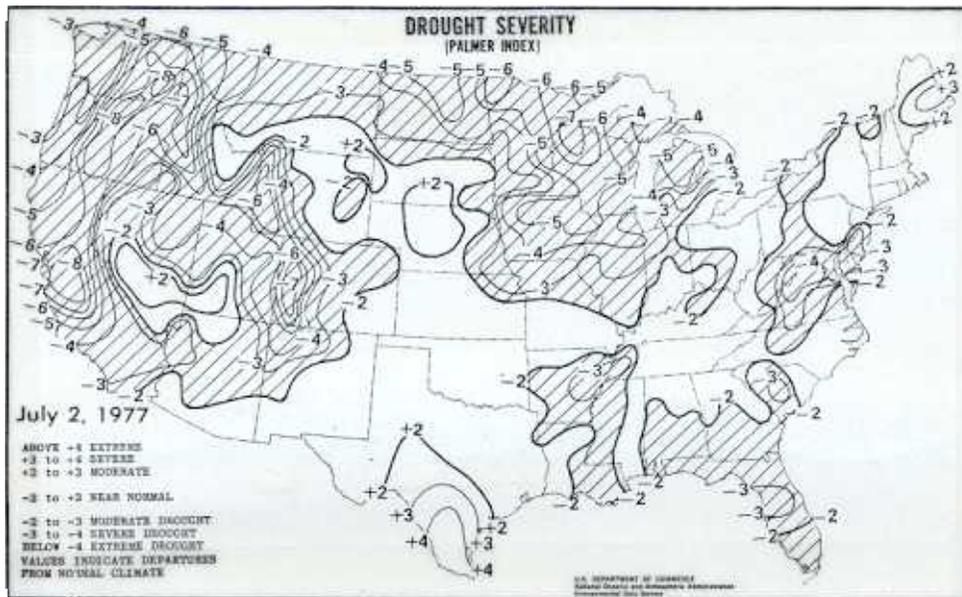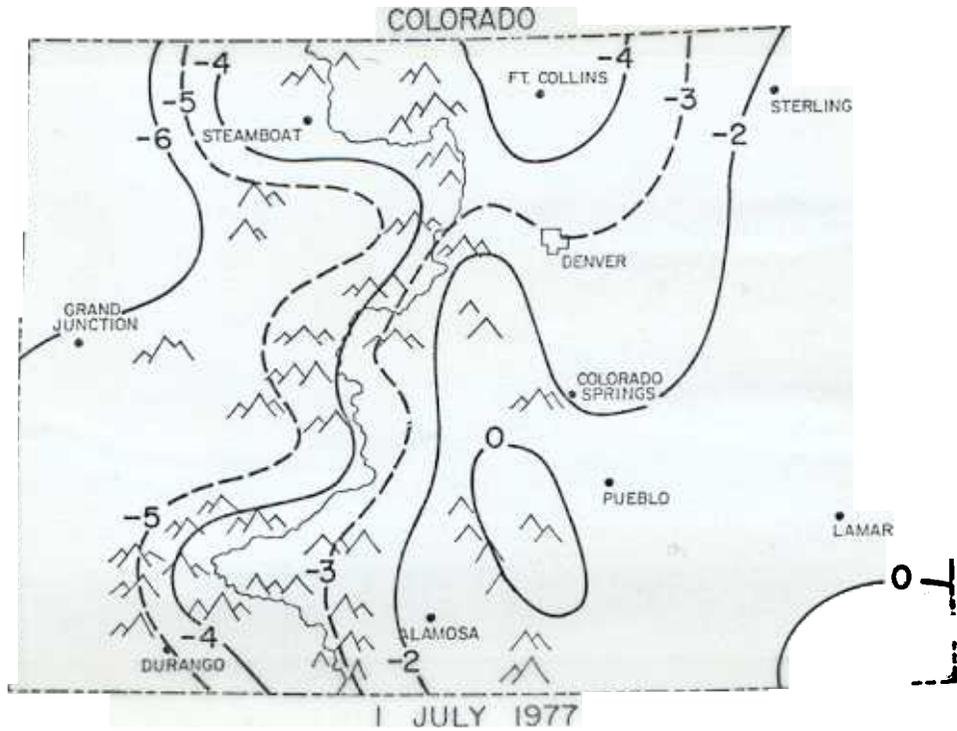
Figure 8d. Palmer Index pattern for Colorado for
1 July 1977 based on the 25 new regions
(top) compared to the Palmer Index
information for the entire U.S. derived
from the original climatic divisions (bottom).

'igure 9. Precipitation for the period October 1976
through June 1977 as a percent of the
1951-1970 average.

D. Case Study: 1956-1957 End of the Mid-50's Drought
    on the High Plains

A second example of local variations and changes is shown in Figure

10a-f. National analyses are not available for that time period.

Instead the index values for the specific state climatic divisions are

shown for comparison. In this sequence, extreme drought develops during

the summer of 1956 in east central Colorado (Figure 10a, b). Drought

expands into southern and western parts of the state (c) and then begins

to abate in the northeast (d). Moderate to severe drought conditions

continued through the winter in the southeastern half of Colorado (e).

Then along came a very wet spring which totally washed away the drought

During the 30 years of data used in this study, this was the most

dramatic example of how abruptly serious droughts can be ended.

Once again, the original PI values gave an adequate large scale

description of moisture conditions. However, the detail afforded by

special Colorado PI study gave much more information on the nature

of this drought as it affected Colorado. For example, excellent winter

precipitation in early 1956 in the Northern and Central Mountains and

the upper Arkansas Valley showed up clearly on the local analysis while

it was not at all apparent from the large basin PI values. Also, the

large basin PI values did not show how the area of most severe drought

continued westward from the Burlington area almost all the way to Denver

and Colorado Springs, while the extreme northern and southern portions

of the Colorado High Plains were only experiencing moderate drought.

