

DROUGHT IMPACTS/FACTOIDS

WGA Drought Preparedness Act Meeting

July 22, 2002

After 3-6 years of drought in some areas, the real question is: What impacts haven't we seen?

According to the Drought Monitor dated July 16, 2002:

32 states are in Moderate Drought (D1) or worse (covering approximately 53% of the U.S.)
26 states are in Severe Drought (D2) or worse (covering approximately 39% of the U.S.)

While we can't truly place this drought in historical perspective until its "over", it has arguably moved parallel/past the drought of 1988/89, and now sits behind the droughts of the 30's and 50's when viewing it nationally from a spatial and temporal perspective

Among the sectors impacted: agriculture (crops and livestock), environmental (endangered species, water quality, soil erosion/degradation), recreation, tourism, fire, water supply, and energy to name a few

Specifically:

- low water supply issues from east to west leading to many localities requesting voluntary or issuing mandatory water restrictions
- low well levels or dried up wells
- widespread record or near-record low streamflows in many areas of the U.S.
- dismal snowpack in the Rockies this year and in the Southwest along w/ parts of the Great Basin
- Barge traffic threatened on the Missouri River as well as recreation and environmental interests in the basin. The river is 9-15 feet below normal in average depth according to COE
- Very active fire season thus far. With over 3.5 million acres burned through July 19, this is over twice as much as the 10-year average to date (according to the National Interagency Fire Center). Forest Service budget to fight fires was extinguished long ago. *We still have a good 6 weeks left in the peak fire season in the West. The monsoon will bring lower humidity levels, rain and dry thunderstorms where lightning will kick off more storms, especially in the western states*
- estimated \$1.4 billion impact in Nebraska alone w/ approximately \$685M tied to agriculture
- a mild winter followed by the recent hot/dry weather have been ideal for grasshopper infestations in Nebraska, South Dakota, Colorado, New Mexico, Idaho and Oregon. While these states have been hit the worst, outbreaks have been seen

- in parts of most states west of the Mississippi
- According to USDA:
 - the U.S. saw its lowest winter wheat crop since 1971 with the smallest harvested acreage seen since 1917
 - as of early July, estimates that over 40% of the “land in farms” are affected by drought w/ 30% of the cropland in drought (D1 or worse)
 - since records began in 1995, pasture/rangelands have not been this bad nationally until the last week of August (2000, 2001)
 - 70% or more of the pasture/rangelands in CA, NM, CO, NE, WY, SD and AZ are rated as very poor to poor. In the East, NC, VA, SC, MD and DE all show conditions worse than 50% very poor to poor
 - farmers and ranchers face a shortage of forage for livestock. A lot of culling going on in many states in the Plains and West.
 - consequently, Secretary Veneman announced the opening of ALL CRP land in 18 drought affected states (including non-drought counties as well). States affected were: AZ, CO, GA, ID, KS, MN, MT, NE, NM, NC, ND, OK, SC, SD, TX, UT, VA, and WY
- According to USDA/NRCS, a record low water supply forecast was issued for the Rio Grande Basin. For the forecast point of Del Norte, CO, the April-Sept. runoff estimate was 90,000 acre-feet. Since the USGS started collecting streamflow data at this gage in 1890, the record low runoff for this period was 155,700 acre-feet in 1977

The economic costs of drought in 2002 will undoubtedly number in the billions, but just how high is anyone’s guess right now as the impacts keep rolling in and the drought keeps rolling on. Stay tuned.....

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NOTE: impacts, facts, and figures were gleaned from USDA, NOAA, NIFC, the Drought Monitor, and media reports