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California

Strong El Nino may not bring wet winter, expert cautions

By **TIM HEARDEN**
Capital Press

SACRAMENTO — Assurances of a dominant El Nino weather pattern through the summer doesn't necessarily mean California is in for a wet winter, a weather expert warns.

The federal Climate Prediction Center recently asserted that El Nino, whose

warm sea surface temperatures fuel southern storms, stands a 90 percent chance of continuing over the next few months and a more than 80 percent chance it will last through the end of the year.

While there's more confidence that El Nino will continue into the winter, it's too soon to know how strong it will be, said Mi-

chelle Mead, a National Weather Service warning coordinator in Sacramento.

"The strength is really what determines the potential to see above-average precipitation for California," Mead said.

Early predictions don't necessarily materialize, Mead cautioned. She pointed to last winter, which started strong amid predictions of a wet win-

ter but fizzled after Christmas.

The CPC boosted its confidence level as warm and unsettled weather throughout California this spring suggested the presence of El Nino, which tends to steer storms into Southern California while leaving the Pacific Northwest dry.

Scattered clouds last week brought more than a quarter of an inch of rain to some

areas of the state, as most of the state has recorded at least some rain in the last few weeks.

In late April, a chilly storm system dumped up to a foot of snow in high elevations after drenching the San Joaquin Valley. The storm caused hail damage in a few navel orange groves, said Bob Blakely, vice president of the Exeter-based California Citrus Mutual.

"The rain was welcome, but it came with a price for some growers," Blakely said.

The weather service in Sacramento was predicting a chance of rain and thunderstorms this weekend if tropical moisture moves into the region. Mead said the unsettled conditions may be partly because of El Nino, but it's also fairly typical for late spring.



Tim Hearden/Capital Press

Organic Valencia oranges from Southern California-based Sundance Natural Foods Co. are ready for eating. Valencia orange harvest is underway in California while the harvest of navels is expected to wrap up within a few weeks.

Orange harvests promise good summer fruit

By **TIM HEARDEN**
Capital Press

SACRAMENTO — Summer oranges from California promise to be sweet and plentiful despite the water shortages that are punishing the state's prime citrus region.

The harvest of navel oranges still has about a month to go and the season's production could be close to the 81 million cartons predicted by the National Agricultural Statistics Service office here.

"We're still picking and will continue to pick for a few more weeks," said Bob Blakely, vice president of the Exeter, Calif., based California Citrus Mutual. "We're moving into the final month of it."

Picking could continue until the middle of June, with navels still appearing in stores through the Fourth of July, he said.

"We're still getting good, quality oranges out in the market," he said. "We're having to grade them a little harder. Utilization is falling off, but there's still good fruit out there."

For much of the season, utilization rates — the percentage of fruit that could be sold as fresh — remained in the low 80s, Blakely said. But now they've dipped into the 70s as the crop has been picked over, he said.

Subpar oranges are diverted to juice.

Meanwhile, harvest is underway for a diminished Valencia orange crop. Growers this season are expected to produce a 20 million-carton crop, down from 22 million cartons last year and a little more than half the 39 million cartons pro-

duced in 2001-02, according to NASS.

"We're hearing they're coming in lighter than estimated so far, but we're only about 25 to 30 percent into that crop," Blakely said. "Again, the fruit could grow as we get into the remainder of the season."

The harvests come as a fourth year of drought and its related federal surface water shutoffs have prompted many growers to take trees out of production. Citrus Mutual has estimated as many as 50,000 acres of orange and other citrus trees would be bulldozed.

The orchard removals could take a particular toll on Valencia trees, which were already being replaced with navels and other more lucrative citrus varieties before the drought began.

Valencia acreage has seen a precipitous decline in recent years; there are about 34,000 bearing acres this year, down from 65,000 in 2001-02, according to NASS.

With navels this season, fruit started out smaller than normal because of drought stress on trees throughout the prime citrus region of Fresno, Kings and Tulare counties, but winter rains improved fruit sizes.

An 81-million-carton navel crop would be slightly smaller than the 84 million cartons produced in 2013-2014, when a series of winter freezes caused considerable damage to groves. Very few nights approached freezing this year, as winter temperatures remained warmer than normal.

California is the source of 85 percent of the nation's fresh citrus and navel oranges are among the state's top commodities, valued at more than \$721 million a year, according to the California Farm Bureau Federation.



