

# Northwest drought retreats; seasonal weather outlook turns colder, wetter

Odds now favor La Nina winter

By DON JENKINS  
Capital Press

Oregon and Washington's flash droughts are receding, and La Nina is shaping up in the Pacific Ocean, causing long-range forecasts for the Northwest to turn wetter and cooler, federal climatologists reported Thursday.

Some 64 percent of Washington is in a drought, down from 78 percent the week before, according to the U.S. Drought Monitor. Oregon's drought retreated to 28 percent of the state, down from 43 percent.

An abrupt change in weather patterns stemmed droughts that had been spreading over both states in September. For example, Spokane, which remains in a "moderate drought," went a record-setting 80 days without rain. The streak ended Sept. 17, with nearly an inch of rain falling over three days.

Looking ahead, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Climate Prediction Center issued a new seasonal forecast that puts the chances of a La Nina taking shape between November and January at 62 percent, up from 26 percent a month ago.

La Nina, a cooling of sea-surface temperatures, tilts the odds toward wetter and colder winters in the northern U.S., and drier and warmer winters in the southern U.S.

The odds still favor a warm-



Don Jenkins/Capital Press

Guillermina Hernandez removes loose vines from a cranberry bog harvested Sept. 19 on the Long Beach Peninsula in southwest Washington. The U.S. Drought Monitor on Sept. 21 reported rain had washed away the region's moderate drought.

er than usual fall and early winter in Oregon, Washington, Idaho and Northern California, but not as strongly as a month ago, according to the Climate Prediction Center.

A large reservoir of unusually cold water on the equator off the coast of South America contributed to the reassessment that La Nina conditions likely will emerge.

Washington received more snow than usual last winter during a weak La Nina, building up a snowpack that helped farmers get through a summer notable for record heat and dry spells, but not water shortages.

Here is a state-by-state look at drought conditions and the October through December forecast:

- Oregon: The northern half of Eastern Oregon remains in a "moderate drought." Storms washed the drought away from northwest Oregon. Odds favor slightly above-average precipitation for the next three months, except in the southwest corner of the state, where precipitation is expected to be normal.

- Washington: Rain rolled back drought conditions in southwest Washington and part of the Olympic Peninsula.

la. Precipitation is forecast to be above-average, except in northwest Washington, where chances are equal for above- or below-average rainfall.

- Idaho: Drought conditions were unchanged, with 23 percent of the state in moderate or severe drought. Odds favor above-average precipitation throughout Idaho.

- California: Drought conditions also were unchanged in California, where 8 percent of Southern California is still in moderate drought. Northern California has equal chances for above- or below-average precipitation.

# Changes planned for Oregon ag water quality oversight

Funding shifts from projects to planning, additional monitoring

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI  
Capital Press

Oregon's farm regulators aim to increase the impact of their agricultural water quality program by shifting how grant money is allocated, among other changes.

Ensuring that farmers comply with water quality standards is within the purview of the Oregon Department of Agriculture, which traditionally focused its attention on waterways subject to complaints.

In recent years, ODA has moved beyond the complaint-driven process to determine for itself which streams and rivers should be scrutinized for water quality problems.

Based on aerial photos and other data, the agency each year selects several "strategic implementation areas," or SIAs, where waterways are examined more closely.

During the 2015-2017 biennium, roughly \$1 million from the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board was spent on compliance projects in the SIAs, such as planting vegetation near denuded streams or moving manure piles away from waterways.

Under the agency's new "coordinated streamside management partnership," this funding will be dedicated to planning rather than on-the-ground work.

In the 2017-2019 biennium, another \$1.2 million in OWEB money will be available, but now the funds will be directed toward technical assistance for local soil and water conservation districts and watershed councils.

The change is expected to help smaller districts and councils — some of which only have a single employee — with tasks such as grant-writing and paying for engineering plans, said John Byers, manager of ODA's agricultural water quality program.

Aside from rectifying specific problems so landowners comply with water quality standards, the program will also identify additional mea-

asures to "uplift" water quality, Byers said.

Paying for the projects themselves will require separate OWEB grants, he said. "We feel they're going to be as competitive or more competitive because of that uplift."

Once it annually chooses six "strategic implementation areas," ODA will consult with the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality and Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife about the best methods for improving water quality.

"Let's make sure we're looking at this from a coordinated perspective," said Byers.

Historically, efforts to improve agricultural water quality were akin to "random acts of conservation," said Lisa Hanson, ODA's deputy director.

Now, ODA will provide local groups with information from DEQ and ODFW up front, helping them to understand where projects will be most effective for fish and environmental health, Hanson said.

"If we work with these 10 landowners, we can have a big impact," said Meta Loftsgaarden, OWEB's executive director.

The agency will also be monitoring aspects of water quality, such as sedimentation and temperature, to see whether its efforts are proving effective.

