

A Parched Plague

Drought Still Lingers In Much Of Western United States

BY MICHAEL E. YOUNG

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DALLAS — With a lot of recent rain, lush lawns and green pastures manage to mask the Texas drought. Still, it retains its grip on the state and most of the western U.S., with nothing to indicate it will ease anytime soon.

"The thing about this rainfall is just the character of it," said Dr. Robert Mace, who heads water science and conservation at the Texas Water Development Board. "We aren't getting the big rainfalls with lots of runoff. We get a little bit of rain and then it's sunny, dry and windy."

The latest outlook, which runs through Oct. 31, says drought will persist or intensify across most of Texas, the Plains and Rocky Mountain states, all the way to California. More than 92 percent of Texas is in moderate drought or worse, with 67 percent in severe, extreme or exceptional drought.

The reservoirs tell the story, Mace said.

Statewide, reservoirs are at 63.9 percent of capacity, the lowest level for late July since 1990. That is 10 percent lower than a year ago and 20 percent below normal levels.

In parts of West Texas and the Panhandle, reservoirs measure in the single digits. Lake Abilene is about 9 percent full. E.V. Spence, in Coke County, is less than 6 percent of capacity. Electra City Lake, west of Wichita Falls, is empty, according to the water development board.

Several began their slow decline at the end of the last century, Mace said.

The situation is better around Dallas, where reservoirs average 79.5 percent full. Still, water levels are up to 40 percent lower than a year ago.

Texas has been in drought since 2011, the driest year on record, said John Nielsen-Gammon, the state climatologist and a professor at Texas A&M University.

"As far as persistent statewide droughts go, there have been maybe three periods that lasted this long — 1909 to 1912, 1962 to '66, and the drought of record in the 1950s," Nielsen-Gammon said. "So far we've been drier than any of those long-haul droughts other than the '50s."

The last year with above-average rainfall at Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport was 2009. From 2010 through 2012, total rainfall was almost 20 inches below normal



A plant peeks out of the cracked dirt at Lake Ray Hubbard in late July in Garland, Texas. The state of Texas has been in a drought since 2011, which was the driest year on record in the Lone Star State.

SARAH HOFFMAN/DALLAS MORNING NEWS/MCT

levels. This year has been no better, with rainfall about 4.5 inches below normal.

"And there hasn't been anything promising in either the Atlantic or Pacific" to indicate a change in the weather patterns, Nielsen-Gammon said.

In the world of long-range climatology, warm and cool shifts in certain areas of the oceans have emerged recently as major factors in rainfall and temperature thousands of miles away.

Persistent drought in the western U.S. has been linked to warmer than normal water temperatures in the northern Atlantic, and average or cooler temperatures in the eastern and northern Pacific.

El Nino and La Nina are part of the language of weather in the U.S. Now climatologists talk about the Atlantic Multidecadal Oscillation and the Pacific Decadal Oscillation as well, both recent discoveries.

"I hadn't really heard much about the PDO or the AMO until 2011," Mace said.

Looking back, though, he can see how this cool phase of the PDO began affecting West Texas reservoirs 15 years ago.

"The key word in Pacific Decadal Oscillation is 'decadal,' because it seems to last about 30 years, and we're 15 years into it," Mace said. "John Nielsen-Gammon has said this means we have a greater propensity for drought for the next 10 or 15 years."

Likewise, the AMO has been in a warm phase since the 1990s, a pattern linked to hot, dry weather in the southwestern U.S. And the eastern-central Pacific, home of El Nino and La Nina, was cooler than normal from mid-2010 through early 2012 and neutral since then, another factor in drought.

In North Texas, timely rains in spring and summer have boosted

farming and ranching, neither of which relies heavily on the region's water supply.

But lower reservoir levels "really affect our large population here in North Texas, especially when it comes to irrigating lawns and landscaping and gardens," said Rick Maxwell, Collin County's agricultural agent.

Norman Gidney, whose family has been farming and ranching for decades in Collin County, and now in Grayson and Fannin counties, said pastures are in great shape compared with previous years.

"Back in 2011, we were hauling water to seven different pastures," he said. "Right now we don't have to do that."

Still, there have been signs of continued drought, mostly in the swarms of grasshoppers devouring crops and grassland across much of the state, including North Texas. "We first started seeing these

grasshoppers when they were just little bitty devils, and when we started spraying our pastures for weeds, we put something in there for grasshoppers and that took care of a lot of them," Gidney said. "So we don't have near the problem that a lot of others have."