Blakely

Californians reduced water use by 13.5 percent in April

SACRAMENTO (AP) — Californians are using less water, but they'll have to conserve a lot more to achieve the mandatory cuts taking effect this month, according to the latest numbers released Tuesday.

California residents reduced overall water usage by 13.5 percent compared to the same month in the benchmark year of 2013, water officials said.

That's the second-best conservation achievement since state officials started closely tracking water use more than a year ago, but falls short of the 25 percent cuts Gov. Jerry Brown made mandatory for cities and towns as of June 1.

"Local communities are stepping up in a way they weren't before, and I'm hoping that's why we are starting to see the uptick" in conservation, said Felicia Marcus, chairwoman of the state Water Resources Control Board.

"The real challenge is, we really have to step it up for the summer months," Marcus said. "If we miss the summer, we are toast."

April's still-lackluster overall achievement reported by the roughly 400 water agencies in the state could raise concerns about whether Californians have fully acknowledged the drought's severity.

This year's Sierra Nevada snowpack, which feeds the state's rivers, was the lowest on record — a grim image that served as Brown's backdrop when he announced unprecedented conservation measures on April 1.

"When they saw the governor out on that dry meadow and saw what was in his executive order, and realized it was really time to step up, they really started to step up," said board scientist Max Gomberg, who is overseeing conservation.

April's best conservers included Santa Rosa, a city of 170,000 north of San Francisco, which reported a 32 percent drop compared to



Mindy Schauer/The Orange County Register via AP

In this Monday, June 1, 2015 photo, workers with JW Landscape work on removing 300,000 square feet of turf at Suzuki headquarters in Brea, Calif. The grass will be replaced with drought-tolerant plants and is expected to save the company 700,000 gallons of water a month, said R.F. Taitano, administrative services manager.

2013. The city offered a host of programs to achieve this, paying residents to reduce 52 football fields' worth of lawn and giving away 50,000 low-flush toilets since 2007.

Saved water "is the cheapest water you can find," said David Guhin, water director for Santa Rosa. "It's gotten to where lawns are uncool."

Cool or not, many communities are still falling far short.

"Fifty-thousand toilets? Really? We don't have that kind of money," said Alan Tandy, city manager of Bakersfield, where water use actually increased by 1 percent in the latest state count.

Besides offering some modest rebate programs for water conservation, the working-class city of farms and oil rigs was finding it "difficult to get the word out to everybody" about saving, Tandy said.

The Southern California coast, a region including Los Angeles and San Diego, cut just 9 percent in April, compared to a 20 percent reduction in the San Francisco Bay Area and 24 percent in

the Sacramento area.

Among cities of 40,000 or more, the steepest reduction in the state, 45 percent, was reported by the water company serving Livermore. The worst was Escondido, reporting a 20 percent increase.

Water districts missing their targets face potential fines of up to \$10,000 a day once June numbers are in, although a far more likely outcome will be state-ordered changes in local regulations, like tougher limits on lawn-watering.

Each community was assigned a reduction target, with some ordered to cut back as much as 36 percent.

Water waste also is being tracked, and the board could penalize local agencies that don't crack down. Only a tenth of water departments reported penalizing their customers for water waste.

The shift to mandatory conservation followed lackluster savings through a voluntary effort, with water use slipping just 3 percent in February and 4 percent in March compared to the same

months in 2013.

And while suppliers of treated water closely monitor and report on their customers' usage each month, most farmers self-report consumption long after their crops have been grown and harvested.

But as more wells and streams run dry, California's farmers are expected to increase by a third the fields they fallow this year. The drought's impact on agriculture alone will cost California \$500 million more than last year, for a total economic hit of \$2.7 billion in 2015, according to a study released Tuesday by the University of California at Davis.

Roughly 200 farmers in the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta east of San Francisco submitted plans by Tuesday's deadline for reducing water use by 25 percent to avoid deeper cuts. State officials are still figuring out how much water could be saved with these deals, but state delta water master Michael George said he expects "significant conservation."

California Dairies Inc. elects officers

California Dairies Inc. board of directors has elected executive committee officers for the 2015-2016 term. John Azevedo, who has served as

chairman of the board since May 2013, was re-elected to serve another term.

Also elected were:

- John Moons, re-elected

first vice chairman

- Manuel Machado, former treasurer, elected second vice chairman

- Edwin Koetsier, re-elected secretary
- Charles DeGroot, elected treasurer

• BJ Schonevel, re-elected member-at-large

- Simon Vander Woude, elected member-at-large

Executive committee elections take place each May, and officers serve a one-year term.

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