

Wet end to hot year bodes well for Washington

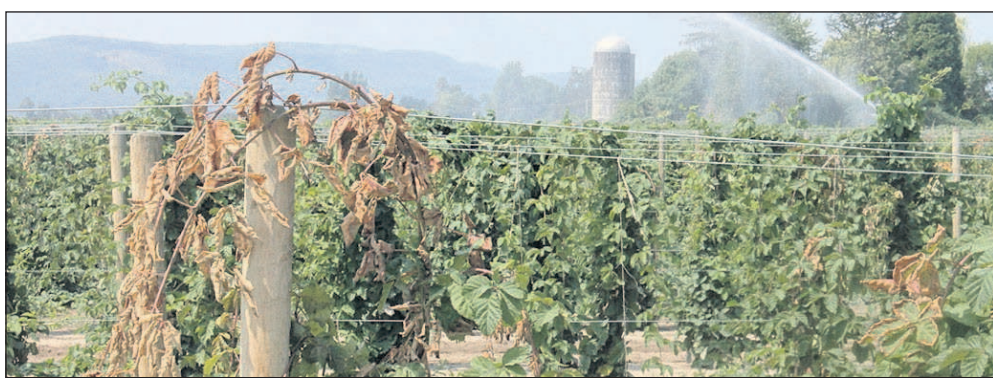
Mild winter still in the forecast

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

Washington's year of record-breaking heat was capped by a wet and only slightly warm December that should help make the 2016 snowpack much improved over last winter, even if El Nino props up temperatures for the rest of the season, State Climatologist Nick Bond said.

"Overall, it looks like we're going to be in pretty decent shape in regard to the water supply," Bond said. "In light of the kind of warm and probably wet conditions we'll have, (the snowpack) probably will be a little less than usual, but three times what we had last year."

A National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administra-



Plants wither during Washington's record-warm 2015. The state's climatologist sees an improved water outlook in 2016.
Don Jenkins/Capital Press

tion report released Jan. 13 confirmed 2015 was Washington's warmest in the past 121 years. Temperatures were particularly high in February, March, May, June, July and October.

The year ended, however, with the fourth wettest December on record, while temperatures were near normal.

The precipitation started

snowpacks, which hardly materialized last winter. Basin snowpacks throughout the state ranged between 125 and 75 percent of normal, according to the Natural Resources and Conservation Service.

Washington's overall snowpack was only 27 percent of normal in mid-March last year when Gov. Jay Inslee declared a drought emergency

in parts of the state. Inslee declared a statewide emergency in May as conditions worsened.

For months, climatologists have expected El Nino, a warming of the Pacific Ocean, to produce a warm and dry Northwest winter, raising concerns that Washington will suffer a second straight drought year.

In some El Nino years, however, winter storms move in as usual, Bond said. "There are plenty of exceptions and this may be one of those."

Bond said he still expects a mild winter, but the precipitation so far has a built cushion.

"We can all appreciate December. It put us in a good way," he said.

Washington's average temperature in 2015 was 50 degrees, 3.9 degrees warmer than the 20th century average, according to NOAA's National Centers for Environmental Information.

Bond said a warm strip of water off the West Coast, nicknamed "The Blob," influenced temperatures. The Blob is now cooling, he said.

"It's definitely moderated. I'm OK with saying The Blob is more or less out of the picture," Bond said.

Bond said Washington's record-breaking year can be

attributed to factors other than climate change, but he added that baseline temperatures are rising.

"It wasn't due to global warming, but it's going to be what global warming feels like," he said. "We are warming, and that's going to accelerate."

Oregon also set a year-long heat record, with an average temperature of 50.4, 3.9 degrees above the 20th century average.

Idaho and California had their second-hottest years on record.

The average temperature in the continental United States was the second-warmest on record, surpassed only by 2012.

The U.S. had its third-wettest year ever. The total amount of the country in drought shrank during the year by 10 percent, according to NOAA.

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Legal-4-2-4/#4

Nurseries growing new Washington apple

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

QUINCY, Wash. — A sea of 2-foot-tall trees, brown leaves still hanging on, ride above a blanket of snow. They look normal enough

but it's rootstock growth, in a field owned by Gold Crown Nursery. In another month they will be cut off six to eight inches above the ground, just above single buds that were grafted into the stems last August.

In spring, the buds will burst forth, growing new nursery trees through summer. They'll be ready for digging in November, placed in cold storage through winter and shipped for planting in the spring of 2017.

What makes these trees special are that they will be the first commercial planting of Cosmic Crisp, the first apple variety bred in Washington to be exclusively grown by any and all Washington growers that the industry hopes will become the new "Washington" apple. The first apples will be harvested and sold in stores in the fall of 2020.

