

# Popular meteorologist Art Douglas offers his take on El Nino's impact

By **MATTHEW WEAVER**  
Capital Press

Meteorologist Art Douglas is a fixture at the Spokane Ag Expo and Pacific Northwest Farm Forum each year, bringing his unique perspective on the weather to the region's many farmers and ranchers.

This year, all eyes are on El Nino, warm water that has pooled in the Pacific Ocean, and how it will impact the West Coast's weather during the next year.

Peterson will speak during the Pacific Northwest Farm Forum main session, which starts at 9 a.m. Tuesday, Feb. 2.

Dry conditions in the Pacific Northwest are part of the El Nino pattern, which started to develop in 2013. As it became a "mega" El Nino the impact spread.

Douglas predicts that El Nino will likely start to fade by March or April, with neutral conditions developing by the beginning of summer.

"It's probably not quick enough to turn moisture con-



Capital Press file

Meteorologist Art Douglas will offer his annual outlook during this year's Spokane Ag Expo and Pacific Northwest Farm Forum, starting at 9 a.m. Tuesday, Feb. 2.

ditions around in the Pacific Northwest in the critical time in which the wheat is in the ground," Douglas, professor emeritus at Creighton University in Omaha, Neb., said. "It's not real positive."

Douglas also expects to talk about climate change during his presentation. Warming has taken place on the planet and the

amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere has more than doubled, he said. But within the scientific community, he believes "global warming" is too often blamed for abnormal weather instead of changes in the oceans that are likely to reverse.

"If that's the case, we're going to see a slowdown in global warming and other types of weather patterns taking over," he said.

For example, from 1998 to 2011, the Pacific Ocean's "decadal oscillation" was in a good phase for moisture in the Pacific Northwest and "disastrous" for California and Texas, Douglas said. Now the cycle is changing, returning the region to drier climate similar to that in the 1960s and 1970s, he said.

In 2016, the El Nino may give way to a strong La Nina pattern, which would create a year of wet weather.

"We may have one nice, good, wet winter next year, and then we've got to be prepared for quite a few years of recurrent below-normal precipitation in the Northwest," Douglas said.

# Farmers flock to hear Douglas talk

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Courtney Morse gets up early to make sure he hears Art Douglas deliver his weather forecast.

Morse drives the 50 miles from his farm, south of Davenport, Wash., to Spokane to make sure he doesn't miss the popular weatherman's presentation.

Morse said Douglas' presentations are like taking a class in meteorology.

"He'll take you to the next level, (how) ocean temperatures, wind currents and what's happening in a different part of the planet will affect the weather here," Morse said.

Douglas has spoken at 28 of the last 29 Spokane Ag Expos and is a popular mainstay.

When he was involved with the Washington State Farm Bureau, Davenport farmer William Guhlke would divide his time between the Spokane Ag Expo and meetings with legislators in Olympia.

"I would crawl over the mountains for Art Douglas, to hear him talk," Guhlke said. "He's not the guy that's going to predict it's going to be 100 de-



Matthew Weaver/Capital Press

Davenport, Wash., farmer Courtney Morse, left, and another audience member speak with weatherman Art Douglas prior to his forecast at the 2013 Spokane Ag Expo and Pacific Northwest Farm Forum. Farmers praise Douglas for his accuracy and accessibility.

grees on the Fourth of July, and then it rains. If he says it's going to snow and you'll have a blizzard on Christmas, you better bet you're gonna have a blizzard on Christmas."

"He's usually pretty down to earth — you can understand where he's coming from when he's explaining what he expects to happen," said Art Swannack, a Lamont, Wash., rancher. "He does a good job of explaining why he believes the ocean cycles are the primary driver of our weather in Eastern Washington."

The farmers said Douglas'

forecast helps them make plans for their operations.

"He's been fairly accurate with all his statistics," Guhlke said. "He really predicted this summer to be hot and dry, and I felt he hit it right on. Maybe I didn't follow his advice good enough. We had a tremendously hot summer, which devastated our crop. He was very right about that."

If Douglas predicts drought, that means Morse will be less aggressive when forward contracting his wheat, the better to take advantage of potentially higher prices later, he said.

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