Figure 10a. Palmer Index pattern for Colorado based
on the 25 new regions (top) and Palmer
Index values for the 5 original divisions
(bottom) for 1 April 1956.
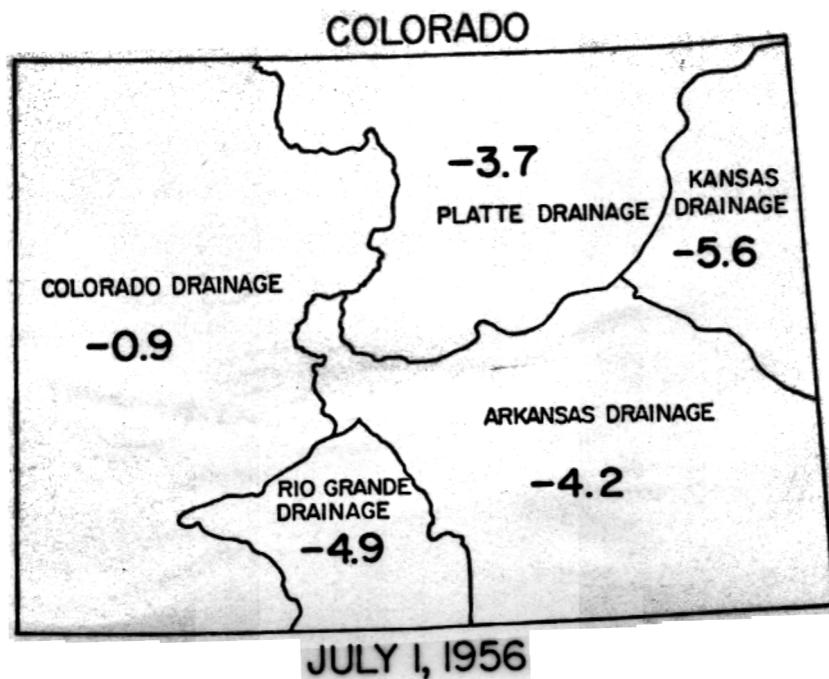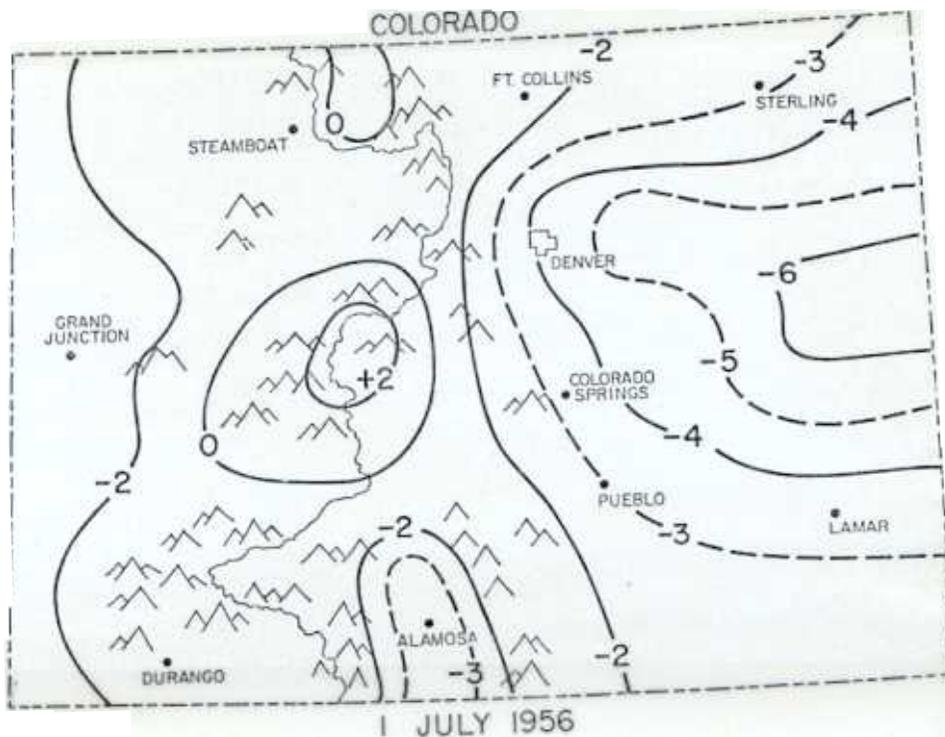
Figure 10b. Palmer Index pattern for Colorado based
on the 25 new regions (top) and Palmer
Index values for the 5 original divisions
(bottom) for 1 July 1956.
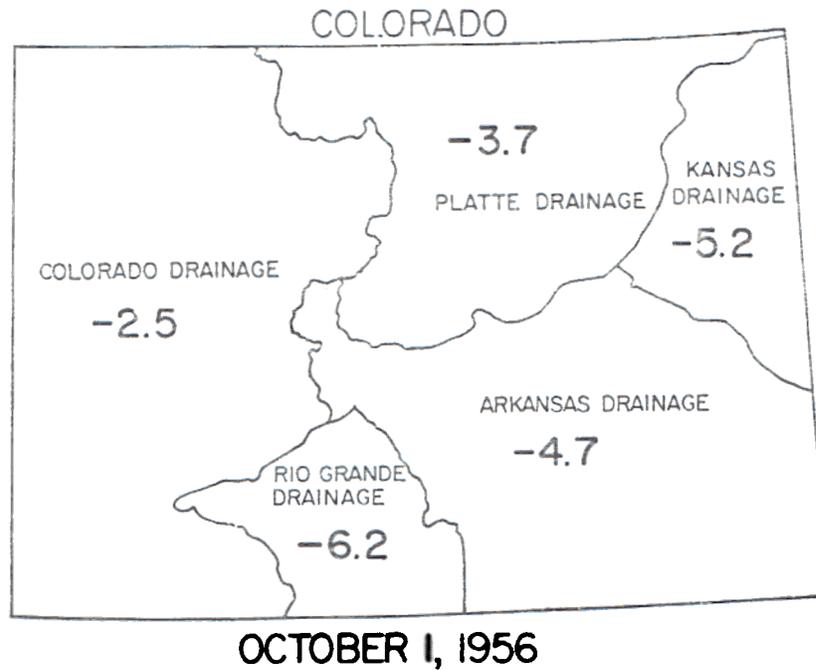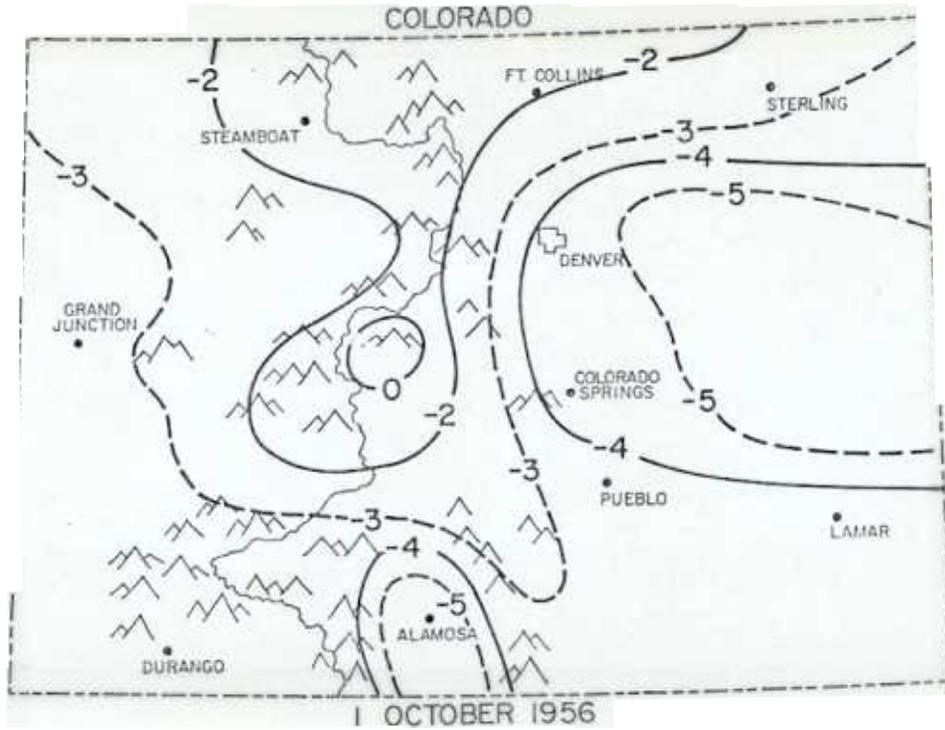
Figure 10c   Palmer Index pattern for Colorado based
on the 25 new regions (top) and Palmer
Index values for the 5 original divisions
(bottom) for 1 October 1956.
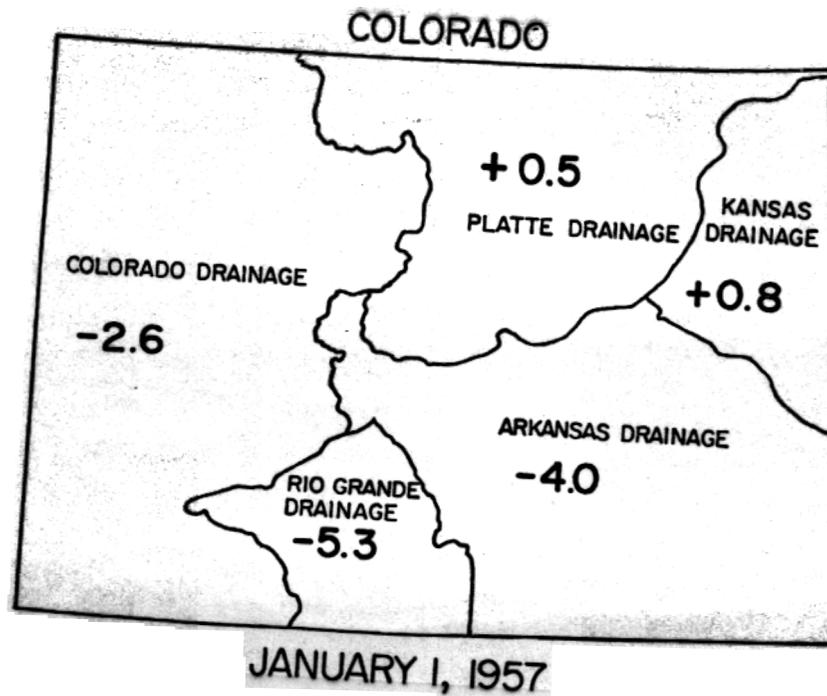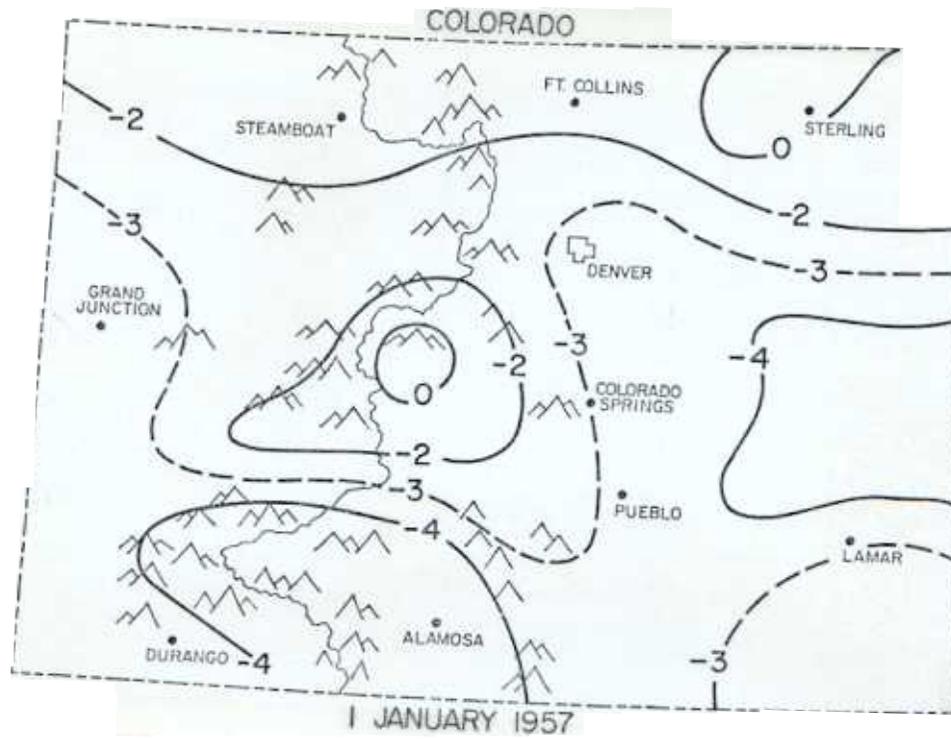
Figure 10d. Palmer Index pattern for Colorado based on the 25 new regions (top) and Palmer Index values for the 5 original divisions (bottom) for 1 January 1957.
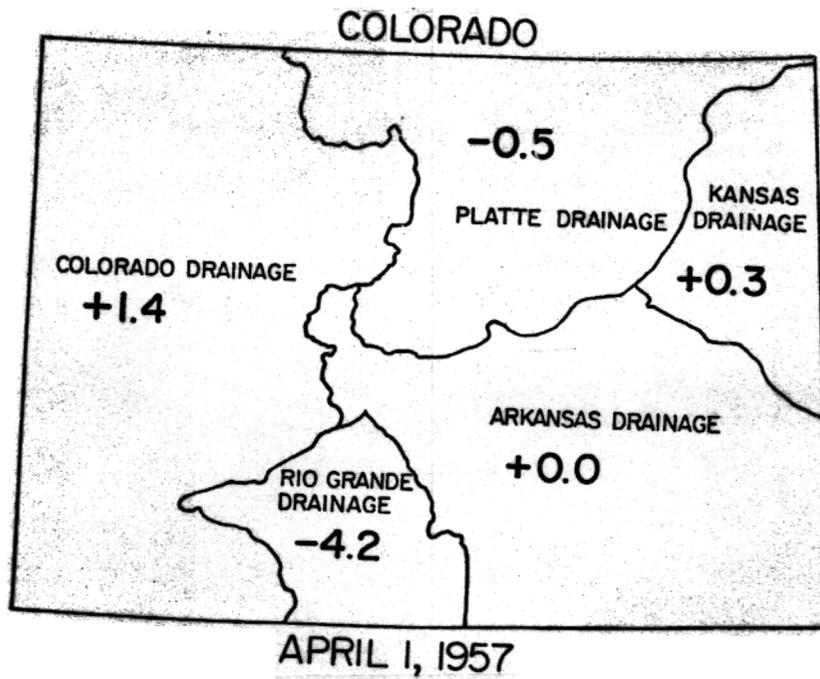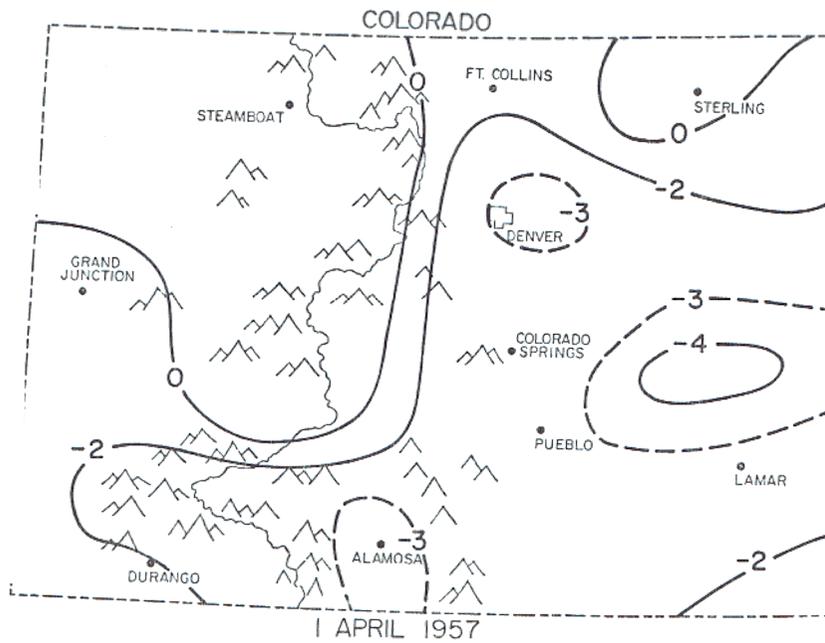
Figure 10e. Palmer Index pattern for Colorado based on the 25 new regions (top) and Palmer Index values for the 5 original divisions (bottom) for 1 April 1957.
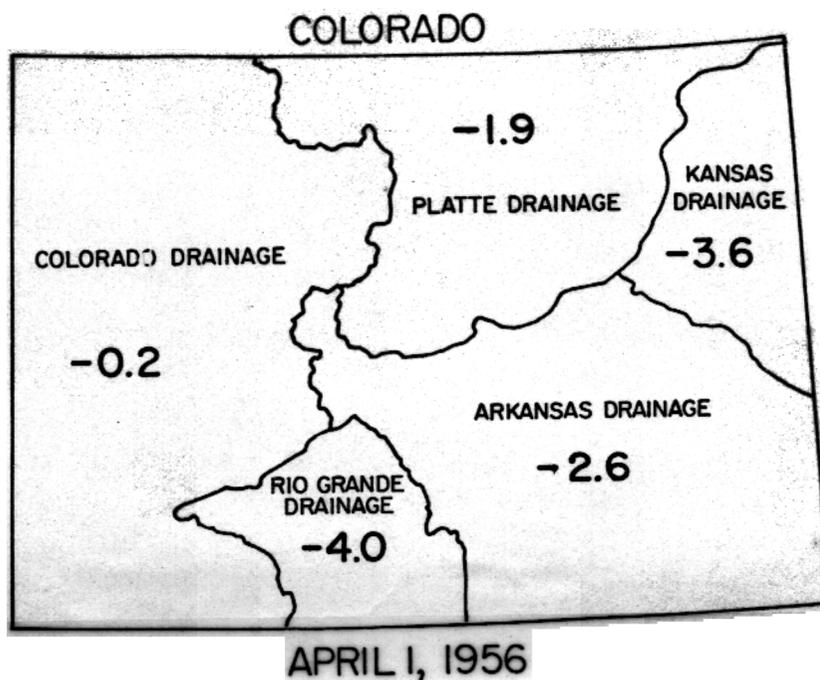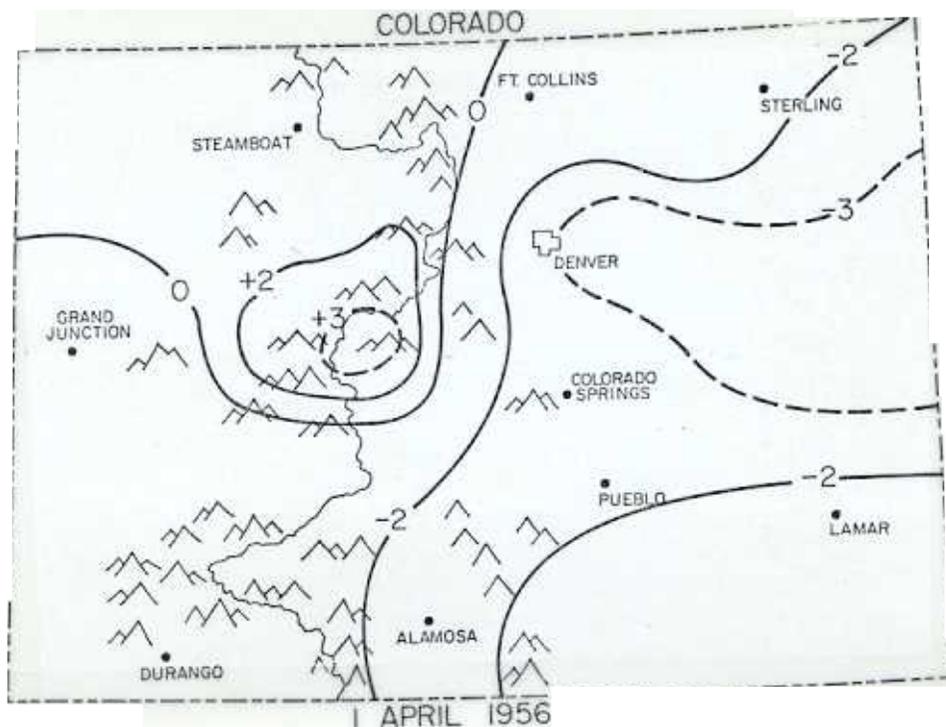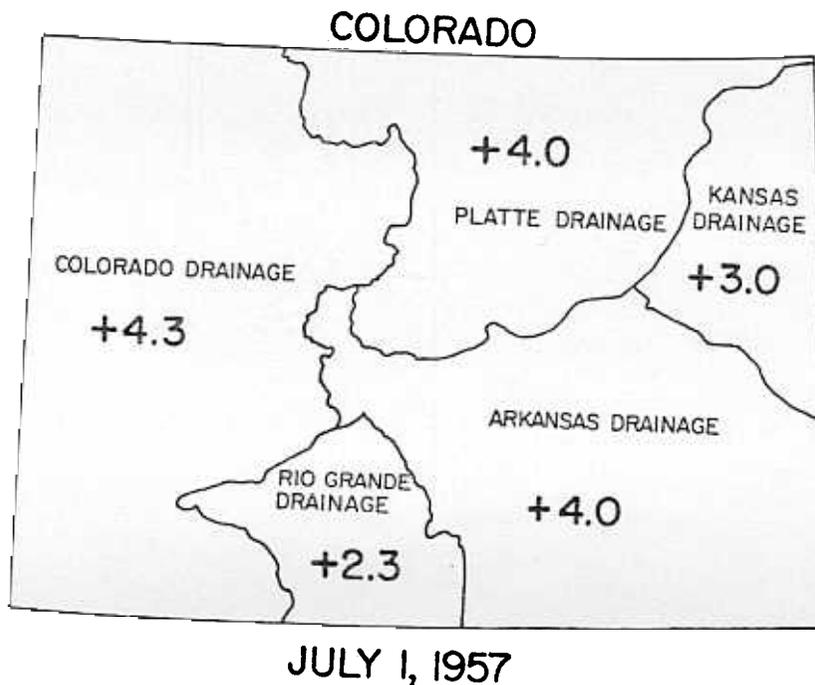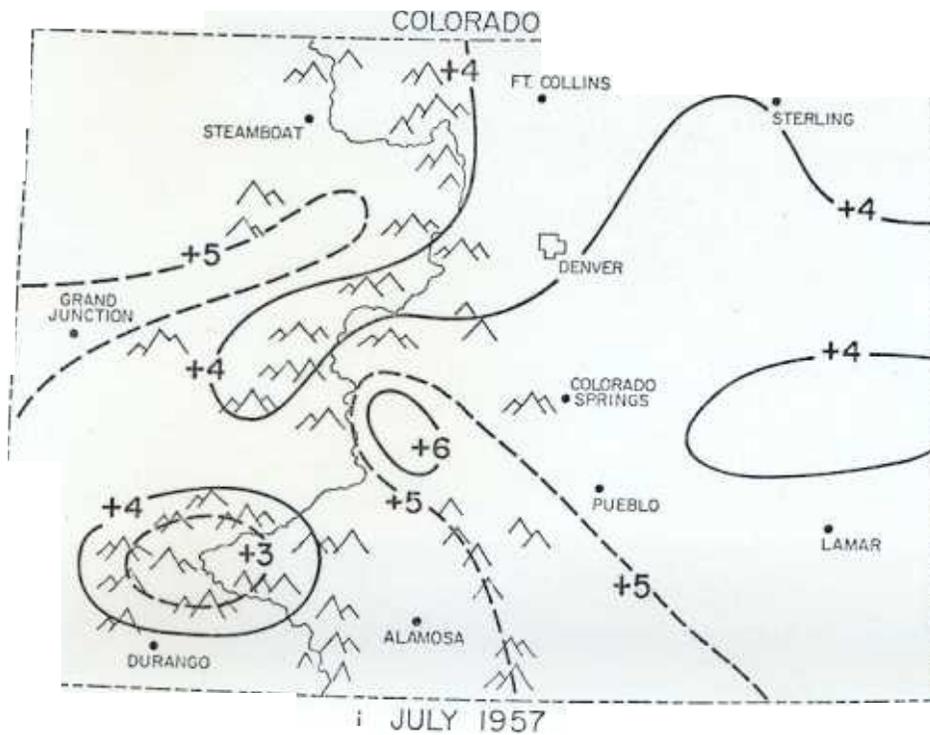
Figure 10f. Palmer Index pattern for Colorado based on
the 25 new regions (top) and Palmer Index
values for the 5 original divisions (bottom)
for 1 July 1957.

