

El Nino-powered winter creeps forward

By **TIM HEARDEN**
Capital Press

SACRAMENTO — For much of Northern and Central California, the El Nino-powered arrival of winter could be more of a gradual onset than a grand entrance.

After several weak storms spritzed the region in the final days of October, another cool and potentially wet system is due to hit California in the

middle of next week, forecasters say.

But it may be mid-November before a change in weather patterns really takes hold. AccuWeather's long-range forecast shows mostly cloudy days with some showers and thunderstorms in Northern California through the second half of the month.

"This is the transition to our wet pattern," said Michelle Mead, a National Weather

Service warning coordinator in Sacramento. "This is about the time we start to see more storms moving off the Pacific (Ocean) into California."

El Nino signaled its presence late last week with Hurricane Patricia, which slammed into Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, and was still bringing torrential rains, strong winds and local flooding to much of the southern United States this week.

Forecasters have predicted Southern and Central California could see above-average rainfall this winter from El Nino's southern storms, and Northern California could start to see above-average precipitation as the winter proceeds.

However, the federal Climate Prediction Center foresees equal chances of above- or below-average rainfall throughout California in No-

vember.

And next week's system isn't coming from the south but from the north. It's what meteorologists call an "inside slider" expected to make its way down from the intermountain region of Idaho and Montana, bringing the possibility of the season's first significant snowfall at higher elevations.

Mead cautions that weather in the spring and fall is

more difficult to predict, and long-range forecasts tend to rely more on what's happened in past years than on anything that's happening in the atmosphere.

"When we're transitioning (from summer to winter), the models play catch-up for a while," she said. "Every seven to 10 days they start showing us a weather system coming in, but they don't always come to fruition."

Seminar to address hot-button water issues, including WOTUS rule

Host of irrigation-related topics are on the agenda, including EPA's controversial new regulations

By **SEAN ELLIS**
Capital Press

BOISE — Several hot-button local, state and federal water issues will be discussed during the Idaho Water Users Association's annual Fall Water Law and Resource Issues Seminar Nov. 19-20.

An update on the Environmental Protection Agency's controversial Waters of the United States rule is expected to be the main attraction.

A panel of experts will discuss what the rule means and what's next, after a federal court ruling earlier this month temporarily blocked the rule from taking effect in all 50 states.

The panel, which will include an EPA representative and two legal experts, will examine all aspects of the rule, according to an IWUA news release.

"The EPA rule is one of the most hotly contested federal government moves in some time because of the threat that it poses to state sovereignty," IWUA Executive Director Norm Semanko stated in the news release. "That fact only guarantees the panel will be a hot-button attraction for folks attending the meeting."

The seminar, which will be held in Boise, attracts a who's who of people involved with water delivery in Idaho.

The IWUA represents 300 irrigation districts and canal companies, agribusinesses, hydropower and aquaculture interests and groups around the state that manage water supplies for more than 2 million acres of irrigated farmland.

The seminar is a great educational opportunity for people involved with water, said Idaho Water Resources Board Chairman Roger Chase.

"It's a really important event (because) you get to hear from people who are experts on the issues, not

only locally but regionally and nationally as well," he said. "I really enjoy the event and always learn a lot there."

Chase is on the seminar agenda and will update people on state efforts to recharge the Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer. Aquifer recharge plays a big role in implementing the settlement between surface water users and junior groundwater pumpers resulting from a 2005 water call, he said.

"That's a real important part of (the agreement)," Chase said. "We want to take some of that water that leaves the state and instead recharge it into the aquifer."

Chase's talk will be part of an overall presentation on water delivery calls in Idaho and settlement updates.

Idaho Department of Water Resources Water Distribution Section Manager Rob Whitney will discuss how the department handles complaints about unauthorized water uses.

"I'm going to talk about what department policy is related to enforcement of unauthorized uses of water and how the department is using technology ... to address that issue," he said.

University of Idaho Agricultural Economist Garth Taylor will provide an overview of irrigation use and agriculture in Idaho and said he wants to show just how big a player the state is in both areas.

Other presentations include an update on California water shortages and curtailment orders, legal limits on using wells to recover canal seepage, and whether flood control releases in the Treasure Valley should count against reservoir storage rights.

More information

For seminar details, visit the IWUA website at www.iwua.org or call (208) 344-6690.



Mateusz Perkowski/Capital Press

Farmer Leonard Heidt examines thornless Marionberries growing on his property near Mount Angel, Ore. Heidt came across the variety as a "sport" a decade ago and is pursuing a plant patent for it.

