

Snowpack at 11 percent, tough for farmers, fish

By JEFF BARNARD
Associated Press

GRANTS PASS — Snowpack in the mountains of Oregon is low for the second year in a row, prompting predictions of reduced stream flows that could hurt farmers and fish.

After a winter with more rain than snow at lower elevations, the May report from the Natural Resources Conservation Service put Oregon's snowpack at 11 percent of average statewide. Officials reported finding bare dirt at all but a few measurement spots.

The conditions promise less irrigation water for farmers and stream flows that make it difficult for salmon and steelhead to migrate to the ocean and return to spawning grounds.

Hydrologist Julie Koeberle said the snowpack has not been as low since 1992, when it was 13 percent of average. Prospects for rain during the normally dry summer season are uncertain, she added.

Last year, Oregon saw far deeper snowpacks, ranging from 120 percent of normal in the northeastern corner of the state, to 18 percent in the Klamath Basin, with about half of average in the central part of the state.

Oregon does not export water to other drought-stricken states in the West,



Jamie Lusch/ Mail Tribune via AP

This undated photo shows a steelhead caught in the Rogue River near Central Point. With Oregon's snowpack at a tiny fraction of normal, streamflows are projected to be low this summer.

but the Klamath River does flow from Oregon through Northern California before reaching the Pacific Ocean.

If the Southern Pacific Ocean warming condition known as El Nino persists into next winter, it could mean another dry winter in the Northwest.

Around the state, snowpack ranged from zero in the Klamath Basin to 16 percent in northeastern Oregon. Major federal reservoirs were about half full in much of the Willamette Basin.

One bright spot was the Rogue River, Oregon's leading whitewater rafting spot, where flows were projected to be about 55 percent of average, — still high enough for rafting, thanks to a reservoir that filled.

"We are looking just fine," with reservoir releases projected to be about the same as last year, said Brad Niva, owner of Rogue Wilderness Adventures in Merlin.

Oregon's other major whitewater river, the Deschutes, is projected at 71 percent of average flows.

The primary reservoir serving the Klamath Reclamation Project, a federal irrigation program that includes about 275 square miles of farms straddling the Oregon-California border, was nearly full, but that amounts to only enough water to meet Endangered Species Act mandates for sucker fish in the reservoir and coho salmon in the Klamath River, said Greg Addington, director of the Klamath Water Users Association.

DROUGHT: 'I've noticed the wheat crop looks pretty stressed'

Continued from 1A

Meanwhile, dryland wheat farmers are suffering a lack of rain to produce a solid yield on this year's crop. The National Weather Service reports precipitation in Heppner has been below normal every month since January, and is down 1.93 inches overall for the calendar year. That's already 15 percent of the area's average annual rainfall.

County Commissioner Don Russell said he drives from Boardman to Heppner about five times every month, and he can see a difference in this year's wheat stands.

"I've noticed the wheat crop looks pretty stressed," Russell said. "It's shorter than normal, and not as green as it should be."

Several farmers talked to the county court about pursuing a drought declaration, Russell said, to help them through a potentially difficult year. If approved, the declaration could allow the Oregon Water Resources Department to issue temporary water rights and transfers where necessary.

The OWRD has said drought is "unavoidable" in the John Day River basin and likely in the Umatilla basin, given this year's extreme lack of snow in the mountains to recharge streams.

As of May 5, the U.S. Drought Monitor has all of Umatilla, Morrow, Union, Gilliam and Sherman counties listed in severe drought. Umatilla and Morrow counties already qualify for

federal drought assistance since they are contiguous with Grant County, where the Department of Agriculture has identified disaster conditions.

"Morrow County is no exception to our neighbors. We're very dry," Russell said. "Unless we get some very late rain, it's going to be a very dry summer and dry fall."

The Drought Council and Water Availability Committee will make its recommendations following review Thursday. The governor has the final say in whether to declare a local drought emergency.

Contact George Plaven at gplaven@eastoregonian.com or 541-564-4547.



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Substitute teacher Diana Howland checks the progress of seventh-grader Jeremiah Brandon during an art class Friday at Sunridge Middle School in Pendleton. Howland also works as a teaching assistant for the school district.

SUBSTITUTES: Oregon schools offer one of the most competitive pay rates in Northwest

Continued from 1A

in Sunridge's learning lab/ in-school detention, she is often asked to switch to a substitute teacher role.

"People come up to me and ask, 'Who are you today?'" Howland said with a laugh.

