

Drought persists in most of Pacific Northwest

By GEORGE PLAVEN
Capital Press

SALEM — Nearly three-quarters of the Pacific Northwest remains locked in drought, climate experts from Oregon, Washington and Idaho say.

In the driest areas of southern and central Oregon, irrigators face another year of water shortages, and fire districts are predicting above-normal risk for wildfires as early as May.

Britt Parker, regional drought information coordinator for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, said 74% of the Northwest is currently in drought. Approximately 18% is in “extreme” or “exceptional” drought, the two driest categories.

“This reflects long-term precipitation deficits for much of the interior Northwest,”

Parker said.

It would take 150-200% above normal precipitation over the next two months to end drought conditions in the most severely impacted areas, according to NOAA. Nick Bond, Washington state climatologist, said the odds of that happening are extremely low.

Bond said the region was expected to benefit from La Nina, which typically portends cooler and wetter weather during the winter.

However, a ridge of high pressure that normally parks itself over the north-central Pacific Ocean was instead closer to the West Coast, deflecting storms and pushing them north.

“That basically dried us out for that period of January and February that we’re complaining about,” Bond said.

Even with the recent atmospheric river that brought heavy

rainfall to northwest Oregon and Washington, precipitation did not fall where it was needed most, farther south and east.

Looking ahead, Bond said more of the same can be expected from March through May.

“For Central Oregon and Southern Idaho, the forecasts are not nearly as encouraging,” he said, adding that Mother Nature “is not always fair.”

Bond did highlight one silver lining: There is no indication this spring will be as warm as it was in 2021. Cooler weather means mountain snowpack is liable to stick longer, melting more gradually to replenish streams and rivers longer into the summer.

“That’s something we’re certainly going to be keeping an eye on,” he said.

Oregon

Larry O’Neill, Oregon state climatologist, said drought has

been building over the last two years with the impacts worsening each summer.

For the last two water years — from October 2019 through September 2021 — Oregon has experienced its third-driest period dating back to 1895. Eight counties received their lowest total precipitation on record, including Sherman, Wheeler, Jefferson, Crook, Wasco, Deschutes, Klamath and Jackson counties.

About half of all streamflow gauges in Oregon managed by the U.S. Geological Survey were recording below-normal flows over the last 45 days, O’Neill said. Of those, 10% recorded record low streamflows for this time of year.

Most reservoirs are also averaging 10-30% lower storage than they were at the same time last year, foretelling another lean year for farms and fish.

“We are coming into some tough times here in Oregon,” O’Neill said. “Not only are water supply issues going to become more acute, but we’re starting to grow concerned about the general dryness of the landscape and what it means for wildfire risk.”

Eric Wise, meteorologist for the Northwest Interagency Coordination Center, said conditions “certainly have the potential for a very active (fire) season” in Central and Southern Oregon.

Idaho

David Hoekema, hydrologist for the Idaho Department of Water Resources, said drought conditions in that state vary from north to south.

Southern Idaho is “definitely heading in the direction of drought,” Hoekema said, while northern Idaho “is doing a little better at this point.”

Last year, southern Idaho had the driest spring since 1924, leaving reservoirs much lower than normal.

Washington

Of the three states, Washington appears to be in the best position to withstand drought in 2022.

Karin Bumbaco, assistant state climatologist, said overall snowpack, precipitation and reservoir storage in Washington is faring better than Oregon and southern Idaho.

“Perhaps we’re the winners this year in terms of drought,” Bumbaco said.

Water supplies in western Washington will likely be in good shape, save for parts of the Olympic Peninsula and Dungeness Valley, which have had low summer streamflows due to lower snowpack the last few years.



Dean Guernsey/The Bulletin

Bend residents rally in support of peace in Ukraine in downtown Bend on Tuesday, March 1.

Bend crowd rallies for peace in Ukraine

By ZACK DEMARS
The Bulletin

BEND — Zenia Kuzma didn’t know if anyone would appreciate the blue and yellow ribbons she hung in Drake Park last week, but she felt she had to find a way to show support for the people of Ukraine, who were facing an unprecedented struggle halfway around the world.

“I was feeling very, very lonely,” Kuzma, 65, told The Bulletin on Tuesday, March 1. “It’s really about freedom.”

But that feeling changed Tuesday, when between 75 and 100 people joined in downtown Bend for a rally in support of the besieged country, draped in the yellow and blue of Ukraine’s flag and following hundreds of thousands across the world who’ve protested the invasion since it began last week.

Among those speaking was Kuzma, who was born in the U.S. but whose parents came to the country from Ukraine. She carried a sheaf of wheat to sym-

bolize Ukraine’s significance as the “breadbasket of Europe,” producing over a tenth of the world’s wheat. She told the crowd she was glad her parents weren’t alive to see the destruction Ukraine was facing, but that she was grateful to see the group showing its support.