Initially known by its breeding name, WA 38, the apple was bred from Enterprise and Honeycrisp in 1997 by Bruce Barritt, who was then the apple breeder at Washington State University



A sea of rootstock trees stands in a blanket of snow near Quincy, Wash. They will become Cosmic Crisp apple trees this year.
Dan Wheat/Capital Press



This bud was grafted into this half-inch-diameter rootstock last August and will grow into a new Cosmic Crisp apple tree this year after the rootstock above it is cut off in February.
Dan Wheat/Capital Press

Tree Fruit Research and Extension Center in Wenatchee.

Cosmic Crisp has a sweet, tangy flavor and ranks high in taste, texture and beauty and has many qualities of the popular Honeycrisp with fewer horticultural challenges, says Kate Evans, who succeeded Barritt after his retirement.

Twenty-four growers were chosen by drawing to plant the first 300,000 to 400,000 commercial Cosmic Crisp trees in 2017. But propagation is going well

enough that 600,000 will be ready so a second set of 24 growers also will receive trees, said Bill Howell, managing director of Northwest Nursery Improvement Institute, Prosser. NNII is managing tree production by seven nurseries. Growers are evenly split into two classifications: smaller growers wanting 3,000 to 5,000 trees and larger ones receiving up to 20,000.

In 2018, nurseries will have enough Cosmic Crisp that the drawing won't be

used and any Washington grower will be able to buy them at nurseries.

"We have orders for well over 1 million trees for 2018 and orders are coming now pretty aggressively for 2019," said Lynnell Brandt, president of Proprietary Variety Management in Yakima that is coordinating the commercialization of Cosmic Crisp for WSU.

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Aerial applicator's license suspension unwarranted, judge says

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

An administrative law judge has found that Oregon's farm regulators weren't justified in yanking the license of an aerial pesticide applicator accused of endangering the public.

In September 2015, the Oregon Department of Agriculture suspended the pesticide applicator's license of Applebee Aviation of Banks, Ore., and fined the company \$1,100 for allegedly spraying chemicals in a negligent manner.

Over the following months, the agency revoked the company's license for five years and increased the penalties to \$160,000 — with another \$20,000 in fines tacked on for its owner, Mike Applebee —

as it learned the company repeatedly conducted spray operations even after its license was invalidated.

However, the "preponderance of the evidence" doesn't substantiate ODA's allegation that Applebee Aviation posed a "serious danger to the public health or safety," as is required to suspend a license without a hearing, according to Senior Administrative Law Judge Monica Whitaker of Oregon's Office of Administrative Hearings.

Emergency license suspensions are an "extreme remedy," but ODA's findings of misconduct — such as workers handling pesticides without proper protective equipment — were largely based on the claims of only one former employee, Darryl Ivy, Whitaker said.

The administrative law judge said the agency's heavy reliance on Ivy's accusations was "inherently problematic."

Ivy quit his job with Applebee Aviation in April 2015 and claimed he was exposed to herbicide spraying that caused mouth blisters and a swollen airway, triggering an investigation by ODA and the Oregon Occupational Safety and Health Division.

While an ODA investigator cited photos taken by Ivy to support the agency's conclusions, "the photos were not authenticated" and Ivy wasn't called as a witness to the evidence, Whitaker said.

For example, photos of residue on a truck windshield, which ODA accepted to be a pesticide spray mixture could have been "soap residue" be-

cause the substance was never tested, she said.

The former employee's "mere assertions" aren't sufficient to establish the allegations against Applebee Aviation without further verification, Whitaker said.

Whitaker has issued an order proposing that the original license suspension and civil penalty against the company be reversed, though those sanctions remain in place until ODA makes a final decision.

At this point, the administrative law judge's proposed order is a recommendation to the ODA. The agency's director, Katy Coba, will issue the final order, which Applebee Aviation can challenge.

"As we speak, we're mulling over the options," said Bruce Pokarney, communications director for ODA, noting that the agency can't comment on the proposed order's findings.

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PUBLIC NOTICE

The Oregon Soil and Water Conservation Commission (SWCC) will hold its regular quarterly meeting on Thursday, February 11, 2016, from 12:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. and Friday, February 12, 2016, from 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at the Willow Lake Water Pollution Control Facility located at 5915 Windsor Island Road N., Keizer, OR 97303. The meeting agenda covers SWCC reports, advisor reports, Soil and Water Conservation District programs and funding, Agriculture Water Quality Management Program updates, and other agenda items.

The Oregon Department of Agriculture complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). If you need special accommodations to participate in this meeting, please contact Sandi Hiatt at (503) 986-4704, at least 72 hours prior to the meeting.