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Washington to appraise drought damage

'Never seen anything like it,' farmer says

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

The Washington State Department of Agriculture will survey fields and question producers to assess how much last summer's drought cost farmers and ranchers, a look back that officials say will help them plan ahead.

WSDA is scheduled to deliver a preliminary report by Dec. 31 to the state Department of Ecology, the agency that disburses drought-relief funds. WSDA

will see how lingering drought damage affects 2016 production and submit a final report at the end of next year.

The report will put figures on economic and production losses by region and commodity, according to an agreement between DOE and WSDA. The study, according to officials, will identify the areas and crops hardest hit by the drought and help policymakers direct relief.

The assessment will attempt to measure the affect on yields and a wide-range of farm practices, including planting and har-

vest schedules, labor costs and the expense of activating emergency wells and pumps.

The state has not conducted such assessments after previous droughts.

WSDA in May estimated the drought would sap \$1.2 billion from Washington's \$10 billion agriculture industry, a rough calculation based on the assumption that losses would be concentrated in Yakima Valley irrigation districts with junior-water rights. The valley is the state's top-producing farm region, and growers with junior-water rights faced cutbacks because of low snowpacks.

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Courtesy of Washington Department

An orchard in Benton County in Central Washington suffers from the drought last summer. The Washington State Department of Agriculture will appraise 2015 drought losses, as assessment the state hasn't done after previous droughts.

GETTING ON TRACK

E. Wash. terminals handle efficient, 110-car shuttle trains

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

FOUR LAKES, Wash. — When HighLine Grain LLC's new shuttle-train loading facility opens early next year, it will represent the latest addition to a network of transportation improvements that help Washington farmers ship their nearly \$1 billion wheat crop to market each year.

With the new HighLine facility, there are now four high-efficiency shuttle terminals that can handle the wheat grown across 2.2 million acres of Eastern Washington.

Fifty miles southwest of HighLine's terminal in Four Lake, Wash., is the Ritzville Warehouse Co.'s Templin terminal near Ritzville, Wash.

About 35 miles to the southeast is the Co-Ag and Pacific Northwest Farmers Cooperative McCoy terminal. About 154 miles to the south is another facility, owned by AgriNorthwest in Plymouth, Wash., near the Washington-Oregon border.

The facilities represent a key transportation link for getting the region's wheat to overseas markets.

Each year during harvest, Pacific Northwest farmers truck their wheat to country grain elevators, where it is stored. When the elevators sell the wheat, they load it onto trucks or 26-car short-line trains to get it to the shuttle-train loading facilities.

There the wheat is aggregated and loaded onto 110-car BNSF Railway shuttle trains, which take it to ports in Portland, Seattle or Tacoma. It's then loaded onto ships for the trip across the Pacific Ocean to customers in Asia and elsewhere.

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Matthew Weaver/Capital Press

HighLine Grain terminal superintendent Brad Wiley stands outside the facility during construction Nov. 6 near Four Lakes, Wash. The terminal is slated to open in late January.

"A little bit of competition keeps everybody in line, I guess. We all get along pretty well out here in the country."

Stacey Hunt, grain manager Ritzville Warehouse Co.

Calif. agency sets initial allocation at 10 percent

Despite storms, reservoirs below 30 percent capacity

By TIM HEARDEN
Capital Press

SACRAMENTO — Despite early season storms and the prospects for a wet winter, California's water agency has initially estimated it will deliver only 10 percent of requested allocations to State Water Project contractors.

The allocation matches last year's initial allocation and signals that the drought, which is entering its fifth year, is far from over. The allocations could be increased or decreased depending on how much rain and snow falls this winter, officials said.

"No matter how hard it's raining, we need to remember to use water wisely and sparingly," state Department of Water Resources director

Mark Cowin said when announcing the allocation Dec. 1. "Our historic drought has lasted for years and isn't going to quickly be washed away."

Cowin and other officials say California still faces severe water shortages even after recent storms, including a wintry system just before Thanksgiving that dumped up to a foot of snow in some areas of the Sierra Nevada.

Lake Oroville, the State Water Project's principal reservoir, was only at 26 percent of capacity as of Dec. 1 and is nearing its record low of 882,000 acre-feet set on Sept. 7, 1977, the agency reports. The reservoir, which provides water for 25 million Californians and serves nearly 1 million acres of farmland, can hold up to 3.5 million acre-feet.

Shasta Lake, the centerpiece of the federal Central Valley Project, was at 29 percent of its 4.5 million acre-foot capacity and 49 percent

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A shoe sits on the dry lake bed Oct. 27 at Folsom Lake, in Folsom, Calif. Despite recent storms, the state's reservoirs remain below 30 percent of capacity.

Rich Pedroncelli
Associated Press

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