

Drought

Western landowners can apply for drought mitigation funding

By ERIC MORTENSON
Capital Press

Farmers and other landowners in Oregon, Idaho, California and five other drought-stricken states are eligible for funding under a program announced Monday by U.S. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack.

The USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service will oversee distribution of \$21 million in emergency funding, Vilsack and NRCS Chief Jason Weller said in a conference call with reporters.

The money can be used to offset the cost of drought mitigation work such as planting cover crops, removing invasive plants, improving livestock watering systems or installing more efficient irri-

gation systems, Vilsack and Weller said.

Meager snowpacks during the winter have left much of the West facing water shortages due to greatly reduced stream-flow and diminished reservoir storage. The NRCS recently reported that warmer than normal winter weather had already melted much of the snowpack that feeds streams during summer months.

Landowners in Kansas, Texas, Nevada, Oklahoma and Utah are eligible to apply for funding, along with people in Oregon, Idaho and California.

Washington was not included in the funding even though Gov. Jay Inslee declared a statewide drought emergency May 15. Tracy Robillard, public affairs officer with the NRCS Portland office, said funding is reserved for states with regions registering extreme ("D3") or

exceptional ("D4") level drought.

Landowners in those areas will have a 30-day window in which to apply; the registration period in each state will be announced later this spring.

The money comes from the Farm Bill under the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, known by the acronym EQIP. Under the program, landowners sign a contract to perform conservation work and the NRCS provides technical assistance to get it done. The landowner pays for the work up front. After an evaluation, the NRCS reimburses the landowner for some, half or more of the cost.

In Oregon, the NRCS will focus on range and forest conservation projects that reduce wildfire threat, Robillard said in an email.



Don Jenkins/Capital Press

Washington Department of Ecology Director Maia Bellon talks about her agency's drought response as Gov. Jay Inslee stands behind her during a press conference May 15 in Olympia. Bellon says getting water to Yakima Basin farmers is a high priority.

WSDA estimates statewide drought to cost farmers \$1.2B

Governor foresees hardships as summer progresses

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

OLYMPIA — Washington's first statewide drought in a decade will cost producers \$1.2 billion in lost income, the state Department of Agriculture estimates.

Gov. Jay Inslee referred to the projection Friday at a news conference at which he announced he was declaring a statewide drought.

"Difficult decisions are being made today about which crops get priority in our vital agricultural regions," he said.

The statewide declaration had been expected for several weeks. Inslee declared an emergency in about one-fifth of the state on March 13 and expanded it to almost half the state on April 17.

Since then, the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation has revised downward its water supply forecast for the growing season in the Yakima Basin. While farmers with senior rights will receive full supplies, the bureau estimates junior-right holders will receive 47 percent. Meanwhile, federal agencies are forecasting record-low flows in rivers across the state.

"The drought has deepened dramatically over the past few weeks," Inslee said.

The governor warned that conditions for farms, fish and municipal systems that rely on surface water or shallow groundwater wells could suffer more problems over the summer.

"We're facing hardships now, and we may face even tougher, more challenging months ahead," he said.

A \$1.2 billion loss in farm revenue would be about 12 percent of the \$10.16 million value of crops and livestock produced in Washington state in 2013, the most recent year for which figures are available.

Yakima Basin growers in the Roza Irrigation District and Kittitas Reclamation District will be particularly hard hit, according to an assessment by WSDA.

Losses in those two districts on crops such as cherries, apples, hops, grapes and hay are estimated to reach \$243 million, or about half of what could be ex-

pected in a normal year, WSDA Deputy Director Kirk Robinson said.

For the rest of the state, WSDA estimates losses at \$972 million, a 10 percent reduction. Much of that loss will come in the Wenatchee area, where farmers rely on surface water.

WSDA described its estimate as conservative. Robinson said a hot summer could make losses greater.

The National Weather Service's Climate Prediction Center projects Washington's summer will be warmer than average, while the chances of above or below normal precipitation are equal.

WSDA did not attempt to assess indirect economic losses due to a shorter packing season and reduced demand for labor and farm chemicals and equipment. The assessment also didn't estimate losses if crops are planted in the fall under dry conditions.

Robinson advised producers to document their losses. Producers could become eligible for federal relief programs if the drought persists.

In 2005, WSDA forecast producers would suffer a 5 to 8 percent reduction in income, with losses of up to \$299 million. That year, however, conditions improved as the growing season went on. The value of Washington agricultural production actually increased over 2004 by about \$500 million, according to a report issued the following year by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

State officials hold out little hope for a turnaround this year. Because of a lack of melting snow, the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation began drawing down Yakima Basin reservoirs in mid-April, 10 weeks earlier than usual.

