Winter 'not scary' for NW farmers, weatherman says

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

The Pacific Northwest will see slightly above normal temperatures and normal precipitation throughout the winter, a well-known weatherman predicts.

Art Douglas, a professor emeritus of atmospheric sciences at Creighton University in Omaha, Neb., is best known for his presentations at the Spokane Ag Show every winter. Warm waters in the North Pacific and North Atlantic will favor high pressure ridges across the north, meaning "weak storminess" for the winter, Douglas told the Capital Press.

"Especially for you guys in the Pacific Northwest, it's not scary," he said.

Uncertainty in NOAA and European forecasts continues to shift beween El Nino, which means warmer winters for the Pacific Northwest, and La Nina, which means colder winters.

Douglas predicts a mild December and January, with a cold February. The weather will be dry at the beginning of winter and wet in February, in the form of snow.

"One of your biggest fears are arctic outbreaks, especially toward the end of winter that might freeze the wheat," he said. "This is the type of winter where I would be very cautious as to what might happen to winter wheat."

Art Douglas

Douglas says the year so far appears to be most like the years 2018, 2014 and 1959.

He predicts "major jumps," from a mild start to a cold finish, and from somewhat dry to much wetter. The cold in February will persist into March.

"You go from a cold March to a warm April back to a cold May," Douglas said.

In the spring, the Pacific Northwest will consistently trend toward slightly higher temperatures compared to the rest of the country.

"No concern in this forecast for you guys (for precipitation)," Douglas said. "Pretty darn normal in March, some spotty in April ... and then you get into May and the moisture tries to increase up into the wheat area. If you want moisture, you want it in May as it's really growing, starting to bloom and all that kind of good stuff."

The summer forecast so far resembles cool-and-wet summers from 2014 to 2019. The forecast could change if equatorial sea surface temperatures move to El Nino or La Nina, Douglas said.

"I don't see how an El Nino or La Nina could come between now and March," he said. "What might happen after that? I'm truly clueless. We've had too many El Nino years in a row starting in 2014. We've never had a really good La Nina over the past five years. Statistically, it's overdue."

La Nina "recharges" the system to develop an "impressive" El Nino, Douglas said. He doesn't think that's likely, but also doesn't expect an El Nino for next summer.

"We're neutral," he said. "The middle ground isn't real common. Most years sort themselves out as being El Nino or La Nina. The transition more often than not takes place over a very short period of time."

The current forecast could mean another hot, dry summer in the Western U.S., Douglas said.

"Another fire season is what that summer forecast is

Idaho joins battle between states over ESA

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

A coalition of 13 states, including Idaho, on Monday joined the defense of the Trump administration's revisions to the Endangered Species Act from an attack by 17 other states, including Oregon, Washington and California.

Idaho and like-minded states filed a motion to intervene in a lawsuit brought by the other states, the District of Columbia and the city of New York. The suit seeks to toss out Trump's ESA rules.

If the suit prevails, rural Idaho residents will lose, according to Scott Pugard, administrator of the governor's office of species conservation.

"Because over 60% of Idaho's land is federally managed, regulations that affect federal land use decisions have a profound impact on Idaho's economy, custom, culture and way of life," Pugard said in a court document.

The lawsuit is pending in the U.S. District Court for Northern California. If the presiding Judge Jon Tigar allows Idaho and its partners to intervene, a majority of states will be involved in the case.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Idaho and 12 other states are defending the Trump administration's revisions to the Endangered Species Act against a lawsuit filed by 17 other states. Idaho cites the preservation of the greater sage grouse as an example of states working with federal agencies to conserve species.

The 17 states suing to repeal the Trump revisions are represented by Democratic attorneys general. The 13 states defending the changes have Republican attorneys general.

The states led by Democrats argue that the Trump administration has weakened the ESA, and a weaker federal law will undermine their efforts to conserve species.

The states led by Republicans say the Trump administration has enhanced species survival by reigning in the Obama administration's overreach on designating critical habitat.

The Trump rules will allow states and landowners a chance to collaborate and be creative in protecting species, according to the state.

In one revision, threatened species will no longer automatically receive the same blanket protection as endangered species. Instead, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will write recovery plans tailored for each new threatened species.

The rule, according to the motion to intervene, will give "more room for states to take the lead in protecting threatened species in ways that protect landowners' rights to make reasonable use of their property."

Idaho has a history of working with federal agencies to protect species, such as the greater sage grouse, according to Pugard.

Tigar is also presiding over two lawsuits filed by environmental groups over the ESA changes.

According to the Justice Department, all of the lawsuits should be dismissed because the states and groups haven't been harmed.