“I’m so glad that there’s support here,” she told the crowd. “I really, really want to thank you.”

Those gathered, organized by the Vocal Seniority, a social justice group in Bend, waved yellow and blue signs at passing cars, many of which honked back in support. Some of the signs had supportive messages calling for “Glory to Ukraine,” others with insults directed at Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Roby Basman held a hand-drawn sign that read “Verdedig Oekraïne,” Dutch for “defend Ukraine.”

The 21-year-old Basman, one of the rally’s youngest attendees, was visiting family in Bend from her home in

Deventer, Netherlands. Fearful of the conflict in Ukraine, she joined the rally even while far from home.

“Everybody in Europe is kind of worried, because it’s right on the doorstep,” Basman told The Bulletin. “Obviously I just hope that (Putin) doesn’t start a world war or something, and it doesn’t get any further than this, because he’s already damaged enough in my opinion.”

Bend resident Doug Watson, 75, waved a sign that read “Putin is a war criminal” at cars passing on Wall Street. He said he worried about how Putin’s invasion could escalate to even more conflict.

“For us to just turn the other cheek and just let it happen, that’s not necessarily going to be a solution,” Watson said. “It’s really a matter of an autocrat getting away with doing what he thinks he can get away with. And if the world gets together, I think we can make it very painful for him.”

Watching the war from afar

By ZACK DEMARS
The Bulletin

BEND — Ukrainian flags are hard to come by in Bend. But they’re easy enough to make — a rectangle of yellow and a rectangle of blue will do.

While Olga Almond would rather travel to Ukraine to be closer to her family and volunteer to help, flight restrictions render that impossible. Finding the right fabric and stitching it together to hang outside her Sunriver house was one of the simplest ways Almond could find to support her home country from 6,000 miles away.

Almond said this simple gesture has been meaningful to the friends and family she keeps in touch with, sending photos back and forth as they shelter in metro stations, basements and other bomb shelters across Ukraine.

“They tell me, ‘Thank you so much because it makes us encouraged,’” Almond said, “because we know all (the) world today thinks about our situation.”

Almond and others in Central Oregon with ties to Ukraine are watching with fear, anger and nervous anticipation for loved ones in the country as Russian military forces continue the invasion of the country launched last week.

Almond moved from Dnipro, a central Ukrainian city of just under a million residents, to Oregon in 2008. But her two daughters, 45 and 39, and two grandchildren, 22 and 3, are still in the country.

“This is hard for me,” Almond said. “I cry every day.”

Messages from her older daughter have been few and far between. Almond last heard that she was safe and planned to stay in the country, as her 22-year-old grandson can’t leave under restrictions in place, which prevent men of fighting-age from evacuating in case they’re needed to join the battle.

Almond’s younger daughter, however, hopes to leave the country through Poland.

Once there, the family is hopeful her application for U.S. permanent residence — an application that’s been pending for nine years — will help her get to the U.S.

“I think there’s a good chance if she can get to Poland that we’ll be able to get her and the grandson here,” said Tom Almond, Olga’s husband.

But in the interim, the family waits and prays. Olga Almond’s phone buzzes frequently, with updates coming from family in Dnipro, friends in Kyiv and others sharing information through the messaging app Telegram.



Dean Guernsey/The Bulletin

Olga Almond, shown at her Sunriver home in front of a Ukrainian flag that she made, holds a photo of her daughter, Sasha Molodchy, and grandson, Temur Molodchy, who live in Dnipro, Ukraine.

“I try (to) prepare myself for (a) really bad thing,” Olga Almond said, pausing as she stifled back tears. “Like all (women are) feeling about their kids.”

Bend resident Olesya Deuchar is also nervously waiting for messages from family and friends in the region.

Deuchar lived in Russia, but frequently traveled to and went to college in Ukraine, where her mother was born. Her mother was in the country, picking up some visa documents to come to the U.S. when war broke out last week.

“Basically feeling helpless and worried about my family,” Deuchar said.

“I can only imagine what they feel. I’m angry and helpless basically, at the whole situation.”

Deuchar fears for her mother’s safety. So far, she’s been able to remain in contact with loved ones in Ukraine. A cousin was able to bring his family to the country’s western side before returning to Kyiv to fight the invasion. A friend from college was able to get west to somewhere safer, too — though “there are no safe zones now,” she said.

But alongside the fear and frustration, Deuchar has felt anger.

“I’m angry that, in this century, with all the advanced technologies, people are still animals,” Deuchar said of the invasion.

For Almond and Deuchar, the Ukrainian resistance against the invasion — a stronger resistance than the Russian military seems to have anticipated, analysts have observed — is a reason for some measure of optimism.

“I’m optimistic,” Deuchar said.

“I know that they do not give up; everybody’s determined to fight to the end. That’s not just the soldiers, that’s regular people.”

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