Dry summers can lead to a grasshopper explosion the following year, Maxwell said, especially if there's dry weather in spring when the young 'hoppers hatch. Dry weather inhibits a fungus that can kill grasshoppers.

"Most areas around here have normal populations," Maxwell said, "but there are certain areas where it's a lot worse. I was talking with one of our farmers a couple of weeks ago who said that on one of his cornfields, no problem, but at the other end of his property, the grasshoppers pretty well destroyed the crop."

Tour

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Company sold out last week, according to the bar's website. But never fear, you can catch the show on the last Saturday of the month at 8 p.m. on SDPR.

For its upcoming appearance, the show will include interviews with Bernie Hunhoff and Katie Hunhoff of *South Dakota Magazine* in Yankton. In addition, the Rock Garden Tour Family Band will probably perform an original song about tavern sandwiches.

The band Mrs. Begley and the Boys is also scheduled to appear during the evening.

Heeren, who has formed the Fresh Produce advertising agency in Sioux Falls, said the idea for the Rock Garden Tour emerged when he studied horticulture and journalism (which explains the "Flower Man" moniker) at South Dakota State University in Brookings.

"It's always been sort of a joke that you can tell people you are going to do both of those things, rock and roll and garden show, on the same program," he said. "The show, for me, is a combination of all the stuff I love. I love gardening and grew up on a farm. But I also came from a family with performers and music, so that's a real big deal."

Heeren grew up at Norway Center, located in the middle of Canton, Beresford and Alcester, and just up the road from Yankton.

"I love South Dakota, so the show is a combination of all the things (for which) I have a genuine interest and feeling," he said. "But you don't have to be a South Dakotan or rural to get (the jokes or music in) the show."

Ben Hanten, owner of Ben's Brewing Company, said he has known Heeren for years and has been a big fan of the show. "I have been to a live taping at the Latitude 44 bar in downtown Sioux Falls, and I have been after Ted to do a taping in the 'Mother City,'" Hanten said.

"Ted doesn't fit just one demographic. He reaches a wide range of people. It's funny — you catch yourself listening closely to his (parody) songs, and you have a hard time not laughing."

Bernie Hunhoff said he has known Heeren for years, and the show fits well with South Dakota's self-deprecating humor.

"South Dakota is different than other states. We're a modest lot and take things all in fun," Hunhoff said with a laugh.

Thursday's show, entitled "Kings, Capitals and Also-Rans," looks at Yankton's former role as the territorial capital before losing its claim to Pierre, Heeren said.

Along those same lines, Heeren will look at the pride shown in titles such as Gayville's "Hay Capital of the World" and neighboring Meckling's counter-claim as "Hay Capital of the Universe."

Every place in the state seems to have a festival or some claim to fame, Heeren said.

"Every small town in South

Dakota has something, and I think the more obscure, the better," he said, noting Gann Valley was recently recognized as the smallest county seat in the nation.

Heeren first's contact with Bernie Hunhoff came shortly after graduating from SDSU in 2000.

"My first job out of college was working at the radio station in Brookings, and every weekend I interviewed Bernie," Heeren said. "I was the board operator, and I enjoyed those conversations and enjoyed Bernie's stories. I call Bernie and Katie the fact-checkers from *South Dakota Magazine* (because of their knowledge of the state)."

Rock Garden Tour usually runs an hour, but the Yankton show will run between one and two hours, Heeren said.

We will have an intermission and some audience participation, so it will stretch it out a little bit," he said. "We will record this show and edit it down to an hour."

Heeren believes Rock Garden Tour fits the state and its people extremely well.

"I think South Dakotans are very comfortable in their own skin, with who we are and where we are. From that, maybe we have the confidence to jab a little bit at ourselves," he said.

"This is our kind of humor, intended to be for fun rather than offending people. We would never say that we're picking on someone. We grew up here and we have ownership of it. We celebrate the small curiosities about ourselves."

Heeren will bring his sidekick, "Oil Can" (Tom Hurlbert),

and a larger band than normal. He may also try out material outside of his normal repertoire, including things that could make it into his first television taping later this month in Sioux Falls.

"Our typical show is one or two musicians. My father-in-law, Jim Groth, plays guitar. We're looking at a bigger band at Yankton and playing a lot more songs than we typically would," he said.

"On any given show, we would play three or four songs, but at Yankton it will be more like seven or eight. We'll do a lot of songs and have a little bit more fun."

Rock Garden Tour is gaining in popularity, Heeren said.