V. APPLICATION OF THE PALMER INDEX IN COLORADO
TO WINTER WHEAT PRODUCTION

A. Wheat Yield Information

The examples presented in the previous sections have indicated that
the Palmer Index, calculated for relatively small geographical areas,
yields realistic estimates of overall soil moisture conditions compared
to the climatic normal. This does make it useful as a general tool for
drought monitoring. The value and usefulness would be even greater,
however, if it could be applied to the impact side of drought. Drought
is not really drought unless there is some hardship caused by the lack
of normal moisture. For this reason, a specific application area was
selected to study how the Palmer Index could be used as an indicator of
economic impact.

Winter wheat is the dominant cultivated crop in Colorado's
agricultural economy. More than 3.5 million acres have been planted
each year since 1980 accounting for nearly half of all the cultivated
land in Colorado. Only about 4 percent of all winter wheat grown in
Colorado is irrigated, so the bulk of Colorado's wheat relies solely on
precipitation and stored moisture in the soil. As such, it is an
appropriate element of Colorado's economy to study. While drought-
hardy varieties are being and have been developed, winter wheat
continues to be very climate sensitive. The Palmer Index, being
essentially an indicator of deep soil moisture, is ideally suited for
comparison with wheat production.

In this study a very simple approach was taken. Wheat yields in
the various subregions of the state were compared to Palmer Index values
for the past several years using simple statistical correlation
techniques.

Several assumptions and approximations were required to facilitate
this comparison.

1) Wheat yield information for each year 1941-1981 was obtained
   from the Colorado Department of Agriculture, "Colorado
   Agricultural Statistics" annual reports.

2) Yield statistics were based on average yield (bushels) per non-
   irrigated acre harvested for each county.

3) The subregions used for Palmer Index calculations did not
   correspond to county areas. Yield information was determined
   for each subregion by selecting the major wheat producing
   county within the subregion. In large subregions yield
   information from 2 or 3 counties were combined, weighted
   proportionally according to the total production in each
   county.

4) Yield information was assembled for only 10 of the 25
   subregions. These 10 areas accounted for 90% of the total 1981
   production. No wheat is grown in 9 of the 25 subregions.

5) Wheat yields have improved due to changes in farming practices,
   technology, and wheat varieties. This improvement, while
   almost certainly nonlinear with time, constitutes a trend which
   is unrelated to climate. Simple linear regression was used to
   remove this trend from the data.

Average yield for each year from 1941 to 1981 is plotted for two

major wheat growing areas of Colorado in Figure 11. The trend

obtained by linear regression is also shown. This trend line will be

considered as the "average" yield for a particular area for a particular

year. Later analyses will refer to annual departures from "average"

yields. Significant year to year differences can be seen in this figure

along with large differences between subregions. For example,

effects of the mid-1950's drought appears to have been much greater in

region 8 (Kit Carson county and surroundings) compared to region 10

(Weld, Morgan, and Logan counties). Yields in general have been more

consistent in region 10 then in region 8.

