

Popular weatherman keeps an eye on sunspots

Douglas forecasts wet, cold winter

By **MATTHEW WEAVER**
Capital Press

Farmers who attend Art Douglas' weather forecast at the Spokane Ag Expo usually get more than just a glimpse of the coming weather picture.

They also get to know more about the impacts of sunspots.

Sunspots are explosions in the interior of the sun, creating excess energy that heads across the solar system and toward earth, said Douglas, a professor emeritus at Creighton University in Omaha, Neb., and a pop-



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Meteorologist Art Douglas will offer his annual weather outlook during this year's Spokane Ag Expo and Northwest Farm Forum.

ular speaker at the Spokane Ag Expo for 30 years,

Gravitational forces within the sun go through

an 11-year sunspot cycle of convection, redistributing energy. Douglas said the cycle is "plunging" into a sunspot minimum.

"It would be a method by which Mother Nature will try to counteract the influence of increased CO2 and how CO2 has been warming the planet," Douglas said. CO2 is carbon dioxide, a so-called greenhouse gas that traps heat from the sun.

A sudden, strong sunspot eruption would send more energy toward the earth, causing the stratosphere to heat up and form a ridge over Greenland, forcing a polar jetstream across the U.S. That usually means strong cold outbreaks and cold winters when that happens, Douglas said.

"It's something we're always on guard for the next two to four years," he said.

The year 2017 was "up and down" for development of La Niña and El Niño, Douglas said. El Niño and La Niña are the warm and cool phases of the recurring climate across the tropical Pacific Ocean. El Niño favors warm and dry conditions in the Pacific Northwest; La Niña favors cool, wet conditions.

Last year started with a La Niña, but a weak El Niño formed from April through August, before returning to a moderate La Niña.

U.S. and European weather models indicate the La Niña will peak in January and be gone by June. Normally La Niñas last one or more years.

A water pool at the International Dateline is likely the warmest or second-warmest since the 1950s, Douglas said. A high-pressure ridge in the

Central Pacific will send a jetstream across the Gulf of Alaska and skim the Canadian border from Washington state to the Great Lakes. That pattern is favorable for more precipitation in the Pacific Northwest.

"There will be periods when the jets will plunge farther south and arctic air will be able to get down into the Pacific Northwest," Douglas said.

He called for normal to above-normal precipitation through April and peaking in March. Precipitation will be normal or below normal by May.

Douglas also predicted below-normal temperatures in mid- to late winter and early spring.

In the long term, the West Coast is entering a warm phase associated with a drier Pacific Northwest, Douglas predicted.

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