"One of our highest priorities has been finding ways to get water to farmers in the Yakima Basin. It's our richest agricultural region in the state and our highest-risk area for this drought," Department of Ecology Director Maia Bellon said.

Friday was the first time Inslee has called a news conference to announce a drought declaration, underscoring its increasing severity.

The drought will diminish stream flows for fish throughout the state, but residents in the most populous areas may hardly notice.

Utilities that supply Seattle, Tacoma and Everett with domestic water supplies have expressed concern that publicity about the drought will cause customers to conserve, decreasing their revenues.

DOE has requested \$9.6 million from lawmakers for drought relief, including \$4 million to lease water in the Yakima Basin for farmers. Legislators have not acted on the request. Inslee praised Bellon for marshaling resources to respond to the drought without waiting for the money. "It's taking some creativity," he said.

Rain eases drought, but not much

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

SUNNYSIDE, Wash. — Rainstorms that hit Washington last week provided some short-term drought relief but didn't add a lot of water to mountain reservoirs, a state water expert says.

A trace of rain started Monday, May 11, increased Tuesday, was heaviest on Wednesday and tapered off Thursday morning.

"It was not widespread. More like thunder cells," said Scott Pattee, water supply specialist of the Washington Snow Survey Office of the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service in Mount Vernon.

It rained on the north side of Naneum Ridge, helping the Wenatchee River and from White Pass eastward to Sunnyside but there was very little precipitation in the upper Yakima Basin, Pattee said.

Cle Elum, Rimrock and Bumping lakes all benefited and overall about a week's worth of reservoir water was saved by the rain, said Chris Lynch, hydrologist at the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation in Yakima.

On May 19, the bureau reduced the Yakima Basin season forecast to 44 percent of normal. It would have been a bit worse without the rain, Lynch said.

"We were in quite a skid and it helped put the brakes on," he said.

Even with the rain, the basin is tracking 20 percent below



Rain drips from green cherries in an East Wenatchee, Wash., orchard the morning of May 14. Cherries throughout Central Washington were still too green to be harmed by several days of rain that provided short-term drought relief.

Dan Wheat
Capital Press

average precipitation for the month of May, Lynch said.

It rained hardest around Sunnyside, where the Roza Irrigation District has shut off water to farms to save it for later in the season.

The largest amount of rain recorded in Benton County was 2.7 inches at Roza Station 2, and other nearby stations on the Washington State University AgWeatherNet system had similar amounts for the week ending May 13. Benton City had 1.73 inches.

Jim Willard, a Prosser grape and tree fruit grower, said he received 1.58 inches of rain in his cherry orchard. He had just used the last of his pre-shutdown water from the Roza canal.

"It was like one good watering," he said of the rain.

He usually irrigates the orchard every eight to 10 days this time of year and every four days in the heat of summer.

Scott Revell, manager of Roza Irrigation District, said the rain was helpful, that the entire district got at least an inch of

rain. He agreed it was the equivalent of one good irrigation cycle.

Other May 13 AgWeatherNet readings in Eastern Washington: Pasco, 1.16 inches; Wapato, .77 inch; Moxee (near Yakima), .81 inch; Mattawa, 1.10 inches; Moses Lake, .59 inch; Ritzville, .50 inch; Fairfield (near Spokane), .24 inch; East Wenatchee, .49 inch; and Brewster, .24 inch.

Rain was welcomed by nearly everyone except those just starting first-cutting alfalfa and protecting early cherries around the Tri-Cities.

About 30 to 50 percent of first-cutting alfalfa in the lower Columbia Basin — Basin City to Hermiston — was cut with 20 percent of that baled before the rain, said Chep Gauntt, a Pasco grower. There will be some "pretty severe damage" on the rest of it, he said.

"We got an early start and have all of ours in the shed," he said. "Those who haven't cut yet will be a little later. Their yield will go up but quality will be a

little less. If they can cut within the next week in the lower basin they will do good."

It was still early enough before harvest that cherries weren't damaged, said Denny Hayden, Pasco, one of the earliest growers in the state. He anticipates starting harvest between May 24 and 27.

"It did more damage to roads than crops," he said. "We had 20 percent of our annual rainfall (over an inch) in one day."