Table 4 summarizes the regional winter wheat yield information used

in this study. The highest, average yields occur in northeastern
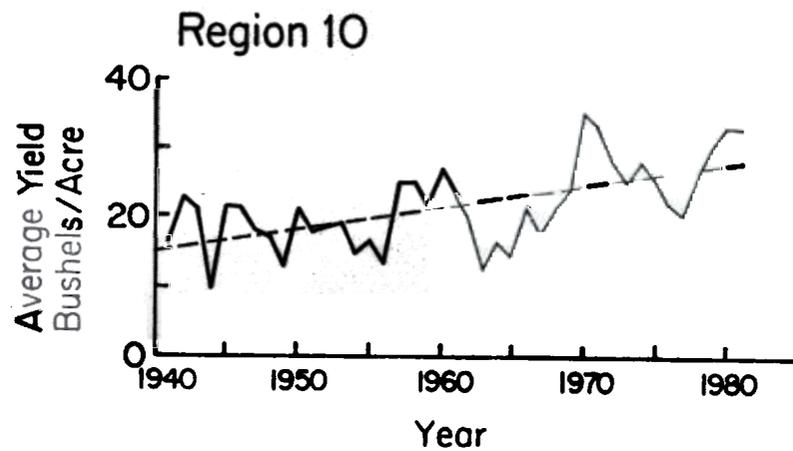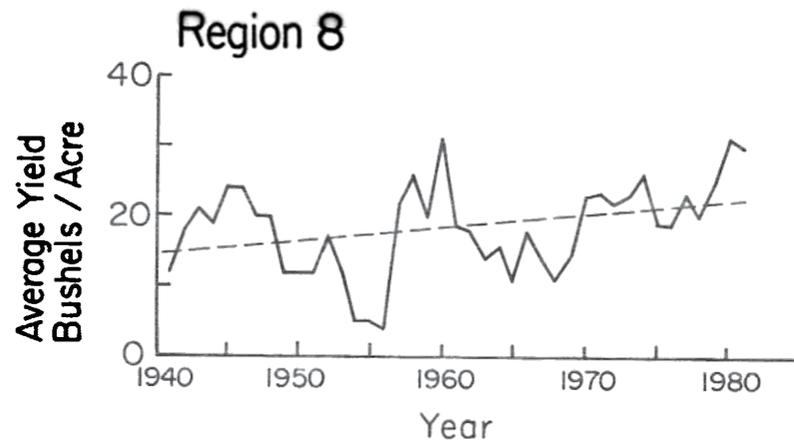
Figure 11. Time series, 1941–1981, of annual average
wheat yield in Region 8 (southern half of
Kansas drainage) and in region 10 (Platte
drainage -- Colorado northeastern plains).
Dashed lines are the "average" yield defined
by the trend line obtained using linear
regression.

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TABLE 4.

Regional Statistics on Colorado
Winter Wheat Production, 1941-1981

Region	Annual Avg. Temp. (F)	Average* Wheat Yield (bu/acre)	Estimated** normal yield as of 1941 (bu/acre)	Estimated** normal yield as of 1981 (bu/acre)	Estimated** annual rate of improvement (bu/acre)/yr
1	53.2	14.7	12.5	16.8	+.11
2	53.3	15.3	13.1	17.6	+.11
3	50.7	16.6	13.0	20.2	+.18
4	51.8	13.9	12.0	15.9	+.10
5	43.9	13.9	not calculated		
6	44.9		Insufficient wheat grown		
7	34.5		Insufficient wheat grown		
8	50.8	18.3	14.6	22.5	+.20
9	50.4	23.7	17.4	30.2	+.32
10	48.7	21.8	15.5	28.0	+.31
11	48.8	22.4	18.2	26.6	+.21
12	49.9	23.9	not calculated		
13	46.4	17.8	not calculated		
14	40.9		Insufficient wheat grown		
15	36.8		Insufficient wheat grown		
16	36.1		Insufficient wheat grown		
17	41.9		Insufficient wheat grown		
18	50.0	16.6	not calculated		
19	46.1	15.7	14.8	16.6	+.04
20	44.0	20.2	19.4	20.9	+.04
21	38.0		Insufficient wheat grown		
22	39.1	17.9	not calculated		
23	38.3		Insufficient wheat grown		
24	36.2		Insufficient wheat grown		
25	35.8	23.5	not calculated		

* Yield statistics are based on acres harvested. Regional statistics obtained by selecting representative counties in each region. Data obtained from "Colorado Agricultural Statistics". Annual Publications, 1941-1982. State Department of Agriculture.

** Linear regression analysis used to determine estimates of annual normals and trends.

Colorado. Regions 9 and 10 have experienced the greatest improvement in yields over the past 40 years and also the most consistent yields on a year to year basis. Yields are much more variable and have improved at a much slower rate in southeastern Colorao. Yields on the Western Slope have shown little improvement in the past 40 years.

B. Correlations of Palmer Index Values with Wheat Yields

Using the winter wheat yield data, a number of comparisons with Palmer Index values were performed using the monthly PI values for each subregion. The first analysis was a comparison of annual wheat yields with the PI value for each month beginning 6 months before the typical planting data, continuing throughout the entire growth cycle of the crop, and terminating 6 months after harvest. The results of this correlation for region 8 is shown in Figure 12. Correlations were performed using both the actual yield data and also the yield residual (the difference between the actual yield and the "average" yield for that year as defined by the trend line shown in Figure 1). Correlations were significantly improved when the "average" yield (trend line) was removed. During the months prior to planting, the correlation coefficient improved steadily from 0.2 on March 1 to 0.5 on September 1 Improvement continued during the fall growth period but leveled off during the months of winter dormancy. Beginning March of the harvest year the correlation began a steady improvement which peaked with a correlation coefficient in excess of 0.8 on July 1 near the time of harvest. Correlations, following harvest, degraded rapidly but remained above 0.6 at the end of December.
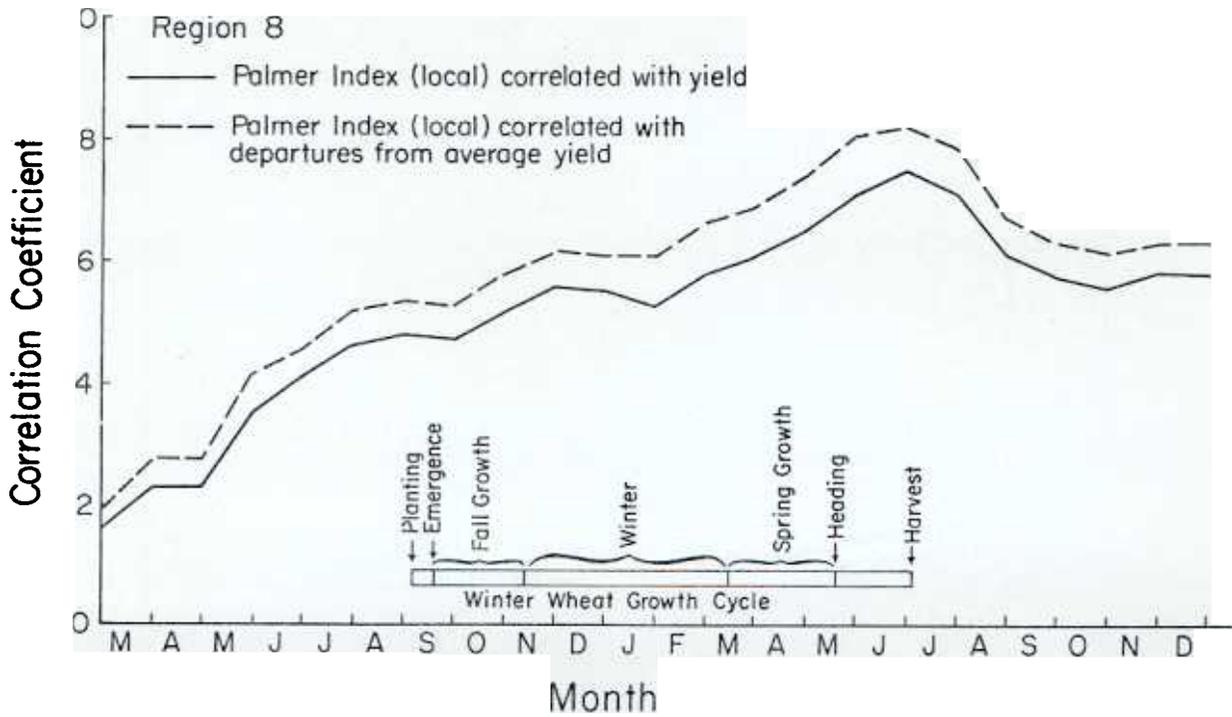
Figure 12. Correlation coefficients of the Region 8 monthly
Palmer Indexes correlated with wheat yield (solid
line) and with departures from "average" trend
values of yield (dashed line) for the period
1952-1980.

In other regions of the state a similar pattern was observed. Peak correlation coefficients varied from as low as 0.6 in Region 2 to 0.85 in Region 10. The best correlations with wheat yield usually occurred with the June 1 Palmer Index in the southeastern regions and with the July 1 PI in northeastern and western Colorado, but this was not constant.

The correlation coefficients, while reasonably high, are not high enough to indicate a high predictive value of the PI several months in advance. The correlation coefficients during the previous autumn were rarely much above 0.6 meaning that only 36% of the possible variations in yield could be explained by the PI. Correlation coefficients exceeding 0.7 or 0.8 (explaining more than half of the variation) typically occurred only during May, June, and July.

C. Comparison of New Index Values with the
   Original Palmer Index Calculations

The question basic to this research project is, "Can it be shown quantitatively that Palmer Indexes calculated for new and smaller areas of Colorado are significantly better than the values already being calculated for the 5 large drainage areas of the state?" An attempt is made here to answer this question using winter wheat yield as the indicator

A time series of June 1 PI values for Region 10 and for the entire Platte drainage area[1] is shown in Figure 13. Also plotted are the annual wheat yields in that region and the difference between the actual yield and the estimated average yield for each year.

