Butterfly

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to make a decision, depending on whether the Center for Biological Diversity files new lawsuits related to ESA deadlines, or obtains additional "remedies" in such litigation.

The agency had found in 2014 that substantial evidence indicated that a threatened or endangered listing may be warranted for the monarch, but did not make a final decision within a year, as required by ESA.

Populations of the butterfly declined roughly 90 percent over the past two decades, which the environmental groups attribute to the popularity of glyphosate-resistant biotech crops.

These crops have increased the prevalence of glyphosate, which is highly effective at killing the milkweed that monarchs depend on for food at the larval stage, according to the plaintiffs.

If the species does gain ESA protection, environmental groups may push for federal requirements that farmers set aside reserves of non-biotech crops, reducing glyphosate usage.

Water

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Here is a round-up of the water situations in the West:

Oregon: Below average

Despite an adequate accumulation of snow over winter, streamflows are well below average across much of Oregon.

In some cases, streamflows have reached record low levels that are worse than during last year's drought, according to the Oregon Water Resources Department.

All of Oregon's river basins are experiencing substandard streamflows, ranging from about 78 percent below average in the Umatilla Basin to 43 percent below average in the Grand Ronde Basin. Statewide streamflows were 57 percent below average last month.

Snow and rain levels in Oregon were normal in early spring but abnormally high temperatures in April dealt the state's water outlook a major setback, said Scott Oviatt, Oregon snow survey supervisor for the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Mountain snowpacks melted faster, with none left as the state's irrigators entered the summer, Oviatt said.

"All the sites melted out," he said. "That peaked our stream flows two to four weeks early. Everything's been moved up on the time clock."

Trees have also absorbed more moisture to compensate for last year's drought stress, making even less water available to streams, he said.

Irrigators who draw their water directly from streams are likely to see shortages, but those who rely on reservoirs may also experience problems because storage is no longer being replenished, Oviatt said.

Many Oregon reservoirs were boosted by the early snowmelt but they're also being drawn down earlier, so levels could end up as low as in 2015, according to the department.

In the Willamette Valley, reservoirs are about 54 percent full on average. Other areas of the state are seeing a broad range of reservoir levels — Henry Hagg Lake, which supplies the Tualatin Valley Irrigation District, is 88 percent full, while the Clear Lake reservoir in Southern Oregon is only 24 percent full.

On the whole, reservoir levels are adequate and an improvement over 2015, but parts of Oregon are nonetheless facing drought again this year, said Jim Johnson, the Oregon Department of Agriculture's land use specialist and water planning coordinator.

"We don't have the longer term storage in snowpack due to the warm spring," he said.

— Mateusz Perkowski

Washington: Manageable

Washington state's irrigation water supply is in relatively good shape compared with last year's drought, but it could be better.

Statewide, April and May were the warmest those months have been since 1950, said Marti, the drought coordinator for the Department of Ecology.

The result was the most rapid melt of mountain snowpack in 30 years. Water managers normally rely on a gradual snowmelt to replenish the state's reservoirs as they are drawn down for irrigation.

The early snowmelt has caused water usage to be curtailed to approximately 600 junior water right holders throughout the state, Marti said.

Most are individuals along the following rivers: Walla Walla, Touchet, upper Yakima, Okanogan, Methow, Chehalis and Nooksack. Also included are the Little Spokane Basin and Cow, Charmokane and Harvey creeks north of Spokane.

More users and districts along the Yakima, Wenatchee and Entiat rivers could experience water shortages in August and September, he said.

However, two weeks of cool weather and showers in June helped slow the decline in conditions.

As of June 30, 37 percent of the state's rivers were flowing below normal with 1 percent at record lows. That is an improvement over last year, when 80 percent of river flows were below normal and 40 percent were at record lows, Marti said.

Weather seems more normal in comparison to the excessive June heat a year ago, said Chris Lynch, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation hydrologist overseeing the Yakima Basin Project. The project includes five mountain reservoirs and the Yakima River providing irrigation water to 464,000 acres of farmland. It was hardest-hit in last year's drought.

The reservoirs at the end of June had been drawn down just 7 percent, or 75,000 acre-feet of the 1,065,400 acre-feet of water, which Lynch said is normal.

Major irrigation diversions were running at 6,334 cubic feet per second, which is average and water supply for junior water right districts was still estimated at 86 percent of average. At that rate, the Kittitas Reclamation District and Roza Irrigation District, the two largest junior water right districts, hope to make it through the season unscathed.

Last year, they made severe cuts in water delivery at 47 percent of normal supply, which cost millions of dollars in crop losses.

