

Northern California's wet weather pattern to continue in December

By TIM HEARDEN
Capital Press

SACRAMENTO — The fast start to the rainy season in Northern and Central California has a good chance of continuing in December, long-range forecasters say.

The federal Climate Prediction Center foresees chances of wetter-than-average conditions in much of the Golden State through at least the middle of the month, and the whole month could produce above-average rainfall in far Northern California and the Pacific Northwest.

"The long-range outlooks are starting to advise that we could see a pattern change and go into a more stormy pattern," said National Weather Service warning coordinator Michelle Mead, adding that a series of storms could begin around Dec. 8.

What happens after New Year's Day, however, is more difficult to predict, she said. The climate center's three-month outlook sees equal chances of wetter- and drier-than-normal conditions for Northern California and the Pacific Northwest, while central and southern California could remain dry.

The outlook follows generous amounts of rain in Northern California over the last two months, pushing many areas above their normal precipitation totals for the water year.

Since Oct. 1, Redding has sopped up 12.7 inches of rain, well above its average of 6.76 inches, and Sacramento's 5.84 inches of rain exceeded its normal 3.12 inches for the period, according to the National Weather Service.

The rain has helped with pasture regrowth in the foothills without interfering too much with table grape and other harvests, according to the National Agricultural Statistics Service.

Sheep have been grazing on alfalfa and inactive farmland while many ranchers are still providing supplemental feed to cattle, NASS reports.

However, the state's snowpack is still rather meager, at 59 percent of its normal snow water equivalent statewide and 82 percent of normal in the northern Sierra Nevada, reports the state Department of Water Resources.

Reservoirs are a mixed bag. Shasta Lake, the centerpiece of the federal Central Valley Project, is at 64 percent of its capacity — above nor-



Calif. Dept. of Water Resources

Michelle Mead, the National Weather Service warning coordinator in Sacramento, says the pattern of frequent rainstorms to hit California so far this water year has a good chance of continuing in December.

November rainfall

Here are the November and seasonal rainfall totals and comparisons to normal for selected California cities, according to the National Weather Service:

Redding: Month 4.92 inches (normal 4.48 inches), season to date 12.7 inches (normal 6.58 inches)

Eureka: Month 6.98 inches (normal 5.61 inches), season to date 17.9 inches (normal 7.85 inches)

Sacramento: Month 1.12 inches (normal 2.08 inches), season to date 5.84 inches (normal 3.03 inches)

Modesto: Month 0.94 inches (normal 1.36 inches), season to date 2.99 inches (normal 2.04 inches)

Salinas: Month 0.95 inches (normal 1.4 inches), season to date 2.56 inches (normal 1.98 inches)

Fresno: Month 1.38 inches (normal 1.07 inches), season to date 2.05 inches (normal 1.7 inches)

mal for this time of year.

But Lake Oroville, the State Water Project's main reservoir, has only 69 percent of its normal water for this time of year and is only 42 percent full, the DWR reports.

The latest U.S. Drought Monitor shows improving conditions in Northern California but still extreme to exceptional drought across the southwest part of the state.

"We've already lucked out and had two of the five to seven atmospheric rivers we normally get in a year, but they were across Northern California," Mead said. "We still need these storm systems to shift a little south so we can spread the wealth. We definitely don't want to have too much up here and have minor flooding when we've still got drought in the south."

Industry seeks better malting barley varieties

Organization wants to reduce quality risks

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

The malting barley industry wants to bolster acres by offering farmers better varieties with consistent quality.

"We're always trying to improve the selection rate, the percentage of the barley that will make malting quality in a given year," said Scott Heisel, vice president of the American Malting Barley Association.

Barley acres have decreased over the last two decades, down to roughly 3.5 million acres total each year. Roughly 75 percent of that is malting barley, Heisel said.

That number is the minimum number required to supply end users, Heisel said.

"I'm not sure we need to increase it a lot from where we are, especially if we're successful in increasing that selection rate," he said.

The majority of malting barley is grown under contract. Heisel recommends a grower have a contract in place, particularly in areas outside the major malting barley-growing regions.

"Growers are going to be more likely to sign that contract if they have varieties that

are more likely to make malting quality," he said. "We're trying to reduce that risk of not making malting quality."

The malting barley association is broadening its member base to include distillers and food companies alongside traditional brewing and malting members.

Companies have begun producing all-malt beers.

"That's going to require more barley to be used per barrel of beer," Heisel said. "We need to have a whole portfolio of varieties for the different styles of beer being brewed."

The association spends \$500,000 per year for research on varieties with lower protein and larger and more uniform kernel plumpness, Heisel said.

It takes about 10-12 years for a new variety to be released.

"We're not just looking out for the industry, we also want varieties that will fit into growers' rotation," Heisel said. "We need input on what a grower wants out of a new variety, whether that be a few days earlier maturity. We're looking to make barley a more attractive crop for the grower as well."

The association plans to release its annual list of recommended malting barley varieties in late December or early January.



Rich Pedroncelli/Associated Press File

Irrigation pipes sit along a dried irrigation canal on a field farmed by Gino Celli near Stockton, Calif., in May 2015. Leaders from the Senate and House of Representatives reached agreement on a water resources bill that includes language easing some restrictions on pumping from the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta and allowing the capture of more water for storage during storms.