Some of his Chelan cherries are straw color and he protected them with calcium spray to reduce moisture going into the cherries, Rainard to keep moisture out and helicopters to blow off water.

"It was 47 to 50 degrees the whole time and the wind blew, which was a positive," Hayden said. "Toward the end, it really blew and dried them extremely quick. The helicopter had to quit because of the wind. We went into last night dry. I think we came out very well for the kind of rain we had."

Roza District looking for water; forecast drops

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

SUNNYSIDE, Wash. — The Roza Irrigation District in the Yakima Valley continues to look for water to lease from other districts as the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation drops its estimate of the summer water supply in the Yakima Basin to 44 percent of normal.

That's 3 percent less than the previous forecast. Mid-

May rains slowed water consumption from the region's reservoirs and even added a little water to two of them.

As of May 18, owners of 1,200 acres in the Sunnyside Valley Irrigation District are willing to lease their supply to the Roza at \$500 per acre, said Jim Trull, SVID manager.

That will provide about 2,400 acre-feet of water of the 5,000 that the Roza District is looking for. The RID is looking for more landowners in the SVID willing to lease out water but there may not be anymore, Trull said.

What will be leased is probably water from pasture and forage crops, he said.

Scott Revell, manager of

the RID, said he probably has another 200 acres in other districts including the Naches-Selah. The deadline for signups in the SVID was May 18, but Revell said a second round would begin May 19 and go a couple of weeks. All leases are subject to approval by Yakima County Superior Court because of long-standing adjudication of water rights, he said.

The RID board meets May 22 to discuss how long the district's temporary suspension of water to growers will last. It began May 11 to save reservoir water for later in the season.

The 2,400 acre-feet of leased water will add about three days to the end of the shortened irrigation season, Revell said.

The Yakima Tieton Irrigation District decided not to lease any water to the Roza.

"We're sympathetic to their concerns but just didn't feel it was in the best interest of our users, not knowing the final proration level," said Rick Dieker, Yakima Tieton manager.

Twenty-five percent of the Yakima Tieton's water is junior rights subject to proration.

"We want to make sure we have enough to get through the season. Right now we anticipate having enough and delivering through September. Normally, we go into the first or second week of October," he said.

The Wapato Irrigation Project doesn't have any water for the Roza and began limiting deliveries to 66 percent of normal on May 18, said Edwin Lewis, project manager.

LEGAL

NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING
Notice is hereby given that the Oregon Potato Commission will hold a public budget hearing at 8:30 a.m. on Friday, June 5, 2015. The regular quarterly Commission meeting will begin at 8:00 a.m. These meetings will be held at the
Eagle Crest Resort
1522 Cline Falls Highway
Redmond, OR 97756
The purpose of the public budget hearing is to receive testimony and evidence on the proposed budget for operation of the Oregon Potato Commission during fiscal year July 1, 2015 to June 30, 2016. Any person desiring to submit facts or data, orally or in writing, may do so by attending the public hearing or by contacting the Commission Executive Director before the hearing date.
Bill Brewer, Executive Director
Oregon Potato Commission
9320 SW Barbur Blvd., Suite 130
Portland, Oregon 97219
Phone: (503) 239-4763
Email: brewer@oregonspuds.com
A copy of the proposed budget is posted on the Oregon Potato Commission website www.oregonspuds.com and may be obtained by writing to the Commission.
21-2/#4

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NOTICE OF OREGON BEEF COUNCIL PUBLIC BUDGET HEARING
NOTICE HEREBY IS GIVEN that a public meeting will be held pursuant to ORS 577, the Oregon Beef Council Statute, at the Grant County Fair Grounds in the Keerin North Building, 411 NE Bridge St, John Day, OR 97845 on Friday, June 12, 2015 at 9:00 am upon a Proposed budget for the operation of the Oregon Beef Council during Fiscal Year July 1, 2015 to June 30, 2016.
At this meeting, any producer of beef in Oregon has the right to be heard with respect to the proposed budget, a copy of which is available for inspection, under reasonable circumstances, in the Oregon Beef Council office in Portland.
For further information, contact the Oregon Beef Council office at 1827 NE 44th Ave., Ste. 315, Portland, Oregon 97213.
The meeting location is accessible to persons with disabilities. A request for an interpreter for the hearing impaired or for other accommodations for persons with disabilities should be made at least 48 hours before the meeting to the Oregon Beef Council at 503-274-2333.
Dated this 22nd day of May 2015.
ATTESTED: Sharon Livingston, Chairman,
William N. Wise, CEO
21-2/#4