The revisions won't apply to decisions already made by federal agencies, so it's just speculation that the changes will undermine species protection, according to the Justice Department.

A hearing on the issue is set for next year.

OSU names new dean for College of Forestry

Thomas DeLuca will begin on June 30

By GEORGE PLAVEN
Capital Press

CORVALLIS, Ore. — Oregon State University has named a new dean for the College of Forestry.

Thomas DeLuca, who currently is dean of the University of Montana's College of Forestry and Conservation, will make the move to Corvallis beginning June 30. DeLuca replaces Anthony S. Davis, who has been acting dean since January 2018.

In an announcement Monday, Ed Feser, OSU provost and executive vice president, said DeLuca is "a highly accomplished researcher and leader who understands Oregon State's commitment to building and enhancing healthy communities, economies and ecosystems.

"His national and international experience in working collaboratively with other universities, a range of forestry professionals and an array of stakeholders will help advance the great success and contributions occurring within Oregon State's College of Forestry," Feser said.

At OSU, DeLuca will oversee a college with six undergraduate programs, four graduate programs and more than 1,200 students. He has spent the last three years as dean of the forestry college at the University of Montana, with six undergraduate programs, nine graduate programs and 900 students.

DeLuca is also director of the Montana Forest and Conservation Experiment Station, and a member of the governor's Montana Forest Action Council.

"I wasn't looking at any other options or moves, but this is the sort of opportunity that occurs once in a lifetime," DeLuca said. "I feel strongly that this is a unique position at a time in which forestry has the potential to take a front seat in both conservation and commerce."

Tom Deluca

DeLuca holds a bachelor's degree from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and master's degree from Montana State University, both in soil science. He earned a doctorate in soil science and biochemistry from Iowa State University in 1993.

DeLuca's career includes more than a decade overseas in Sweden and the United Kingdom. He has held research positions at the University of Montana, the Wilderness Society in Bozeman, Mont., Slippery Rock University in Slippery Rock, Pa., and five years as director and professor at the University of Washington School of Environmental and Forest Sciences.

The OSU College of Forestry recently celebrated the grand opening of the A.A. "Red" Emmerson Advanced Wood Products Laboratory in October, part of a new $79.5 million forest science complex that will also include the George W. Peavy Forest Science Center, slated to open next spring.

The 17,500-square-foot advanced wood products laboratory is dedicated to researching and testing mass timber products, such as cross-laminated timber, in commercial buildings. It is now home of the TallWood Design Institute, a partnership between OSU's College of Forestry and College of Engineering, and the University of Oregon's College of Design.

With DeLuca on board, Davis will return to his previous role as executive associate dean, which he held under former Dean Thomas Maness, who died in July 2018 following a lengthy illness.

"Dean Maness had a broad, inclusive and inspiring vision, and while the unique capacity of this individual will not be duplicated, there is much that he set in motion that I'm excited to help push to fruition," DeLuca said.

Munger Bros. settles with Labor Department for $3.5M

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

California-based Munger Bros., owners of a Western Washington blueberry farm, have agreed to a $3.5 million settlement with the U.S. Labor Department over allegations it poorly housed, unsafely transported and underpaid some 3,200 employees while also unlawfully preferring to hire foreign over U.S. workers.

Munger will pay a $1 million fine and $2.5 million in back wages, according to a judgment filed in the U.S. District Court for Eastern California.

The settlement prohibits the company from using H-2 workers for three years at its farm and blueberry packing plant, Crowne Cold Storage, in Delano, Calif., and Sarbanand Farms in Sumas, Wash.

Although part of the recent settlement, the suspension took effect last spring, according to court records.

In a court filing, the Labor Department accused Munger of providing housing to H-2A workers that was infested with bed bugs, had metal bars over windows, and inoperable toilets and smoke alarms. Workers were allegedly transported in vehicles with bald tires, according to the complaint.

"This case demonstrates our commitment to safeguard American jobs, level the playing field for law-abiding employers and protect workers from being paid less than they are legally owed," Cheryl M. Stanton, Labor Department wage and hour administrator, said in a statement Monday.

Munger admitted no wrongdoing.

"We have accepted the consent agreement. The Department of Labor has presented a novel theory that has been never used before, but our obligations to our employees, customers and the community motivated us to comply with the settlement," the company said in a statement.

The company declined to elaborate on what it meant by "novel theory."

In a separate court action, Sarbanand Farms faces a class-action lawsuit by some 600 foreign workers in federal court in Western Washington.

The suit alleges that about 70 workers were illegally fired in 2017 for staging a one-day walkout. They and other workers were intimidated into laboring while sick and pressured to pick an unrealistic amount of berries, the suit alleges.

CHRISTMAS & NEW YEAR's DEADLINES

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