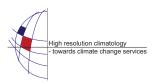
EMS Annual Meeting Abstracts Vol. 7, EMS2010-292, 2010 10th EMS / 8th ECAC © Author(s) 2010



Use of the Soil Moisture Index for drought monitoring

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Since 2000, the network of stations that make up the Czech Hydrometeorological Institute (CHMI) has measured the soil moisture content at the 0-0.9-m layer using sensors placed within the natural soil profile under closelycropped grass cover. Using information from eight years of continuous observation at seven stations throughout the Czech Republic, we verified the usefulness of the Soil Moisture Index (SMI). The SMI is a potentially useful index for calculating water stress in the Czech Republic and elsewhere. During this period, a statistically significant decrease in moisture content was found, and negative SMI values predominated. There were frequent occurrences of flash drought, characterised by a very rapid decline in soil moisture during a three-week period. SMI values below -3 could be used by CHMI in the Integrated Warning Service System (IWSS). The routine calculation of SMI values could alert agricultural producers to developing flash drought conditions and provide them with information regarding the effectiveness of recent rainfall events.