— Dan Wheat

California: Improves

Growers in California are breathing sighs of relief after a federal agency decided last week not to drastically reduce water releases from Shasta Lake.

The National Marine Fisheries Service had proposed reducing summer flows from the Central Valley Project's centerpiece reservoir by more than 20 percent to make sure there is enough cool water for the winter salmon run.

But U.S. Bureau of Reclamation officials said releases that federal and state resource agencies agreed on in March would be maintained as long as water in the Sacramento River stayed at 56 degrees or lower.

The plan released June 29 "includes a bunch of monitoring and checking to see if we're on track," said Shane Hunt, a bureau spokesman in Sacramento. He said releases from Keswick Reservoir west of Redding would be increased from 9,000 cubic feet per second to 10,500 cfs by about July 9.

The decision came after 15 members of California's congressional delegation sent a letter urging federal officials not to cut the releases because it would mean further cuts in water supplies for farmers. The lawmakers said the proposed decrease would deprive the CVP of about 400,000 acre-feet of water "for which crops have already been planted, loans have already been issued, products ordered and habitat management plans implemented."

While farm groups and water contractors were relieved that supplies wouldn't be cut, some complained about the time it took for the federal agencies to reach agreement on the latest plan and the sense of uncertainty that lingered for growers.

"The real problem is the process," said Joel Nelsen, president of California Citrus Mutual.

Though farms north of the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta were slated to get their full allocations this year, water availability remained a top concern for rice farmers heading into this year's crop, according to a survey by University of California researchers.

The Sacramento River Settlement Contractors complain that current releases from Shasta Lake are still 20 to 30 percent less than previous years.

The complaints underscore the fact that while winter rains and snow improved California's overall water picture, water in many areas remains scarce amid a fifth straight year of drought.

For instance, while Friant Division customers ended up getting about 75 percent of their normal federal water, growers without senior water rights on the San Joaquin Valley's westside have remained at 5 percent.

Shasta Lake was still at 86 percent of capacity and 107 percent of its average as of June 30, according to the state Department of Water Resources. Lake Oroville, the State Water Project's chief reservoir, was at 84 percent of capacity and 102 percent of average on June 30, the agency reported.

"We will be going into the end of September with a pretty good carryover number in Shasta, which is good," the Bureau of Reclamation's Hunt said. "We haven't had that in several years. We'll be able to carry over more water than we had in the reservoir last year in October, and that's a positive sign."

— Tim Hearden

Idaho: Outlook varies

Irrigators in Idaho's Eastern Snake Plain have been rapidly exhausting their storage this summer due to a combination of early peak natural flows and a hot, dry June.

The system's natural flows peaked weeks ahead of normal in mid-May this season due to an early melting of the mountain snowpack.

June brought just a pittance of moisture to Southern Idaho. According to the National Weather Service, Idaho Falls experienced its driest June on record, getting just 0.05 inches of rain.

The Boise area was a bit wetter, though still unseasonably dry with 0.18 inches of rain.

According to USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, the entire state has received below-normal precipitation since April 1.

"It will mean less carryover," said Lynn Tominaga, executive director of Idaho Ground Water Appropriators Inc. "If there's less carryover in the reservoir system it means we're going to be dependent on Mother Nature to have a big winter so that we get the reservoirs filled."

Lyle Swank, watermaster for the water district that encompasses the Upper Snake region, said the Eastern Snake Plain received a slightly below-average winter snowpack, and the reservoir system never quite filled. Streamflows for the Upper Snake at the Heise gage are projected at 83 percent of normal for the period from April through July, about 5 percent less than last year.

"We didn't get quite as much runoff as some of the forecasts were indicating," Swank said.

Swank said the system's nine major reservoirs are now 69 percent full, compared with 80 percent for the date during a typical year. American Falls Reservoir is at just 47 percent of capacity.

"That's surprising to some people how fast it's going down," Swank said. "A lot of times, June is one of the wetter months, but that hasn't been the case."

Swank said some of the water users — such as Burgess Canal, which serves the Rigby and Ririe areas north of Idaho Falls — are renting supplemental storage water. Other users, including those with water rights in the most junior reservoirs — Palisades and Island Park — may have to shift water from grain and hay to finish high-water crops such as corn and potatoes.

Tominaga said Snake Plain well users have been pumping nonstop to meet irrigation demand since the start of June, though many managed to delay irrigating until the end of May due to a wet spring. Tominaga believes grain crops may be ahead of schedule thanks to the heat, and an early harvest could lesson demand for storage water.

