

Report: Drought Intensifies In Plains States

BY JIM SUHR
Associated Press

ST. LOUIS — Extreme drought conditions have spread in several Plains states, but recent rainfall has slightly reduced the overall area of the lower 48 states experiencing some form of drought, according to the latest U.S. drought map.

Nearly two-thirds of the lower 48 states is experiencing some drought, although recent storms pushed the percentage down to 62.91, from last week's 63.86, according to the U.S. Drought Monitor map posted Thursday on its website.

The survey, based on conditions as of Tuesday morning, found that the area experiencing extreme drought — the second highest classification behind exceptional drought — rose nearly 2 percentage points from the previous week, to 22.3 percent. This was due largely to a worsening of conditions in parts of Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska and Oklahoma.

The area facing exceptional drought also increased, from 2.38 percent to about 3 percent.

Some areas benefited slightly from rains that "will settle the dust" but still won't be sufficient to salvage parched crops, National Drought Mitigation Center climatologist Brian Fuchs said by phone from the University of Nebraska in Lincoln, where the weekly drought report is released.

"There are rain events that did take place, but we didn't see any widespread improvement to the core drought areas," Fuchs said. Such precipitation "prob-

bly held off the intensification for a week or so. But the heat is going kick back in, and we're going to be in the same situation.

"The heat kicks in and the dryness returns. To say that we've seen good widespread rain throughout the drought regions of the county, we just haven't. It's beneficial in some aspects, but in agricultural aspects it's too late."

On Wednesday, the U.S. Agriculture Department added 218 counties from 12 drought-stricken states to its list of natural disaster areas, bringing the overall total to 1,584 counties in 32 states. That's more than half

of all U.S. counties, and the vast majority of them received the designation because of drought that's considered the worst in decades in many prime farming areas.

The USDA uses the weekly Drought Monitor to help decide which counties to deem disaster areas, with the distinction making farmers and ranchers eligible for federal aid that includes low-interest emergency loans.

As of this week, nearly half of the nation's corn crop was rated poor to very poor, according to the USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service. About 37 per-

cent of the U.S. soybeans were lumped into that category, while nearly three-quarters of U.S. cattle acreage is in drought-affected areas, the survey showed.

The potential financial fallout in the nation's midsection appears to be intensifying. The latest weekly Mid-America Business Conditions Index, released Wednesday, showed that the on-going drought and global economic turmoil is hurting business in nine Midwest and Plains states, boosting worries about the prospect of another recession, according to the report.

Drought Worsens In Southeast South Dakota

BROOKINGS (AP) — Drought conditions have eased somewhat in northeastern South Dakota, but the situation has worsened in some counties in the southeastern part of the state.

Laura Edwards of the South Dakota State University Extension Service says this week's drought report reflects recent rainfall and improving crop conditions in the northeastern corner of the state. But she says conditions degraded in Minnehaha, Lincoln and Union counties in the southeast.

According to the latest U.S. Drought Monitor report, about 88 percent of South Dakota is at some level of drought, with the rest of the state rated abnormally dry.

Sioux Falls Events Center Name Announced

SIoux FALLS (AP) — The name of the new Sioux Falls events center has been unveiled.

Sioux Falls Mayor Mike Huether announced during a Thursday afternoon news conference that the \$115 million events center will be called the T. Denny Sanford Premier Center.

Sanford Health, First Premier Bank and Premier Bankcard have secured the naming rights for the next 25 years as part of a \$20.75 million deal.

Neb. Will Open Trade Office In Shanghai

BY GRANT SCHULTE
Associated Press

LINCOLN, Neb. — Nebraska Gov. Dave Heineman signed an agreement Thursday to open a trade office in China's largest city, saying the \$50,000-a-year investment would help promote the state to Chinese businesses.

The new office in Shanghai will push to grow new business relationships between Nebraska and China, the world's second-largest economy behind the United States and a major consumer of Midwestern corn, soybeans and other produce. The agreement with the Shanghai Small to Medium Enterprises Center for International Cooperation, a quasi-governmental Chinese group with more than 300,000 members focused on global trade and investment.

The center "has been friends with the state for many years," Heineman said in a conference call with reporters. "They've been an outstanding economic development partner since 2008, and they've assisted Nebraska with both of our reverse trade missions. The Small to Medium Enterprise Center will be our strategic partner as we grow trade and investment in China."

Nebraska has hosted two reverse trade missions since 2008, inviting business leaders from China and other nations to sample the state's food, energy and water-technology industries.

Nebraska Economic Development Director Catherine Lang said the state will spend \$50,000 annually to maintain the office in Shanghai, a city of more than 23 million. The office will operate for at least three years, so Nebraska officials can evaluate its success.

Heineman is in China this week on a trade mission with economic development officials and business leaders. Earlier in the week, he visited the cities of Beijing and Xi'an and entered Nebraska into a "sister state" relationship with the government of Shaanxi, a province with more than 37 million people.

Nebraska has had 29 international investments from 12 countries over the last four years. The investments totaled nearly \$4.2 billion and created more than 1,400 jobs in the state, according to the governor's office.

Nebraska also operates a trade office in Tokyo.

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