Monitoring has already occurred in some Oregon waterways, but systematically analyzing SIAs will provide state agencies with a more expansive perspective, said Loftsgaarden.

"We're able to get a very different story for agriculture than we've had in the past," she said. "It tells a broader, more statewide story."

Rather than focus on individual landowners, the monitoring component will encompass the larger waterway.

"The monitoring is going to be at the watershed scale and it's going to be in-stream," she said.

While ODA ultimately has the authority to issue civil penalties to landowners, so far it hasn't been necessary under the SIA approach, Byers said.

Landowners have been responsive to warning letters informing them that water quality problems need to be fixed, he said.

# Smackout wolfpack nears peaceful milestone

Details on lethal removal revealed

By DON JENKINS  
Capital Press

If the Smackout wolfpack doesn't assail another cow or calf before Sept. 30, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife will stop holding some of its past attacks against it.

The pack's last documented depredation was two months ago, and it's been nearly that long since wildlife managers trapped and euthanized a pup and adult female. The department hopes the lapse of time indicates the large pack has learned to stay away from cattle.

"To date, we've seen the desired outcome," WDFW wolf policy coordinator Donny Martorello said. "We think our actions contributed to that."

WDFW set the end date of its post-culling evaluation period in a report released Sept. 21 on its methods and motives for killing two wolves in July. The department was following a new lethal-control policy that lowered the threshold



Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

A Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife investigator examines a wolf-inflicted wound on a calf July 22 on private land in Stevens County. WDFW killed two wolves in the Smackout pack to stop attacks on livestock.

for killing wolves, but called for initially taking one or two, rather than several. The department cited research that suggests quicker intervention deters packs, saving cows and wolves in the long run.

Under the policy, WDFW also killed one of two known wolves in the Sherman pack in August.

The Smackout pack has attacked at least five cattle in northeast Washington dating back to last year. The cattle belonged to three different producers.

The department says it may kill more wolves if the pack attacks again. But after the end of this month, three attacks from September 2016 won't figure in the department's decision. The pack will still have two depredations from July on its record. The threshold for lethal removal is four depredations in 10 months.

Martorello said the pack

has remained in its territory, 350 square miles northeast of Colville in Stevens County. The pack's territory includes one state and six federal grazing allotments, and several private pastures. Cows are expected to stay on grazing allotments until mid-October.

"It looks like the Smackout pack is doing what the Smackout pack does, but to date it has changed behavior and is not depredating on livestock," Martorello said.

The department's lethal-removal report included previously undisclosed details. Wildlife managers trapped wolves around the pack's rendezvous site, where hunting adults stash pups in mid-summer. The department captured wolves within 1 mile of where the pack attacked cattle, hoping to influence survivors to stay away from livestock.

WDFW euthanized a 30-pound female pup on July 21 and a 70-pound female adult on July 30. The adult was not the pack's breeding female, Martorello said.

The department preliminarily estimated that the le-

thal-removal operation cost less than \$7,000, a fraction of past six-figure operations that featured helicopters. Martorello said the department determined trapping could be effective because the wolves were coming and going from the rendezvous site.

He said the department could use helicopters in the future. "When the (WDFW) director authorizes lethal removal, we'll use the approach that gives us the highest chance of achieving the goal," he said.

During the 10-day operation, WDFW employees put in collectively 317 hours to prevent more conflicts between cattle and wolves, according to the report. The department and ranchers used range riders, lights and ribbons to deter attacks.

The pack had grown large in the spring, 13 to 15 wolves, and large packs are more likely to attack livestock, according to the report. Besides the two wolves killed by WDFW, one adult wolf that was attacking cattle was killed June 30 by a range rider.

# Members needed for Agricultural Heritage Commission

EO Media Group

The Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board is accepting applications to serve on the newly formed Oregon Agricultural Heritage Commission, established by the Legislature to provide incentives for farmers to voluntarily adopt practices that preserve both natural resources and agriculture.

The 12-member board will oversee the program and make funding and policy recommendations to OWEB. Applications are due Oct. 25.

Members are needed to represent a range of interests, including:

- Four members recommended by the state Board of Agriculture who are actively engaged in farming

or ranching.

- One member recommended by the director of the Oregon State University Extension Service.

- Two members recommended by the state Fish and Wildlife Commission with expertise on fish and wildlife habitat.

- One member recommended by the Board of Agriculture with expertise in agricultural water quality.

- One member recommended by the Land Conservation and Development Commission with expertise in conservation easements and land transfers.

- One member selected by OWEB representing natural resource interests.

- One member selected by OWEB representing tribal interests.

- One non-voting member, who is also a member of OWEB.

Terms will initially vary in length in order to stagger membership, after which commissioners will serve four-year terms. Commissioners cannot serve more than two consecutive terms.

For more information or to obtain an application, contact Nellie McAdams at 503-986-0061 or email nellie.mcadams@oregon.gov.

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