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[1]At the time this report was written a complete time series of PI values for the original Platte Drainage had not yet been obtained.
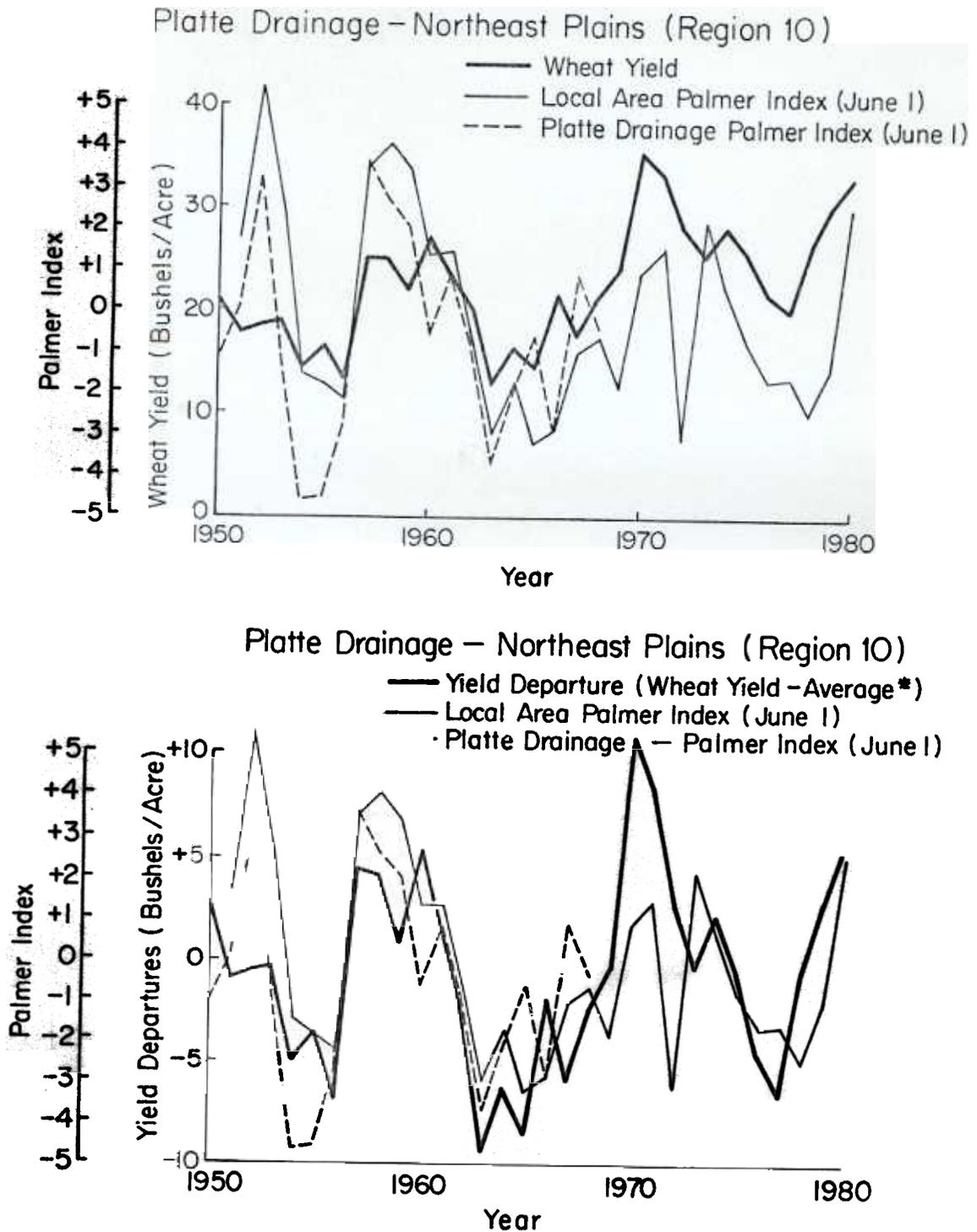
Figure 13. Coincident time series, 1950-1980, of Region 10 wheat yields, Region 10 June 1 Palmer Index values, and Platte drainage June 1 Palmer Index values (top graph). The bottom graph shows the same Palmer Index information plotted with yield departures from the average "trend" values.

This figure clearly shows that both indexes generally traced the ups and downs of the wheat yield. The local area index picked up some of the smaller details better than the overall index and tended to follow the graphs of wheat yield more closely, especially during the 1960's. Some obvious discrepancies were present, however. In 1952, both of the June PI values were very high. There was no corresponding peak in the yield data. Possible reasons for such discrepancies will be discussed in Section V.D.

Figure 14 shows more quantitatively the improvement that can be obtained by using the PI calculated for smaller areas. In Region 10, correlation coefficients were consistently at least 0.1 higher for the local area index correlated with yield residual as opposed to the results obtained using the Palmer Index for the entire Platte drainage.

This analysis did not offer results which conclusively showed the local area PI to be far superior to the PI for the entire drainage area. In several of the regions, the original PI's showed better correlation with yield data than the local area PI's several months prior to harvest. As harvest approached, the local area indexes nearly always correlated best with the yield. We are not prepared to offer a thorough explanation for this response. With only 17 years of overlapping data to work with, the statistical significance of this analysis is questionable.

Another way was chosen to address this question. Figure 15 a-c shows local area and original drainage area Palmer Index values along with yield data as a percent of average for 3 years during the 1970's. While absolute numbers did not always correlate well, local differences in wheat yields between adjacent regions were reliably consistent with
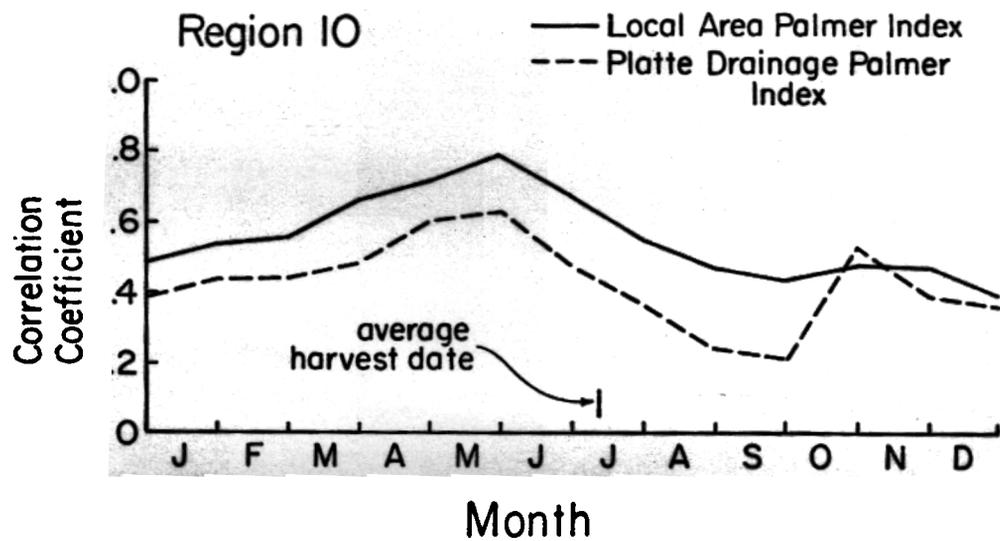
Figure 14. Correlation of 1952-1968 monthly Palmer Index
values for Region 10 with departures of the
annual wheat yields from the "average" trend
value (solid line). The dashed line is the same
correlation using original monthly Palmer Index
values from the entire Platte drainage.
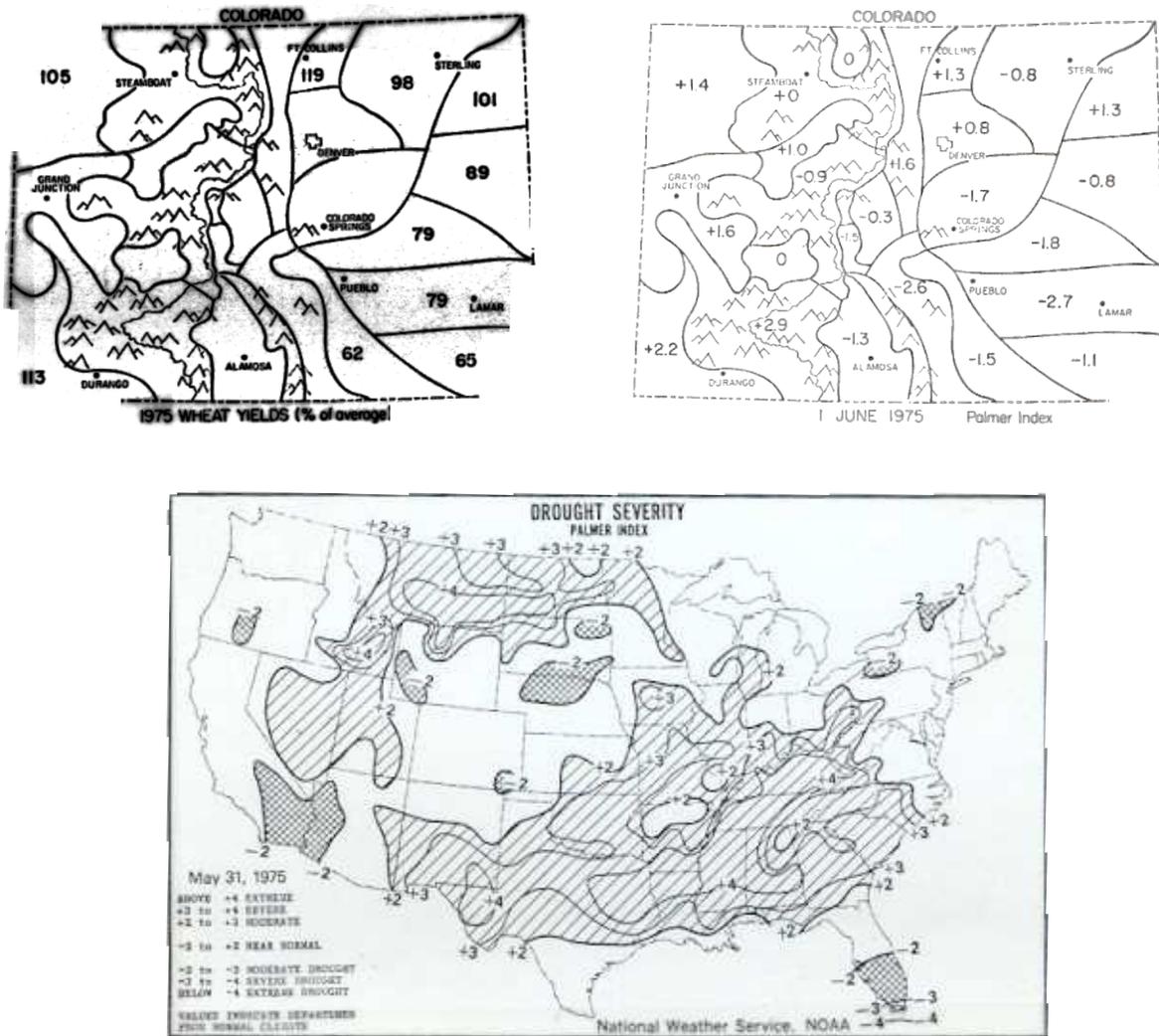
Figure 5a. 1975 percent of average wheat yield (top left),
1 June 1975 Colorado Palmer Index values (top
right), and 31 May 1975 U.S. Palmer Index
pattern (bottom).
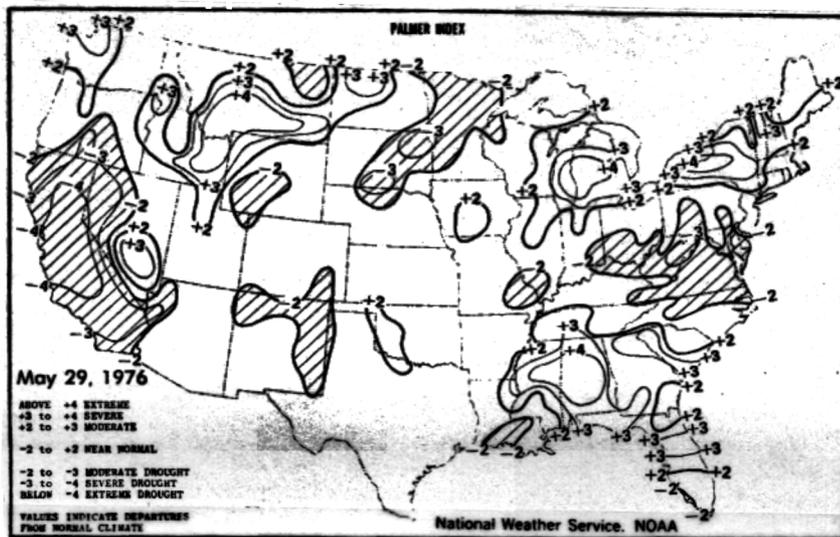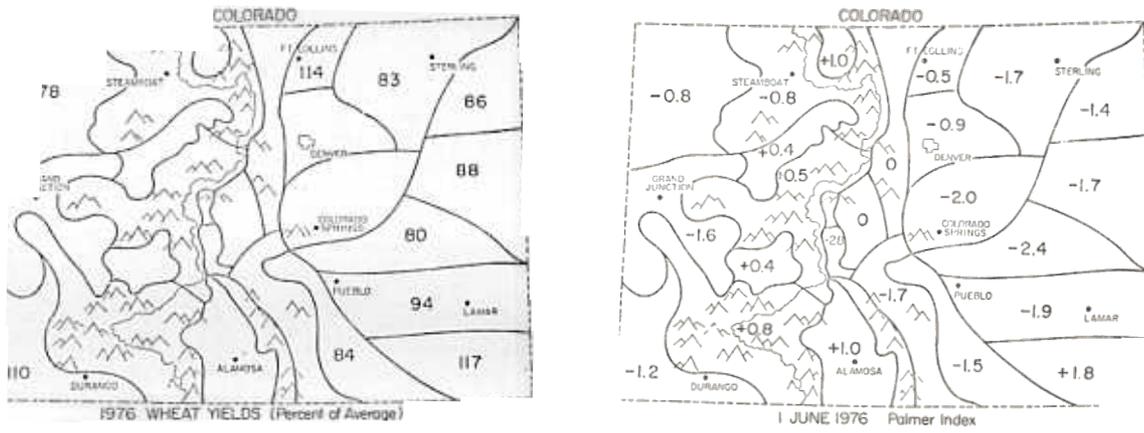
Figure 5b   1976 percent of average wheat yield (top left),
             1 June 1976 Colorado Palmer Index values (top
             right), and 29 May 1976 U.S. Palmer Index
             pattern (bottom).
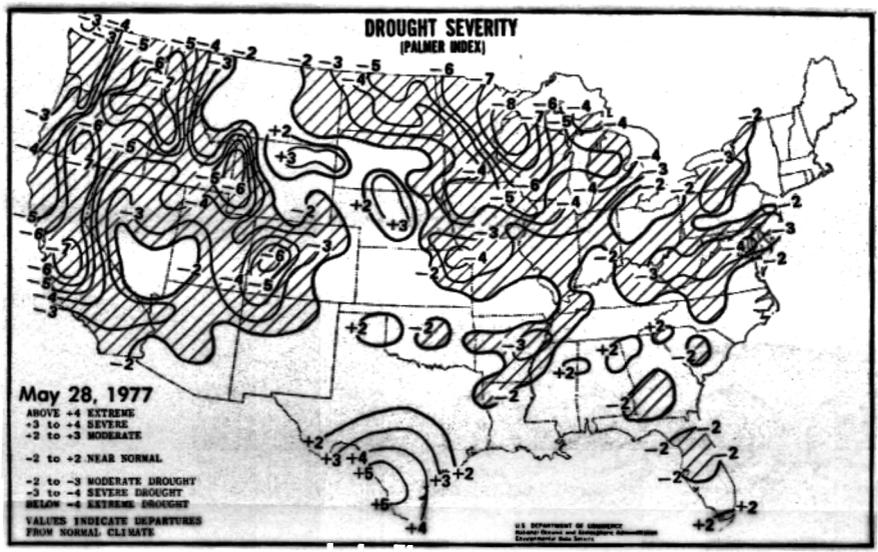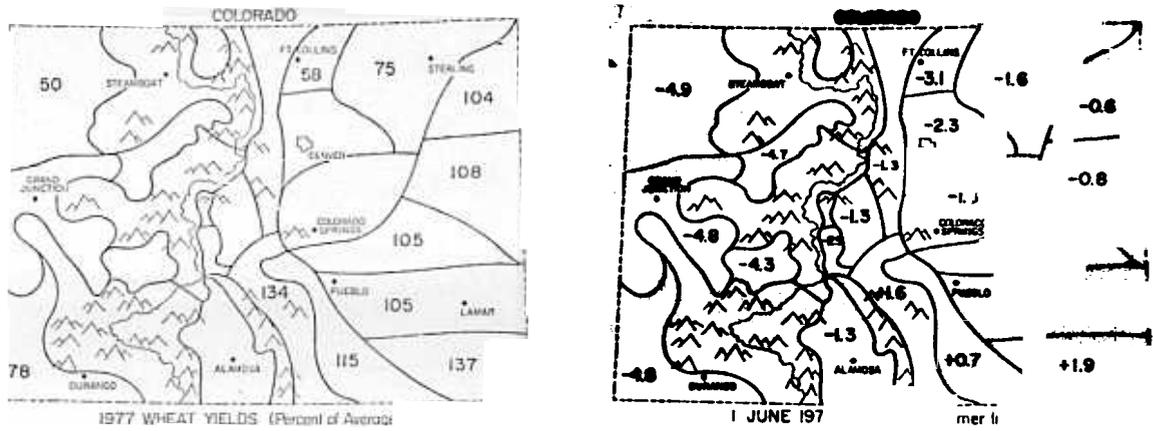
Figure 15c. 1977 percent of average wheat yield (top left), 1 June 1977 Colorado Palmer Index values (top right), and 28 May 1977 U.S. Palmer Index pattern (bottom).