Latest compromise drought relief bill receives praise, opposition

By TIM HEARDEN
Capital Press

SACRAMENTO — A growers' group asserts that the latest attempt at a compromise solution in Congress to California's drought is a good first step toward providing more reliable water for farms.

Leaders from the Senate and House of Representatives reached agreement on a water resources bill that includes language easing some restrictions on pumping from the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta and allowing the capture of more water for storage during storms.

The legislation won praise from Western Growers, which argues its passage is critical as California enters its rainy season.

"I think this bill will certainly allow for greater flexibility in operating the

pumps," said Cory Lunde, Western Growers' director of strategic initiatives and communications. "So in the event that we do have winter storms, we should be able to gather more of that water than we would otherwise."

"The drought language in this bill is not the end-all and be-all," he said, "but it is a good first step toward crafting long-term solutions that will enhance the reliability of water through the Delta."

The drought provisions come amid a far-reaching water bill that would authorize \$170 million for Flint, Mich., and other cities beleaguered by lead in drinking water and \$558 million in long-term authorizations to help California develop new water infrastructure.

The bill faces sharp opposition from Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., who argues it would harm drinking water

quality and severely weaken the Endangered Species Act's protections of salmon and other species, The Associated Press reported.

But the legislation is backed by Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., who has negotiated for several years with House Republicans on drought solutions.

Feinstein said in a statement the bill is "the best we can do" under the circumstances.

"If we don't move now, we run the real risk of legislation that opens up the Endangered Species Act in the future, when Congress will again be under Republican control, this time backed by a (Donald) Trump administration," Feinstein said.

The National Wildlife Federation applauded provisions that authorize restoration efforts in waterways including the Los Ange-

les River and Lake Tahoe. But group president Collin O'Mara said the drought language "should be improved" to better focus on water conservation and reuse and wildlife protection.

Specifically, the bill includes funding authorization for 137 projects identified by Feinstein in a drought bill earlier this year. Included is authorization for the proposed Sites Reservoir, which will seek state Proposition 1 bond funds next year.

Among the bill's short-term provisions is daily monitoring for fish near the pumps to allow for more pumping when fish aren't in danger, allowing agencies to capture more water during storms and requiring agencies to explain why pumping is reduced to lower levels than allowed by the biological opinions for salmon and Delta smelt.

New apple poised for record-setting launch

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

WENATCHEE, Wash. — The Washington apple industry is preparing for what it says has never been done before — introduction of a new variety with rapid acceleration to 9 million, 40-pound boxes of production in three to five years.

That kind of ramp-up — of the new Cosmic Crisp — "is insanity," will take the whole industry working together and is about a \$500 million "gamble" that could end in reward or failure, Robert Kershaw, president of Domex Superfresh Growers in Yakima, told growers at their annual meeting at the Wenatchee Convention Center on Dec. 5.

"We will see the fastest switch in consumption of varieties in the next five years and it will blow people's hair back," said West Mathison, president of Stemilt Growers in Wenatchee.

Honeycrisp became No. 1 in dollars among Washington apples in October but is third in volume (behind Red Delicious and Gala), so a lot of varieties will go away," he said.

Half the opening day of the Washington State Tree



Dan Wheat/Capital Press

association annual meeting gets a Cosmic Crisp apple from Johanna Flores, an association staff member, at the Wenatchee, Wash., convention center on Dec. 5. Growers are buying lots of trees of the new variety in preparation for the introduction of the new variety.

Fruit Association's three-day meeting was spent talking about Cosmic Crisp. The industry is banking on it becoming more popular than Honeycrisp and replacing Red Delicious as the Washington apple.

"All I can say is 'Wow' because in 2017 it will be 20 years since the cross was made that made Cosmic Crisp," said retired Washington State University apple breeder Bruce Barritt, who is credited as the breeder.

"The work was not just done by me, but a team," he

told the crowd, crediting former associates by name. He and they worked at the WSU Tree Fruit Research and Extension Center in Wenatchee.

Enterprise and Honeycrisp, Cosmic Crisp's parents, were unimportant at the time but were chosen for outstanding characteristics including flavor, color, storage and resistance to disease and disorders, Barritt said.

His successor, Kate Evans, said consumer tests rated Cosmic Crisp "statistically significantly" better than other varieties in taste and

CFBF's Wenger renews call for action among growers

MONTEREY, Calif. — The state Farm Bureau's leader is renewing his call for growers to invest more time and resources in achieving political change.

Opening the California Farm Bureau Federation's 98th annual meeting, President Paul Wenger praised earlier generations for having the foresight to get reservoirs, roads and other infrastructure built to benefit agriculture.

"Those people who came before us gave us this opportunity, and the big question is whether we are going to answer that bell," Wenger told members gathered at the Hyatt Regency, according to a news release.

Today's struggle, he said, is focused on defending the resources farmers need to produce food. He

noted the election of Donald Trump as president raises concerns about trade and immigration policy, but said the new administration would likely focus on easing regulations.

"We can look to the federal level to help us, but folks, all politics is local," Wenger said. "We have to be involved, we have to be engaged and we

have to invest."

Wenger has often spoken of a need to increase farmers' clout in Sacramento and Washington, D.C., during his tenure, including forming a political action committee to keep up with labor unions and other powerful interests.

An almond and walnut grower from Modesto, Calif., Wenger is in his fourth term as president after having been elected in 2009.



Paul Wenger