Other regions of the state are faring better. In the Boise Project, for example, managers had to release water to free reservoir space to accommodate an above-average snowpack, and reservoirs are still about 87 percent full, which is about average, said NRCS water supply specialist Ron Abramovich.

Boise Project streamflows are projected at 92 percent of normal for April through July, compared with 53 percent of normal during the same period last year.

In Western Idaho, Owhyee Reservoir irrigators, who have coped with severe shortages in recent years, should have an adequate supply for this season, Abramovich said. Owyhee Reservoir is at 54 percent of capacity, which is 79 percent of average, but is still having its best water year since 2012.

Jay Chamberlin, general manager of Owyhee Irrigation District, said his mountain snowpack melted early and soaked into dry soil, but a wet spring helped delay irrigation demand. His growers will be allotted their full 4 acre-feet for the entire season, but he doesn't anticipate much carryover.

"We have quite a few crops that have high water demands, and we'll be able to meet that water supply for them," Chamberlin said.

The state's best runoff forecasts are in the Bruneau Basin, which is 147 percent of normal, Salmon Falls Basin, which is 130 percent of normal and Oakley Basin, which is 97 percent of normal.

— John O'Connell

John O'Connell/Capital Press

Falls Creek Falls dumps into the Upper Snake River near Swan Valley. The combination of early peak flows and hot, dry weather has placed strong demand on storage water this season.

Corn is irrigated in Oregon's Willamette Valley. Streamflows across the state are generally below average, and some are at record low levels, affecting surface water irrigators. Reservoir levels are generally adequate but may suffer because of the lack of snowpacks.

Farmland

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being adjacent to Portland remains one of Oregon's top five agricultural counties. The county is particularly known for growing Christmas trees, nursery crops and berries.

But it's also known for political contention — some Portlanders derisively call it "Clackastan" — and for opposition to Metro, the land-use planning agency for the tri-county Portland area. The current county commission chair and vice chair, John Ludlow and Tootie Smith, are generally viewed as favoring job growth and development over land-use restrictions.

The commissioners point to an economic study by a consulting firm, Johnson Economics and Mackenzie, that said the county is short between 329 and 934 acres of industrial land and up to 246 acres of commercial land, an overall shortage of up to 1,180 acres over the next 20 years.

The conservation district, however, has some concerns. The acreage south of Wilsonville involves land adjacent to the Aurora Airport and Langdon Farms golf course. It has long been proposed for development by its owners, while farm groups and land-use watchdogs oppose development spreading into prime Willamette Valley farmland.

The acreage next to the city of Canby is Class 1 agricultural soil, some of the best farmland in the valley, said Jim Johnson, the Oregon Department of Agriculture's land-use specialist.

The conservation district is alarmed at the prospect of losing more farmland, said Salzer, the general manager.

"This is remarkable," he said. "It's the first time this board has stood up as a unanimous body and said, 'Wait a minute. Farmland is being threatened and we need to do something about it."

Jeff Becker, the conservation district's board chair, said the board doesn't want to antagonize the county commissioners but simply wants to promote discussion of the issue.

"We don't want to fire darts," Becker said. "We don't want to attack their policies. I know they get pressure (from all sides)."

But Becker said issues such as food supply need to be considered when development is discussed.

"If you get rid of farmland, it's gone forever," he said.

The county commissioners had questions and comments for Salzer when he delivered the conservation district's letter.

Commissioner Ludlow said any development on the land in question would be years out. "We're 1,100 acres short of job-producing land," he said. Commissioner Smith said farming requires a "whole host of behaviors" that young people don't want to engage in, and said much of the land under consideration is "fallow," not actively farmed.

"It may be fallow at this time, but if you build on it, it's gone," Salzer responded.

The current development proposal covers familiar ground about a lack of land for economic development. A bill introduced in the 2015 Oregon Legislature would have allowed Clackamas, Washington and Columbia counties to designate industrial reserves of up to 500 acres outside of established urban growth boundaries, but it died in committee.

This time, Clackamas County is going it alone and apparently will work through Metro.

Clackamas, Washington and Multnomah counties, which include the greater Portland area, agreed in 2010 to designate urban and rural reserves. Urban reserves will be considered first when the urban growth boundary is expanded for houses, stores and industries. More than 265,000 acres in the three counties were designated as rural reserves, meaning they would remain as farms, forests or natural areas until 2060.

"The facts on the ground have changed dramatically since the original reserves adoption," the Clackamas commissioners said in a letter to Metro, "prompting the need for corresponding changes to reserve designations. We cannot pretend that those changes didn't happen, or allow the matter to be dismissed as simply a change in leadership."