differences in the local PI's. The national analyses were much too
coarse to resolve these smaller scale variations.

One additional test was performed to verify whether or not it was
necessary to "normalize" the temperature and precipitation data used as
input for the Palmer model. "Normalizing" in this case refers to the
adjustments made in the data to minimize the effects of moves and
changes of the reporting station.

In Region 11 Palmer Indexes were calculated first using the raw

for the region. This means that monthly temperature and
precipitation data from all stations in the area collecting data at any
time during the 1951-1980 period were simply averaged together each
month to obtain the regional inputs for the model. Indexes were then
calculated a second time using input data which were adjusted based on
the regional 1961-1980 averages of only the current weather stations
Each set of PI values were then correlated with Larimer County wheat
yield data. Figure 16 shows the results. The adjustments seldom
changed the regional input climate data by more than 0.5^{o} Fahrenheit
and/or 0.10 inches of precipitation per month, and the effects on the PI
values seemed small (usually less than ±0.5). However, when correlated

wheat yield (Figure 16), PI's calculated with the adjusted input
data had a significantly higher correlation coefficient, particularly
during the months just prior to harvest. The statistical sample was
quite small and this test was performed on only one region. Still,
these results show dramatically that better PI values could be obtained
using consistent input data.
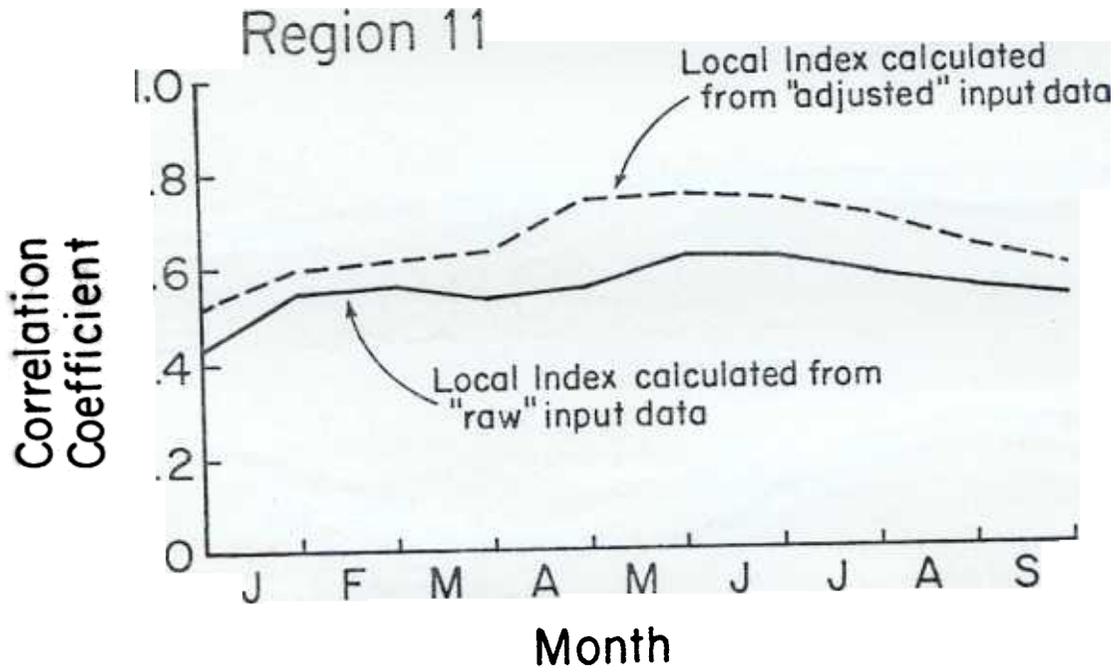
Figure 16. Correlation of Region 11 monthly Palmer Index values with annual wheat yield using unadjusted input temperature and precipitation data (solid line) and adjusted input data (dashed line).

D. Other Factors Affecting Wheat Yield

Soil moisture conditions as indicated by the Palmer Index show good correlation with non-irrigated winter wheat yields in Colorado. Correlation coefficients of 0.8 and higher denote that nearly two-thirds of the variance in year to year yields (with trends removed) can be explained using the PI. That seems to be about the upper limit, however. Many other independent factors influence yield which the Palmer Index modelling simply cannot account for.

Timing of precipitation events can be as important to wheat growth as the total amount of precipitation. Land use practices and weed control, also have very significant effects on soil moisture (Echols, 1983). Early summer hail storms or strong winds just before harvest time can significantly reduce yields even on a county-wide basis. Winter kill can affect wheat nearly independent of soil moisture. Finally, manipulation to achieve maximum advantage from government programs is certainly not unheard of, particularly in some of the marginal wheat growing areas of the state.

Knowing that each of these factors (and this is only a partial list) may play a significant role, and that each factor is probably independent of other factors, makes a clear point that there is no such thing as a simple model to predict wheat yields on a regional basis. It is far beyond the scope of ths project to address the specifics of wheat growth and yield modelling. Realizing these many variables makes the current success of the Palmer Index seem all the more impressive.

