



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian File

Irrigation equipment sits silhouetted against the setting sun near Holdman on Wednesday, Nov. 18, 2020.

Drought:

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and Eugene. South of the line will be dealing with drought conditions this summer. North of the line got some much needed precipitation that helped build the snow pack.

That bodes well for the Umatilla, Walla Walla and Willow subbasins, the main areas where Umatilla County farmers draw their water to grow crops like wheat, potatoes, onions and watermelons.

Oviatt said the snowpacks in Umatilla County are above average this year, aided by the late season snow storm in February. But irrigators and other observers must remain vigilant because a warm rain event or an extended period of unseasonably warm weather could change the outlook.

Eastern Oregon's increasingly erratic weather patterns and the region's finite supply of groundwater inspired the formation of the Northeast Oregon Water Association and its mission to help irrigators access water from the Columbia River.

J.R. Cook, NOWA's executive director, said 2021 will be the first full-year the organization has had two of its irrigation projects in operation. As a result, Cook said the farmers that participate in the projects will have access to a new source of water that is equivalent to the amount of water stored in the McKay Reservoir.

Despite the advances NOWA has made, Cook said there's still more work to do to keep agriculture sustainable in the region.

"It's a shot in the arm but it's not a silver

bullet," he said.

Among the projects NOWA is still working on is building new water storage that will collect water during the high-running years to insulate farmers from the lean ones.

Abundant February precipitation improved water outlook in John Day Basin

Grant County streamflow forecasts improved significantly from February to March but declined somewhat by April 1 due to the dry March, according to the U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service's Water Supply Outlook Report released April 1.

Strawberry Creek near Prairie City is expected to be at 85% of average streamflow from April through September. The Middle Fork John Day River at Ritter and the North Fork John Day River at Monument are forecast at 98% of average.

Also in the basin, Camas Creek near Ukiah is expected to be at 138%, while Mountain Creek near Mitchell is expected to be at 65%.

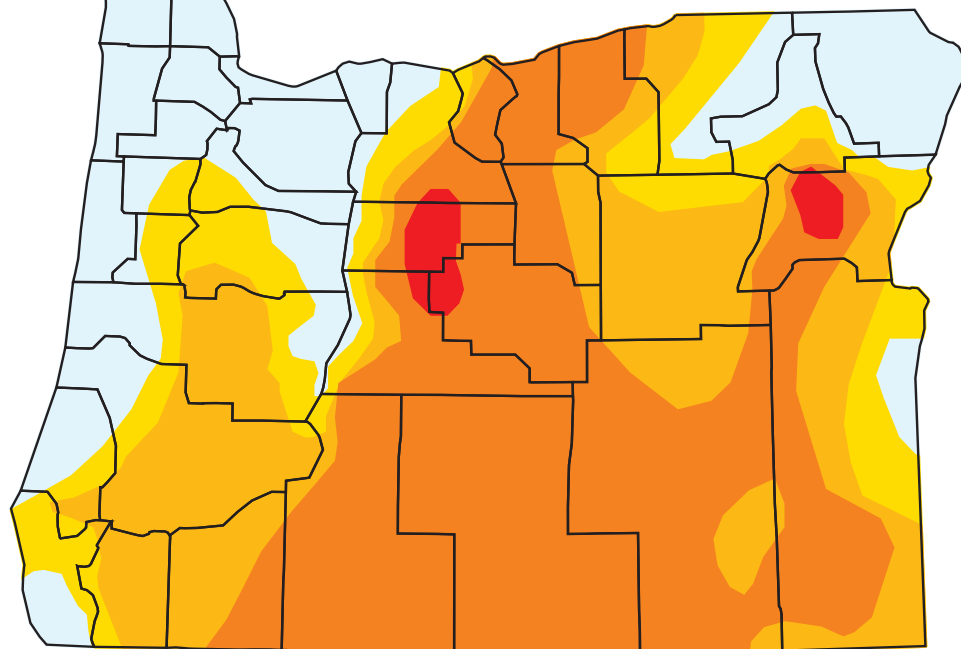
Precipitation was 178% of average in the John Day Basin in February but just 44% of average in March, bringing precipitation for the water year, which starts Oct. 1, to 90% of average as of April 1.

Except for November, with close to 120% of average, precipitation during the other months this water year have been well below average with October and December below 60% and January just over 80%.

Snowpack in the John Day Basin was 121% of normal April 1, a small drop from 127% at the start of March but remaining above the 92% at the start of February.

U.S. Drought Monitor

OREGON



RELEASED THURSDAY, APRIL 1, 2021

DROUGHT CONDITIONS PERCENT AREA	None	D0-D4	D1-D4	D2-D4	D3-D4	D4
CURRENT	21.14	78.86	66.01	41.25	12.55	0.00
LAST WEEK	21.09	78.91	66.01	41.25	12.55	0.00
3 MONTHS AGO	8.57	91.43	83.53	68.71	27.74	0.00
START OF CALENDAR YEAR 12/29/2020	8.57	91.43	83.53	68.71	27.74	0.00
Start of Water Year 9/29/2020	6.50	93.50	84.77	65.53	33.59	0.00
One Year Ago 3/31/2020	15.43	84.57	56.84	13.23	0.00	0.00

INTENSITY

None	D2 Severe Drought
D0 Abnormally Dry	D3 Extreme Drought
D1 Moderate Drought	D4 Exceptional Drought

The Drought Monitor focuses on broad-scale conditions. Local conditions may vary. For more information on the Drought Monitor, go to <https://droughtmonitor.unl.edu/about.aspx>.

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