"I get more and more feedback, but it's still an obscure thing. You never know what people think," he said. "More and more people are enjoying it, but it's like anything new. Your first reaction is that it's quirky. For me, I think as people get more comfortable with us and know more about where we are coming from, they enjoy it. It's always a pretty positive response, and they get a kick."

Hanten thinks Thursday's audience will enjoy a great time. "People attending the show should come in with an open mind and be ready to laugh and have a good time," he said.

For more information about the show, visit Facebook or online at www.rockgardentour.com.

You can follow Randy Dockendorf on Twitter at twitter.com/RDockendorf

Prisoners

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want to spend the money." The inmates' donations are strictly voluntary, said MDSP cultural activities coordinator Jim Halsey. The inmates select which, if any, programs they want to support throughout the year.

"We try to do two or three projects a year," he said. "The Mike Durfee staff makes recommendations of charities or organizations, and the overall pick lies with Warden (Bob) Dooley."

So far, inmates have also donated to the Wounded Warrior Project, the Cure Kids Cancer project, the Springfield Veterans Memorial, the Boys and Girls Club in Avon and the Got Your Six organization which helps veterans and their families.

The inmates' money for the food pantry comes at a critical time for Bon Homme County's needy families, said pantry manager Shirley Mann.

"We feed 40 to 45 families, and each family takes 45 to 50 items from the pantry each month," she said. "We haven't had a food drive since May, and we've been low on food. This (MDSP) donation will really help. We appreciate it so much."

Usage of the pantry has soared in recent months, Mann said.

"We used to have one or two or three families a week. Now, we have 15 to 18 families a week," she said. "We are finding that people who used to donate to the food pantry are now coming in and needing the help."

This time of year creates an additional financial hardship for many families, Mann said. During the summer, grocery bills rise because most children eat at home instead of receive meals through a school nutrition program, she said.

"It's getting worse, now that school is starting, be-

cause people are trying to use what money they have for school supplies, shoes and clothes," she said.

The MDSP inmates' recent donation isn't their first one to the Bon Homme County Food Pantry. In 2011, the inmates donated about \$550 to the pantry as one of their first projects.

Prison officials sought Mann's permission for the first fund drive, but this time they went ahead and designed the food pantry as the recipient of inmate funds. Jacobs and Mary Ann Kloucek, a Mike Durfee human resources specialist, then set up an appointment and presented Mann with the check.

A stunned and thankful Mann accepted the funds. She noted a portion of the money will go toward dish and laundry soap, which cannot be purchased with food stamps.

"Most of the people who come to the food pantry are already on food stamps," she said. "Each family can only come once a month (to the pantry), so we try to load them up with enough to get through the month."

Jacobs sees the inmates' donations as part of their rehabilitation process and connecting with the outside world they will soon re-enter. "Anytime they can be involved with something positive, it can only help their reintegration into society and reuniting with their families and communities," she said.

"Basically, they become productive citizens. We can't reiterate enough the opportunity for the inmates to give back to the community that they will return to some day."

For more information on the Bon Homme County Food Pantry, contact Mann at (605) 589-4590.

You can follow Randy Dockendorf on Twitter at twitter.com/RDockendorf

Agencies

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gauge market to the private sector. A centerpiece of that effort is his support for winding down Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac.

The White House has already lauded efforts to achieve that goal spearheaded by Republican Sen. Bob Corker of Tennessee and Democratic Sen.

Mark Warner of Virginia. While Obama will outline his own proposals on Tuesday, his plans are largely in line with the bipartisan Senate overhaul.

Officials said Obama will insist that the government only step in to pay out mortgage guarantees after private capital has been exhausted and that private capital bear the substantial majority of any losses. He will also call for Fannie and Freddie's investment portfolios to be wound down by at least 15 percent per year.

Obama advisers did not outline a specific timeframe for winding down Fannie and Freddie. The Corker-Warner legislation would shutter the operations within five years.

Fannie and Freddie were nationalized during the 2008 financial collapse and bailed out with \$187 billion in taxpayer-funded loans. The two enterprises don't directly make loans, but buy mortgages from lenders, package them as bonds, guarantee them against default and sell

them to investors.

Fannie and Freddie currently own or guarantee half of all U.S. mortgages and back nearly 90 percent of new ones.

Against the backdrop of Phoenix's reinvigorated housing market, Obama will also tout refinancing proposals that gained little traction on Capitol Hill when he first unveiled them last year. Among his proposals is a call for expanding refinancing eligibility for homeowners who do not have government-backed mortgages.