VI. SUMMARY

A. Review and Recommendations of the
   Water Availability Task Force

The Water Availability Task Force (WATF) functioned as a peer review group throughout the one-year Palmer Index project. During each monthly meeting of the WATF, a brief project status report was given problems were discussed, and work priorities were set. The review was completed in February 1983 when a complete oral presentation on the PI project was given to the Task Force. A written summary of work progress and WATF recommendations was prepared by the task force chairperson following that meeting. The following comments and recommendations of the Task Force were the consensus of the members present at the February 16, 1983 meeting.

Comments

1. The project was a worthwhile activity and achieved the results set out for it.

   a. Transferred the capability to produce the Palmer Index to Colorado.
   b. Investigated the need for designating more homogeneous reporting areas for PI values in Colorado.
   c. Put in place the mechanism for operational production of Palmer Indexes for drought monitoring.

2. The project identified several areas that need to be considered to assure reliability and availability of locally calculated PI values in times of serious drought.

   a. Further study of the model is advisable since some questionable assumptions and techniques are employed.
   b. More refinement of the state regions may be desirable.
   c. Index results should ideally be validated directly with actual soil moisture measurements in addition to the indirect validation done using wheat yields.
   d. Production of the PI needs to be incorporated into an ongoing system within state government. Otherwise the capability acquired during this project will be lost by the time a serious drought impacts the state.

Recommendations

1. The State should pursue additional research in refining the Palmer Index capability. The Colorado Climate Center should be the lead agency for securing funding for such work, assisted by the Colorado Department of Agriculture, the Colorado Commission on Higher Education, and by Colorado State University as well as any interested state and federal agencies.

2. The State should fund the routine monthly production of PI values for the purpose of drought monitoring. The Climate Center and Colorado Department of Agriculture should coordinate the dissemination of this product.

3. In the case that funding cannot be secured for routine production, the Colorado Climate Center (Office of the State Climatologist) should receive, at the minimum, sufficient funding to maintain the program and input data in a standby mode. The State Climatologist should develop a budget proposal for this activity and solicit funding support through the Department of Disaster Emergency Services and the Office of the Governor.

The complete written summary prepared by the WATF chairperson is included in Appendix C. In addition to the written comments, Task Force members offered further suggestions. Great interest was shown in the wheat yield comparison and it was suggested that this work be completed and published, hopefully incorporating expertise from the agricultural community. The Crop Moisture Index data, which were generated along with the PI's but were not included in the statistical comparison with wheat yield, should be included in additional studies. Many ideas were presented as possible applications of the Colorado Palmer Index.

The unanimous decision of the WATF was that the PI calculated for smaller, climatically homogeneous areas of Colorado was definitely a better drought index than has previously been available. The WATF members believed that the PI would nicely complement the Surface Water Supply Index (Shafer and Dezman, 1982) recently developed to monitor that portion of Colorado's water resources

B. Time, Effort, and Cost of Producing the Palmer Index
for Operational Use by the Water Availability Task Force

Running the Palmer Index program is not a difficult process. With all coefficients already generated for each area, the additional work to calculate monthly index values consists mostly of preparing monthly temperature and precipitation input data. Actual computer time and programmer time is small.

The following is a time estimate for producing the PI monthly:

Activity	Time/month	Staff
Calculation of monthly mean temperature and precipitation for 25 areas of Colorado and entry into computer.	16 hrs	Climatologist & Technicians
Computation of PI values and storage of results	8 hrs	Programmer
Preparation of monthly summary	6 hrs	Climatologist
Dissemination (depends on method and volume)	6 hrs	Secretary

Approximate costs based on 1983 dollars would be:

Salaries
Technician	$100/month
Computer Programmer	$100/month
Secretary	$ 60/month
Climatologist	$150/month

Total Personnel Cost $410/month

Computer Costs $100/month

Mail/Telephone/
Supplies/Printing $150/month

Total Cost $660/month
                                                     (7,920/year)

These estimates do not specifically include overhead costs charged by Colorado State University.

To simply maintain the program and input data up to date but on a
standby basis would cost approximately $2,000/year. Practically all of
this cost would be for preparing and storing the input data in the
format required for the program.

These costs are only approximate. Initial programming costs would
be considerably higher, but long-term expenses could be reduced by
adapting the Palmer Index program to a smaller in-house computer.
Currently the program and data files reside on the large main computer
at Colorado State University. The means and extent of dissemination of
PI results also would have significant effect on costs. Most likely the
PI values would be combined with other index information and made a part
of the "Monthly Water Availability Status Report" which is currently
being developed by the Colorado Climate Center on an experimental basis
for the WATF. Again, initial costs would be higher but long-term costs
could be trimmed by piggy-backing this project onto existing data
processing and report preparation responsibilities of the Colorado
Climate Center

C. Conclusions

The capacity to calculate the Palmer Index in Colorado has been
sucessfully transferred to Colorado. Program results have been verified
by comparing monthly index values calculated for the Kansas drainage
area with original values calculated by the National Climatic Data
Center.

The state has been divided into 25 areas which are climatically
similar and which complemented the larger drainage basins used the USDA
Soil Conservation Service. Consistent temperature and precipitation

data have been assembled for these 25 areas. Palmer Index coefficients have been generated and monthly Palmer Index values for the period 1951-1980 have been calculated for each region.

Progress and results have been shared with the Colorado Water Availability Task Force. These interactions prompted a more indepth study of Palmer Index values. Case studies of two major drought events showed that the locally calculated Palmer Index described Colorado drought patterns with considerably greater resolution than had originally been possible. Correlations with winter wheat yields in unirrigated agricultural areas were performed. Results showed that the Palmer Index could explain a considerable portion of the annual variations in wheat yield as well as regional differences in yield in a particular year.

Considerable data and information have been generated during this project. More ideas for additional research have appeared and many more analyses can be done applying and testing the Palmer Index. This research effort has accomplished the goal of enhancing Colorado's drought monitoring capabilities while spurring on more research.

VII. APPENDICES

Appendix A

Water Availability Task Force Member Agencies

Colorado Division of Disaster Emergency Services
(Agency providing chairperson)

Colorado Department of Natural Resources
Weather Modification Office

Colorado Department of Natural Resources
Division of Water Resources

Colorado State University
Department of Atmospheric Science
Colorado Climate Center
(State Climatologist)

U.S. Department of Commerce
National Weather Service

U.S. Department of Agriculture
Soil Conservation Service

U.S. Department of Interior
Bureau of Land Management

U.S. Department of Interior
Geological Survey

APPENDIX B

Colorado Water Availability Status Report

January 1, 1983

State Assessment

Mountain precipitation was mostly near or below average during December. While the Northern Mountains from Steamboat Springs to Berthoud Pass received slightly above average snowfall for the month, the San Juans were slightly below average, and the Central Mountain areas were quite dry. The western valleys were very dry (Gunnison and Delta each received only a trace for the month) except for extreme southwestern Colorado.

Two major snowstorms, the Christmas Eve blizzard and a second storm a few days later, blanketed most of eastern Colorado with much above average snowfall. Two to five times the normal December precipitation was common over most of the plains. The only dry areas east of the Continental Divide, compared to average, were the upper Arkansas Valley above Pueblo, portions of the San Luis Valley, a tiny area north of La Junta, and the northern halves of Weld and Larimer counties in northcentral Colorado.

Despite below average snowfall in many of the high precipitation areas of the state, water supplies remain in good shape. Snowpack continues above average and reservoir storage is excellent for this time of year in most of the major basins. Surface Water Supply Index values, which are used to monitor surface water resources, remain positive except in the Arkansas drainage. Values continue to fall off, however, from their late summer peaks.

Palmer Index values are not being calculated during the winter months. Subjective measurements suggest fair to good soil moisture in agricultural areas of the state. Melting snows on the Plains should contribute more valuable moisture, but many areas were blown clear.

Outlook

Near normal precipitation and below normal temperatures are anticipated by the National Weather Service for January. Water supplies should continue to be adequate to ample in the months to come.

More detailed basin descriptions and specific snowpack data are contained in the USDA -- Soil Conservation Service "Water Supply Outlook for Colorado and New Mexico -- January 1, 1983."

COLORADO WATER AVAILABILITY STATUS REPORT

YAMPA/WHITE

SOUTH PLATTE

KANSAS

COLORADO

GUNNISON

ARKANSAS

SAN MIGUEL/
DOLORES/
ANIMAS

RIO GRANDE

SURFACE WATER
SUPPLY INDEX
(solid line)

PALMER INDEX
(dashed line)

ACCUMULATED
PRECIPITATION
(%)
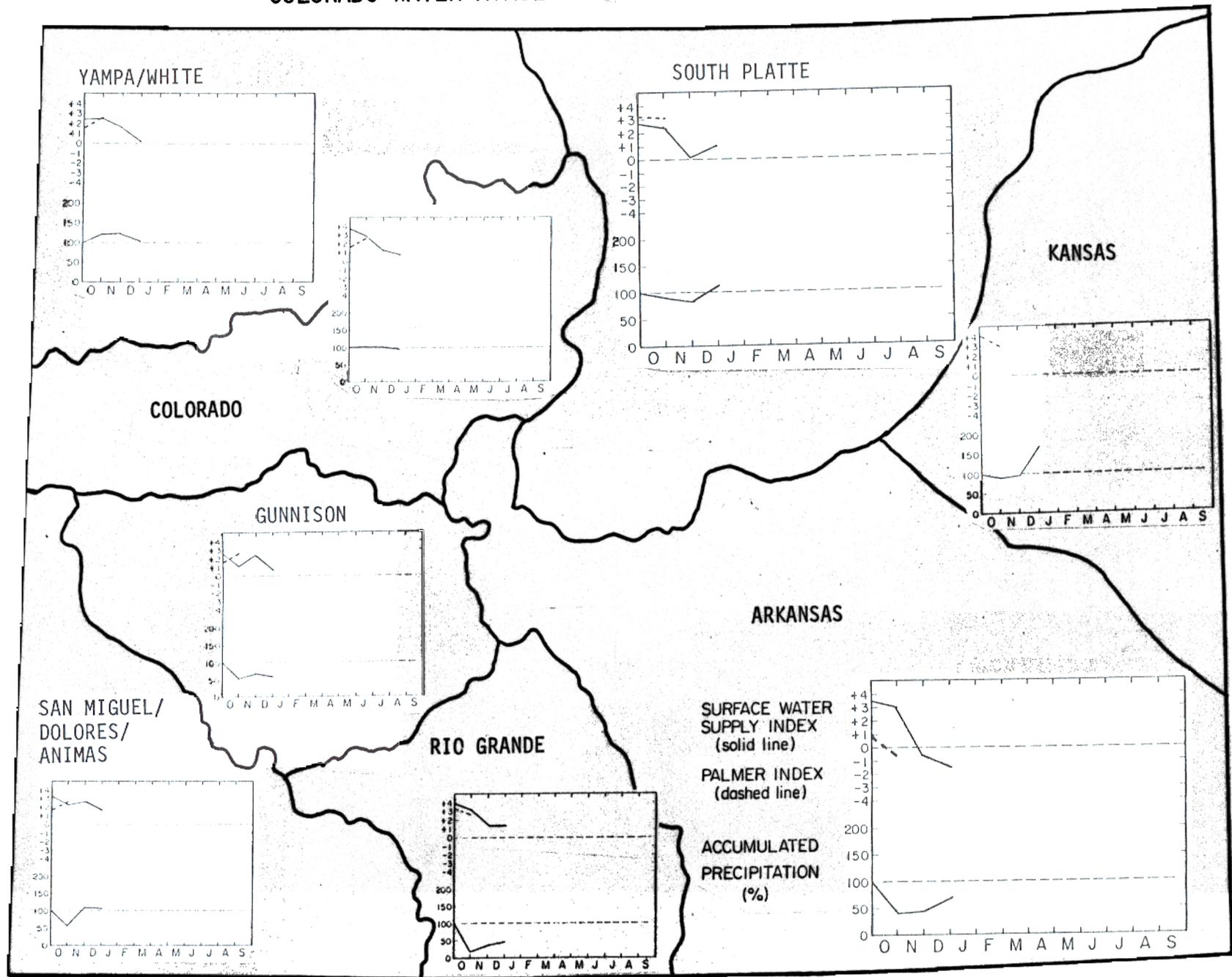
JANUARY 1, 1983

DESCRIPTION OF INFORMATION PRESENTED ON MAP

The map showing Colorado water availability was designed to give a quick general view of current status and trends in available water. Graphs of two indexes and the accumulated precipitation are shown for the current water year. The water year in Colorado is defined as the 12-month period beginning October 1.

