

Forecast projects warmer than normal winter

Zach Urness
Salem Statesman Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

On the heels of a drought-stricken summer and fall, Oregon is expected to stay warm into this coming winter.

Long-term forecasts project a 50 to 60 percent chance of a warmer-than-normal winter likely to include low snowpack, according to NOAA's Climate Prediction Center.

The extended forecast, which includes December to February, says a weak El Nino loads the dice toward warm and dry conditions in the North-

west, meteorologists said.

"Historically, winters with a weak El Nino bring warmer temperatures and lower snowpack," said Jeremiah Pyle, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Portland.

"It doesn't always end up like that," he said, "but some of the worse winters we've had have been in weak El Nino years."

The news doesn't come at a particularly good time.

Eighty-five percent of Oregon remains mired in "severe drought" following the ninth-warmest summer in records going back to 1894. It was the Salem

area's fourth-hottest June, July and August on record, according to meteorologists.

The hot and dry conditions this summer led to the most expensive wildfire season in history, the Statesman Journal first reported earlier this month.

Multiple wildfires burned from July to September in a season fueled by last winter's dry conditions.

Oregon had below-average snowpack for much of last winter, particularly in the south, which paved the way for a wildfire season that cost \$514.6 million in 2018.

"There is good reason to be con-

cerned," Pyle said. "We could easily see a warm and dry winter, and that obviously could be a problem."

"At the same time, nothing is set in stone. There have been El Nino winters that brought good snowpack. You just never know."

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Parks

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Administrative tasks in the office and covering more ground out in the field.

Some big projects planned for the winter include a new restroom and picnic shelters at Scotts Mills, new picnic tables at Denny and Labish Village and cutting back of overgrown vegetation at Spong's Landing.

A big summer for county parks

The addition follows a busy summer season for the county park system.

The department had eight temporary employees over the summer season which allowed some larger projects to be tackled.

A long-overgrown area in Minto Park, about 4 miles east of Mill City along the North Santiam, was cleared for a trail and viewpoint overlooking the river.

"The trail opened westward to new areas I hadn't even seen," Dilley said.

Nearby, the county's only campground, open since 2014, saw record attendance this summer.

The 15-site campground at Bear Creek Park had 443 groups stay in 2018, up from 391 last year.

Additionally, Dilley says the county parks along the North Santiam River haven't seen tree die-offs from drought damage like other nearby parks in the Santiam Canyon.

Fishermen's Bend, a 170-acre park operated by the Bureau of Land Management, and the North Santiam State Recreation Area, a 150-acre park managed by the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department, both saw large-scale projects this summer to remove dead or dying trees.

The county has a full description and location of every park on the Marion County Parks website at <http://www.co.marion.or.us/PW/Parks/>.

County parks open year-round

Aumsville Ponds near Aumsville

Bonesteele Park north of Turner

Auburn, Denny, Eola Bend, Joryville, Labish Village and Parkdale in the Salem area

Rogers Wayside near Silverton

Minto, Niagara and Packsaddle along the North Santiam River

County parks closing for winter

The following parks will still close for the winter season on Nov 1.:

Spong's Landing near Keizer

Bear Creek, North Fork and Salmon Falls along the North Santiam River Basin

Scotts Mills: The gate will be locked but walk-ins are allowed. Restrooms are not available.

The following park closed for the season Oct. 1:

St. Louis Fish Ponds: The gate is locked but walk-ins are allowed. Restrooms are closed.

Fish

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gration by 10 times at Fall Creek.

"That is certainly what we're interested in seeing is making sure that all the options are on the table and make sure that we're choosing the thing that's best for the rivers and the communities," Fairbrother said.

"Detroit is a more unique dam project on the Willamette basin."

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' proposal would draw down Detroit Lake for one to three years to build a water cooling tower to correct water temperatures in the river to pre-dam levels and build a system to move fish upstream past the dam.

Among the construction alternatives the Corps has presented is drawing down the water level at Detroit Lake to 1,310 feet above sea level for construction, below the 2015 drought level of 1,425 feet.

The Corps considered a similar concept to the Fall Creek solution by drawing down the elevation to 1,370 each winter as part of its screening process, but eliminated the alternative because of how Big Cliff Dam is operated and the need for higher water to produce hydro-power.

Big Cliff Dam is downstream of Detroit Dam on the North Santiam River and is used to re-regulate the river.

The Corps' current plans to build a water tower and fish collection screen are projected to cost \$100 million to \$250 million by the time it's completed in 2028.

Drawing down the water yearly, instead, has the potential to correct more environmental problems than fish passage, environmental advocates say.



Detroit Lake U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS

"It even goes further from there that it flushes out the carnivorous fish that tend to live in the river," Fairbrother said. "It also moves sediment and debris in the river. It also helps reduce infectious diseases in the reservoirs that develops in their gills and will kill them eventually."

"Some promising results coming out of that and we'd be interested in exploring where it would be feasible to explore some draw downs."

Native Fish Society, Northwest Environmental and Wildearth Guardians filed a lawsuit in March against the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for not meeting its legal requirement under the 2008 opinion.

When Marion County and the City of Salem intervened in the lawsuit between three environmental groups and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the environmental groups did not fight it.

"Our standing is that we have an economic and agricultural interest," Marion County Commissioner Kevin Cameron said in an earlier interview. "Salem's on the water supply, the domestic water supply. And Stayton relies on that water, and they didn't enter into (the lawsuit).

"What that allows us to do is be on the team when negotiations are made."

That Marion County and the City of Salem are involved in the suit doesn't mean they are on the same side as the environmental groups.

The environmental groups asked that the governmental bodies' involvement in the suit be limited to areas where they have specific interest, notably the North Santiam River.

"In the big picture of things, we don't

think the city and county are actually diametrically opposed to what we're trying to accomplish in the lawsuit," Fairbrother said. "Part of us are us doing a better job of explaining what this lawsuit is about."

"My understanding is they think we're seeking to compel the corps to build the fish passage."

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