

Meteorologist sees dry weather ahead

By **MATTHEW WEAVER**
Capital Press

Farmers will likely see dry conditions this spring and summer as La Nina returns, meteorologist Art Douglas says.

"Any time we get into a rebounding La Nina situation, it's really dangerous for the U.S. because it favors stronger drought development," said Douglas, professor emeritus of atmospheric sciences at Creighton University in Omaha, Neb.

Douglas spoke during the virtual Spokane Ag Show on Feb. 23.

"It never got as cold as what



Art Douglas

to have a lot of repercussions in terms of world weather and crop conditions in the United States."

La Nina and El Nino are complex weather patterns that result from variations in the Pacific Ocean's surface temperatures.

Douglas predicted gradually decreasing ocean surface tem-

peratures along the equator in the spring, summer and fall, and warm water pools in the northern Pacific and Atlantic oceans. That will produce drought and high pressure ridges across North America, he said.

He expected La Nina to "dominate" for the next eight to 12 months.

Douglas expected February to be the coldest month of the winter, with the cold persisting in March and gradual warming in April and May.

He expected occasional cold air throughout the Pacific Northwest during the spring, averaging nor-

mal temperatures but dry conditions, especially in western Washington and Oregon.

"Not a particularly good forecast for wheat in the Pacific Northwest," Douglas said.

Precipitation will be relatively scant in March and April, with rain along the coast in May.

High pressure ridges will keep much of the U.S. hot and dry through the summer. The Pacific Northwest will be slightly cooler than normal west of the Cascades, with the rest of the region's temperatures near to slightly above normal.

Dryness will extend through the

Rocky Mountains into the Plains and eastward into the central Corn Belt.

"So not an encouraging map for crop production in the United States," Douglas said.

He predicted a "super bummer" of a dry August from Texas to the Canadian border.

There will be "a lot of challenges as we go forward in this upcoming summer," Douglas said.

The western U.S. will be hot and dry in September, Douglas said.

Douglas said he expects 2021 to most resemble weather patterns in 2000, 2001 and 2020.

Washington farm groups skeptical about low-carbon fuels bonanza

By **DON JENKINS**
Capital Press

OLYMPIA — Washington House Democrats are again moving to adopt a low-carbon fuel standard, and farm groups continue to be among those pushing back.

The policy requires gasoline and diesel to have more alternative fuels such as ethanol and renewable diesel. Supporters say the mandate fights climate change and creates markets for farmers.

Northwest Agricultural Cooperative Council executive director Ben Buchholz said Tuesday that Midwest corn farmers or Brazilian sugarcane growers will benefit, while Washington farmers will pay more for fuel.

"Our increased fuel costs will be sent to the farmers in those areas," Buchholz told the House Transportation Committee.

California, Oregon and British Columbia have low-carbon fuel standards, intended to cut carbon emissions attributable to on-road vehicles.

The House has approved the policy in previous sessions, but not the Senate. For Senate Democrats, the standard's drawback has been that it may push up pump prices, but no money flows to the state.

Renewable fuel makers and the suppliers of their raw material would profit. Bill supporters say embracing a low-carbon fuel standard will lead to more alternative fuels being produced in Washington.

Food Northwest lobbyist Dan Coyne told the com-

mittee that the state's record suggests otherwise.

"While farmers in Iowa, Brazil or Canada may receive financial benefits, Washington farmers are almost entirely bypassed because Washington state cannot get out of its own way to efficiently permit new renewable fuel facilities," he said.

Most recently, Phillips 66 and Renewable Energy Group canceled plans a year ago to build in northwest Washington what they said would be the largest renewable diesel refinery on the West Coast.

The companies planned to refine soy oil, used cooking oil, animal fats, canola oil and inedible corn oil at a new plant next to the Phillips oil refinery near Ferndale.

The low-carbon fuel would be like taking 450,000 passenger cars off the road, the companies said.

Citing delays in getting permits, the companies dropped the project five days after the Department of Ecology and Whatcom County announced the refinery would likely have significant adverse environmental consequences.

Ecology said the project would be subjected to a lengthy study. The department said it was concerned about ship traffic, wetlands and greenhouse gas emissions.

Rep. Joe Fitzgibbon, D-Burien, who has repeatedly introduced the low-carbon fuel standard, said he agreed that "it is too difficult to site clean energy facilities in Washington state now."

Fitzgibbon, chairman of

the House Environment and Energy Committee, said lawmakers should streamline permits and pass the low-carbon fuel standard, contained this year in House Bill 1091.

"Climate change is not waiting for us," he said. "We need to move more quickly than we have."

HB 1091 exempts from the low-carbon standard fuel used on farms, as well as in aircraft, vessels, trains and equipment to move logs in the woods.

Farm groups say it would increase the cost of moving products and equipment on highways. Dozens of log truck drivers came to Olympia last year to testify against the bill. This year, the Capitol Campus is closed because of the pandemic.

On-road consumption of gasoline and diesel accounts for about 30% of the state's greenhouse gas emissions, according to Ecology.

The bill would require the "carbon intensity" of transportation fuels to be 10% less by 2028 and 20% by 2036.

To determine a fuel's carbon intensity, Ecology would assess the volume of greenhouse gases emitted as the fuel was produced, transported and used.

The policy's long-term effect on greenhouse gas emissions and pump prices is speculative.

The U.S. Department of Energy in October reported that renewable diesel in California cost \$3.06 a gallon, compared to \$3.30 a gallon for diesel.

Washington lawmakers also are considering raising the gas tax and implementing new carbon taxes.



Sierra Dawn McClain/Capital Press

An Oregon farmer is seeking \$2 million for alleged herbicide drift that damaged his blueberry bushes.

Oregon berry farmer seeks \$2 million for herbicide drift

By **MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI**
Capital Press

An Oregon blueberry grower is seeking \$2 million in damages from alleged herbicide drift from a neighboring property owned by a major California-based agriculture company.

William Vandehey of Cornelius, Ore., has filed a lawsuit claiming that an employee of Munger Bros. of Delano, Calif., sprayed glyphosate on an adjacent field during sustained winds of up to 20 mph in May 2020.

Drift from the spray operation caused "severe and long lasting damage" to Vandehey's blueberry bushes, which lost at least half their crop during last year's growing season, the

complaint said.

Vandehey alleges that a representative of Munger Bros. admitted to using glyphosate to an investigator from the Oregon Department of Agriculture but "misrepresented and falsified" the spray operation's "extent and duration" to cover up the damage.

Apart from the direct crop losses suffered last year, the herbicide damage is expected to reduce Vandehey's blueberry yields for 3 to 6 years, the complaint said.

The complaint accuses Munger Bros. of trespass and negligence that caused nearly \$1 million in lost profits, income and other financial damages.

To make up for decreased revenues, Vandehey may have to sell property and farm equipment,

according to the lawsuit. "In the event that plaintiff is unable to secure financing to continue caring for and farming the damaged blueberry bushes, plaintiff reserves the right to plead its damages for a total loss of the family farm."

Vandehey is also seeking \$1 million in punitive damages because Munger Bros. acted with "malice and a reckless and outrageous indifference" by allegedly misting his elderly parents with the herbicide and trying to cover up the incident.

Capital Press was unable to reach a representative of Munger Bros. for comment on the lawsuit. The company is a fruit processor and packer in addition to growing crops on more than 3,000 acres in the U.S., Canada and Mexico.

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