Surface Water Supply Index:

This index has been especially developed for Colorado by the Colorado State Engineer's Office and the Soil Conservation Service. It is based on snowpack, reservoir storage, streamflow, and precipitation and is a general indicator of surface water supply conditions. It is best suited for areas which rely on river or reservoir water. It may not accurately reflect conditions on individual tributaries.

Palmer Index:

The Palmer index is a relative indicator of soil moisture. It uses regional temperature and precipitation data as inputs to a soil moisture budget. It is best suited for unirrigated non-mountainous locations.

Interpretation on Indexes:

+4 ↑	extremely wet
+3 }	ample moisture
+2	
+1	
0	near normal
-1	
-2 }	moderate drought
-3	severe drought
-4	
	extreme drought

Accumulated Precipitation:

The percent of average water-year precipitation for each basin is calculated based on several representative weather stations in each region. The accumulation period begins October 1. Numbers less than 100% denote below average precipitation.

Special Notes:

1) Currently only one Palmer Index is calculated for all of western Colorado.

2

MEMORANDUM

Department of Military Affairs
DIVISION OF DISASTER EMERGENCY SERVICES

TO: Members of the Drought Water Availability and Chairpersons
      of the Review and Reporting Task Forces.

FROM: *John P. Byrne, Task Force Chairman*

SUBJECT: Minutes of the Water Availability Task Force Meeting
         (16 Feb. 1983)

DATE: 9 March 1983

Richard D. Lamm
Governor

Brig. Gen. John L. France
The Adjutant General

John P. Byrne
Director

Meeting was called to order at 0845 hrs. at the State Emergency
Operations Center Camp George West, Golden, Colorado. Present
were representatives of DODES, SCS, Office of the State Climatolo-
gist and Weather Modification Department of Natural-Resources.
Absent were representatives of NWS, USGS, and BLM.

DODES representative made introductory remarks to start the
meeting off noting the items in the handout packet. Items of
special note were articles on a new self reporting weather station,
and notice of a conference on Flood Warning and Water Management
to be held Sept. 19-23, 1983 in Sacramento, California. Conference
will emphasize the use of sophisticated new computer data-gathering
and analysis systems to solve water related problems including
drought.

Old Business

(1) **Water Availability Status Report** - Representative of the Office
     of the State Climatologist reported no special action has been
     taken on this item as of yet due to the reorganization (change
     over by key personnel) at the Univeristy. Report will continue
     to be produced in house until a formalized decision is reached.

(2) **Drought Plan Revision** - DODES representative reported no ad-
     ditional progress made on this item due to other committments
     within DODES. No action input has been received from the Impact
     Task Forces. Concentration at this point will be on updating
     of the WATF annex and the management decision making diagram
     of the basic plan.

Special Consideration

Palmer Index Research Project - this item was given special consider-
ation at the meeting to provide a detail review of the project and
allow the Task Force to consider its recommendations concerning the
Project so that they could be incorporated into the final project
report of the State Climatologist. Some of the goals and accomplish-
ments of the project were.

1. Obtain the program, bring it to Colorado and get it running. This has been accomplished with no modifications in the program itself although there is some potential for change in the program.

2. Verify the Program - A test was conducted on the Kansas Drainage in Colorado. Were not able to copy exact results but could track throughout the index except in the +1 to -1 category.

   Investigate the potential for reorganizing the State into more homogeneous reporting areas, than those designated by NWS. Started off considering eleven or twelve areas and ended up with twenty-five. Of these twenty-five sub regions, sixteen are continental divide east and nine are continental divide west. Main emphasis was on low elevation areas. Climatic homogeniality was sought for each sub region.

4. Normalized monthly data to drive model and co-effecients. 1951-1981 data normalized to current stations for all sub regions. This was the most time consuming task of all those undertaken. No station weighting was done. Co-efficients were calculated for all twenty-five sub regions.

5. Comparisons of Index values from sub regions to major regions to see if there were significant differences. If there were this would validate the need for these sub regions. Results of this comparison reflected significant differences in many cases between the sub regions and the major region.

   There was some discussion on how difficult the index was to produce and how frequently it should be run based on present data availability and reporting systems. Calculations are easy and straight forward and can be run on a small computer. The 14th of the month appears to be the best time frame to get the index out by based on current input mechanism; and monthly appears to be the most useful frequency of producing indexes.

The discussion then turned to the need for validating the results of the index and methods to do this. Ideas consisted of making a comparison of the Index to Precipitation (Stream Flow Data). Perhaps using Dry Land Wheat Production. There appears to be a fairly decent correlation between wheat yields for unirrigated farm land and the index, but there are a lot of other variables that need to be factored into such comparisons to get a true picture. There appears to be some interest within the agricultural elements of the University in this particular activity. The State of Kansas has done the most work in this area making use of the comparison of wheat production and the Palmer Index. The discussion identified the need for more validation of index results as well as more investigation into the use of the Index to assist the Agricultural Community in forecasting crop production.

State Climatologist representative asked the Task Force members
provide him with written comments/recommendations they might have
on the project not later than the end of the month so they could
be included in the final report.

The following comments/recommendations summarize the general
concensus of the Task Force members present at the meeting.

1. The Project was a worthwhile activity and has achieved
   the results set out for it, namely to

   A. Transfer the capability to produce the Palmer Index
      to Colorado.

   B. Investigate the need for designating more homogeneous
      reporting areas for Palmer Index values in Colorado.

   C. Have an operational capability in place to produce
      Palmer Index values.

2. The Project has identified several areas which need to
   be addressed before the system can be considered to be
   fully reliable and available for use in a serious drought
   These are.

   A. Consideration of modifications to the program to
      increase its reliability. Present program has several
      questionable assumptions built into it as well as a
      significant degree of subjectivity.

   B. More work needs to be done on refinement of the sub
      regions to insure their value and validity.

   C. Index results need to be validated against actual
      conditions.

   D. Index production needs to be incorporated into an on-
      going system within State Government or the present
      knowledge and capability acquired through this project
      will rapidly diminish and be non existant when a serious
      Drought impacts the State.

      With these considerations in mind, Task Force recommenda-
      tions were -

1. The State should pursue additional research effort in refin-
   ing the Palmer Index capability it has acquired through this
   project, with areas of concentrations in Program Modification;
   Refinement of Sub Regions; validation of Index results. The
   office of the State Climatologist should be the lead agency in
   securing funding for this activity assisted by the Colorado
   Department of Agriculture (who should have a direct interest
   in this activity) and by the Commission on Higher Education,

the Department of Higher Education and Colorado State
University, as well as other State and Federal Agencies
who have an interest in the Program. The research effort
main focus would be to develop a fully reliable program/
system to produce Palmer Index Values on a monthly basis.

2. The State should fund the routine production of Palmer
   Index values on a monthly basis year around within the
   system of State Government. The Task Force felt that both
   the office of the State Climatologist and the Colorado
   Department of Agriculture had an interest and a role in this
   activity and perhaps the production - dissemenation functions
   could be shared by the two agenices.

3. In consideration of the funding restrictions the State is
   presently experiencing and the possibility that neither item
   1 and 2 above are funded, the Task Force felt that at a
   minimum sufficient funding should be provided to the Office
   of the State Climatologist to provide for program maintenance
   in a dormant phase; The system could then be rapidly activated
   under potential serious drought conditions within a reasonable
   time frame. This effort would require imputing data into the
   system periodically to keep it current through the present
   time frame for each of the sub regions and conducting periodic
   familiarization of the State Climatologists' staff in the
   program to insure trained personnel are available to bring the
   program on line when needed. State-Climatologist should
   develop a budget proposal for this activity and solicit fund-
   ing support through DODES and the Office of the Governor.

New Business

Current Water Availability Conditions

(1) SCS reported that the snow pack as of the 1st of February
    was 70% of last year at this time. The snow pack statewide
    had dropped from 121% of normal on the 1st of January to
    90% of normal on the 1st February. We are 60% through the
    winter with January and February being the normal high pre-
    cipitation months. It will take several large storms to
    bring the snow pack up to normal. Reservoir Storage remains
    excellent for the State at 40% above average. The South
    Platte snow pack is 30% below average and the reservoir
    storage in this area is down from what it was last year at
    this time. This is an area that will need close monitoring.
    Soil moisture conditions are good across the State and the
    wind erosion problem has simmered down. The SWSI reflects
    considerably reduced index values for all river basins with
    the lowest being a -2.1 in the Arkansas Basin and negative
    indexes in the Yampa - White, N. Platte; Colorado; Gunnison;
    and Rio Grande River Basins. The S. Platte and San Juan -
    Dolores are barely in the positive category.

(2) National Weather Service Forecast indicated above normal
temperatures and above normal precipitation through the
end of February.

(3) State Climatologist reported that precipitation had really
dropped off in January with the North East corner of the
State being super dry. Temperatures for the most part were
above normal across the State for the month of February.

(4) State Climatologist reported that the Water Availability
Status Report graphic portrayal of data indicated the down-
ward trend of the indexes and precipitation in the various
river basins, as covered in the other reports. Note during
this time frame time when the Water Supply Outlook
Publication is being produced, no narrative is being produced,
strictly the graphic data. If it is decided at some future
date to go with 25 sub regions for Palmer Index values the
graphic portrayl of this report may need to be modified.
(See attachment #1).

In summary January weather conditions indicate a considerable downward
trend in the availability of water in Colorado and has given raise
to concern over potential drought conditions. February and March
will be the critical months in determining just what the status will
be going into the spring runoff period. The South East Corner of the
State is still in a condition of moderate drought. The South Platte
is also an area of concern and will need to be monitored closely.

Other

It was decided that the next meeting should be scheduled for Friday,
18 March 1983, at 0845 hrs. at the State EOC. (Some consideration was
given to holding this meeting at NWS, but a conflict of schedule
arose). See agenda attached. There being no further business the
meeting was adjourned at 12:15 hrs.

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