Thornless Marionberries reduce liability concerns

Variety also easier to handle, preserves fruit quality, grower says

By **MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI**
Capital Press

MT. ANGEL, Ore. — Over the course of his four decades in farming, Leonard Heidt has found a half-dozen thornless "sport" canes growing from otherwise thorny Marionberries.

All of those turned out to have undesirable characteristics, such as low berry yields and deformed blooms that rendered the plants unsuitable for commercial farming.

For that reason, Heidt was cautiously optimistic when he came across a sport a decade ago that seemed to produce fruit as well as the thorny varieties of Marionberries.

Years of field testing convinced him that the cultivar would be viable and he applied for a plant patent for the variety in 2012, which is still pending.

The patent application has allowed Heidt to begin sell-

ing the "Willamette Thornless Marion" variety to other growers and collect a royalty payment of 10 cents per plant.

Since then, Heidt estimates the thornless cultivar has been planted on about 200 acres as growers gain confidence in the variety.

"I do think it's going to eventually replace the regular Marion, if it proves to have the same durability," he said.

Thornless Marionberries provide farmers with the benefit of being easier to handle, but they also appear to preserve fruit quality during mechanical harvesting, Heidt said.

"They're not getting hit with the stickers, so the berries' cells aren't as damaged," he said.

For processors and end users of berries, the main concern is that pieces of thorny stems will be found in pies, jams and other products, Heidt said.

"The liability is the number

one concern," he said.

Because that worry is eliminated with his variety, Heidt has established a deal under which the Willamette Valley Fruit Co. of Salem, Ore., pays growers a premium of five cents per pound for thornless Marionberries.

"We live in an environment where food safety is really critical," said Dave Dunn, general manager of the Willamette Valley Fruit Co.

Dunn said there's a "delicate balance" involved in promoting the cultivar's thornlessness without disparaging the regular thorny Marionberries that are still the predominant variety in the area.

The company processed 1 million pounds of the thornless variety last year and has found strong support for the cultivar among buyers, he said. "The market looks really good for them."

Willamette Valley Fruit Co.

wants to expand acreage of the crop but is doing so warily to ensure the brand isn't misrepresented, Dunn said.

For example, the company wants to work with trusted growers and processors who won't mix the cultivar with other thorny berries, but then market them all as thornless, he said.

Heidt hopes to forestall this possibility by certifying fields as thornless and estimating their expected production.

Farmers also need to be sure the new variety will perform well in the field — at this point, the plants have withstood low winter temperatures well, but those in the ground are still relatively young, Dunn said.

"So far, the data looks good," he said.

Some canes from the cultivar do occasionally revert to growing thorns, and these should be removed, Heidt said. Plants seem particularly prone to this problem if their roots are damaged, he said.

Feds must disclose some California water well info

Ruling holds that names and addresses are public, geological data is not

By **MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI**
Capital Press

Federal authorities will not have to disclose the location, construction or depth of California water wells to an environmental group under a recent federal court ruling.

However, the decision does require the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation to turn over the names and addresses of the well owners and water transfer participants to AquAlliance, which advocates for "hydrological health" in Northern

California.

In 2013, AquAlliance made a wide-ranging Freedom of Information Act request for documents relating to water transfers in the region, which included geological data about water wells.

The federal government released much of the information to the environmental group but withheld the well data under FOIA exemptions that protect privacy interests.

AquAlliance then filed a legal complaint against the Bureau of Reclamation, claiming that the agency improperly applied those exemptions.

U.S. District Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson in Washington, D.C., has rejected some of the group's arguments while agreeing with others.

The plaintiff claimed that FOIA privacy exemptions

for geological well data only applied to oil and gas wells, but Jackson dismissed this argument, holding that water is also a precious and limited resource.

Jackson also rejected the claim that turning over geological well data wouldn't improperly reveal "proprietary technical or scientific secrets" and thus must be disclosed, contravening a previous federal court decision from South Dakota.

On the other hand, the judge found that the bureau does have to disclose names and addresses because this information isn't "stigmatizing, embarrassing or dangerous" for well owners and people who participate in water transfers.

The government argued that turning over the names and addresses would not serve the public interest but would simply allow AquAlliance to "proselytize" its environmental message, while the environmental group countered that it needed the information to ensure water isn't moved unlawfully.

Jackson sided with AquAlliance on this question, finding that the bureau "neither acknowledges these public benefits of disclosure, nor articulates how these benefits are outweighed by the relatively weak privacy interests at stake."



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