The Oregon Teaching Standards and Practices Commission, the state agency that certifies teachers and substitutes, requires short-term substitutes to have at least a four-year degree.

If a substitute wants to teach a class beyond 10 days, they need a regular teaching license. Unsurprisingly, there aren't many eligible candidates who don't already have a full-time teaching job.

Tricia Mooney, the Pendleton School District's assistant superintendent, said the pool is culled further when the district is looking for substitutes for special education classes or dual credit courses, which require special license endorsements.

Naturally, many districts turn to retired teachers like Talbot because they already meet state requirements and are familiar with local schools.

But that isn't always a viable option either.

Donna Thomas, the Hermiston School District human resources manager, said many retired teachers choose to enjoy their retirement and not be part of the sub pool.

Although substitute teachers earn less than their full-time counterparts, pay isn't considered the biggest barrier to recruiting substitute teachers by many administrators.

In accordance with Oregon state statute, a short-term substitute teacher can't be paid less per day than 85 percent of the salary of a first-year teacher who holds a bachelor's degree.

For the 2014-2015 school year, that's roughly \$172 per day. Subs who work beyond 10 days earn \$202 per day.

Even though other states give counties and local school districts more control in setting sub rates, Oregon schools offer one of the most competitive rates in the Northwest.

Short-term substitutes in Walla Walla earn \$109 per day while Spokane Public Schools has a daily rate of \$117.

The rates are even more paltry in Idaho — the Boise Independent School District offers an \$80 daily rate while the Twin Falls school system substitute teaching rate starts at \$53 per day.

Area administrators offered different theories for the lack of substitutes.

Thomas said the rural nature of Umatilla County meant school districts are all competing for the same subs, not only from within the county but also from Morrow County and Washington state.

Darrick Cope, the Helix

School District superintendent, said the sub shortage could be due to the negative stigma of substitute teaching — an unfamiliar employee trying in vain to control an unruly class.

Help could be on the way in the form of changes to the Teaching Standards and Practices Commission changing some of their sub requirements. The commission recently lifted a rule that capped the number of days a substitute without a teaching license could teach in a district at 60.

Gary Humphries, a Sunridge teacher and a commission member, said the commission is considering additional measures that could expand the sub pool.

In some ways, a shrinking pool has been a positive sign for local school districts.

At the height of the recession, Mooney said the sub pool was much larger when her district laid off teachers.

While Pendleton has since hired back many of those teachers and added new teaching positions as the economy improved, it also removed quality subs off of the district's list.

Even though the trend has led to less candidates for when teachers call out sick, Mooney said there's no true substitute for Pendleton quality faculty.

Contact Antonio Sierra at asierra@eastoregonian.com or 541-966-0836.

HONORING
OUR NATION'S
HEROES
ON MEMORIAL DAY

John
Smith

07/08/72
05/02/12

You will forever be in
our hearts.

Mom & Dad

Remember your
loved one by placing a
Memorial ad for them.

Only \$25

Runs Saturday, May 23rd

in the

EAST OREGONIAN

Hermiston Herald

Please have your info in by Friday, May 15th

Name of Deceased: _____

Date of Birth: _____

Date of Passing: _____

Message: (please limit to 20 words including "from")

Your Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone Number: _____

Fill out this form and submit it along with a picture to:
Paula Smootz at 211 SE Byers Ave., Pendleton, OR 97801
or email psmootz@eastoregonian.com • 541-278-2678

FREE

Health Fair
Blood Draw

FREE

WED, MAY 20TH & THURS, MAY 21ST

6:30AM - 9:30AM • Rm. #3 & #4

Health Fair Panel: Complete - FREE

PSA Prostate Screening (Men Only) - FREE

"Fasting from midnight required for accurate results"

CHI St. Anthony Hospital

2801 St. Anthony Way, Pendleton, OR 97801 • 541-966-0528

You are invited to our
Groundbreaking Ceremony!

The public is welcome and invited
to attend this community event.

Tuscan

Ranch

Guardian Angel Homes is excited to announce the ground-
breaking of their new Memory Care Homes, specializing in
the care of individuals with Alzheimer's or Dementia.

For more information
about Guardian Angel
Homes or to learn more
about reservations or
educational opportunities,
call Jennifer Baus
at (541) 668-6247.

W. ELM AVE
W. LINDA AVE
12TH ST
W. HARTLEY AVE

GOOD
SHEPHERD
MEDICAL
CENTER

GUARDIAN
Angel
Homes

Hermiston