



Natural Resources Conservation Service
P.O. Box 2890
Washington, D.C. 20013

Weekly Report - Snowpack / Drought Monitor Update

Date: 26 July 2012

SNOTEL SNOWPACK AND PRECIPITATION SUMMARY

Temperature: [SNOTEL](#) and ACIS 7-day temperature anomaly showed values cooler over Washington and Oregon and warmer conditions over the Western High Plains (Fig. 1). ACIS [7-day](#) average temperature anomalies show the greatest positive temperature departures over southeastern Wyoming ($>+10^{\circ}\text{F}$) and the greatest negative departures over south central Oregon ($<-6^{\circ}\text{F}$). The cooler departures over parts of the Southwest reflect an ever increasing Southwest Monsoon flow (Fig. 1a).

Precipitation: [ACIS](#) 7-day average precipitation amounts for the period ending yesterday shows widely scattered thunderstorms dominating (Fig. 2). In terms of percent of normal, this is clearly reflected by the pattern of violet (wet) and red (dry) values across the West (Fig. 2a). Since the start of the [2012 Water-Year](#) that began on 1 October 2011, the seasonal moisture has continued to favor the Northern Tier States. Over much of the southern half of the West, drier conditions dominate. However, values are slowly increasing over parts of New Mexico in response to the Summer Monsoon (Fig. 2b). Since the start of [July](#), parts of the Cascades, Northernmost and Central Rockies, Upper Snake River Basin, and 4-Corner States have been much wetter than the long term average (Fig. 2c).



The Summer Monsoon has been [active in New Mexico](#) this week. – Photo by J. Curtis

Weather Summary: A strong upper-level ridge of high pressure continued to dominate the nation's weather this U.S. Drought Monitor (USDM) week, bringing well above-normal

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temperatures to much of the country east of the Rockies. Beneath the core of the high, hot and dry weather baked the central and southern Plains to Ohio Valley. Monsoon showers and thunderstorms brought areas of rain to the West, cool fronts moving along the high's northern edge triggered scattered showers and thunderstorms in the northern tier states, and a front skirting the high dropped beneficial rain along its eastern and southern peripheries. July 22 U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) reports indicated that 55 percent of the nation's pasture and rangeland was in poor to very poor condition, breaking last week's record. In the Plains and Midwest states, crop losses mounted, ranchers liquidated herds, and trees continued to drop leaves and branches. On July 25, USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack designated 76 additional counties in six states as drought disaster areas, bringing the total for the 2012 crop year to 1369 counties across 31 states. Over two dozen large wildfires were burning by the end of the USDM week – most in the West but several in the Plains.

The West: Monsoon showers dropped locally an inch or more of rain to parts of the West, but amounts were mostly less than half an inch. D3 was eliminated in extreme southern Arizona, D2 and D3 were pulled back slightly in parts of New Mexico, and D0 shrank in western Montana. But D3 expanded in western Nevada and D0-D2 grew in central to northern California (mostly in the San Joaquin Valley). Over 80 percent of the topsoil was rated short or very short of moisture in New Mexico, Colorado, and Wyoming. Three-fourths (75 percent) or more of the pasture and rangeland was classified as poor or very poor in California, Nevada, New Mexico, and Colorado. Author: Richard Heim, National Climatic Data Center, NOAA.

A comprehensive narrative describing drought conditions for the nation can be found at the end of this document.

Drought Impacts Definitions

The possible impacts associated with **D4 (S, L)** drought include widespread crop/pasture losses and shortages of water in reservoirs, streams, and wells creating water emergencies. The possible impacts associated with **D3 (S, L)** drought include major crop/pasture losses and widespread water shortages or restrictions. Possible impacts from **D2 (S, L)** drought are focused on water shortages common and water restrictions imposed and crop or pasture losses likely. The possible impacts associated with **D1 (S, L)** drought are focused on water shortages developing in streams, reservoirs, or wells, and some damage to crops and pastures (Figs. 3 through 3e).

Soil Moisture

Soil moisture (Fig. 4), is simulated by the [VIC macroscale hydrologic model](#). The detailed, physically-based VIC model is driven by observed daily precipitation and temperature maxima and minima from approximately 2130 stations, selected for reporting reliably in real-time and for having records of longer than 45 years (and various other criteria). Another good resource can be found at: <http://www.emc.ncep.noaa.gov/mmb/nldas/drought/>.

Soil Climate Analysis Network (SCAN)

Figure 5 provides supplemental data on soil conditions (moisture and temperatures at various depths from 2 inches to 80 inches. For more information about SCAN see ([brochure](#)).

U.S. Historical Streamflow

This map, (Fig. 6) shows the 7-day average streamflow conditions in hydrologic units of the United States and Puerto Rico for the day of year. The colors represent 7-day average streamflow percentiles based on historical streamflow for the day of the year. Thus, the map

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shows conditions adjusted for this time of the year. Only stations having at least 30 years of record are used. Sub-regions shaded gray indicate that insufficient data were available to compute a reliable 7-day average streamflow value. During winter months, this situation frequently arises due to ice effects. The data used to produce this map are provisional and have not been reviewed or edited. They may be subject to significant change.

Fire Conditions

Fig. 7 comes from the [Predictive Services](#) (USFS) facilitates integration of comprehensive climate, weather, situation and fuels information in geospatial format.

State Activities

State government drought activities can be tracked at the following URL: <http://drought.unl.edu/mitigate/mitigate.htm>. NRCS SS/WSF State Office personnel are participating in state drought committee meetings and providing the committees and media with appropriate SS/WSF information - <http://www.wcc.nrcs.usda.gov/cgibin/bor.pl>. Additional information describing the products available from the Drought Monitor can be found at the following URL: <http://drought.unl.edu/dm/> and <http://www.drought.gov>.

For More Information

The National Water and Climate Center Homepage provide the latest available snowpack and water supply information. Please visit us at <http://www.wcc.nrcs.usda.gov>. This document is available from the following location on the NWCC homepage - <http://www.wcc.nrcs.usda.gov/water/drought/wdr.pl>. Reports from 2007 are available on-line while ones from 2001-2006 can be acquired upon request.

This report uses data and products provided by the Interagency Drought Monitor Consortium members and the National Interagency Fire Center.

/s/

Micheal L. Golden
Deputy Chief, Soil Survey and Resource Assessment

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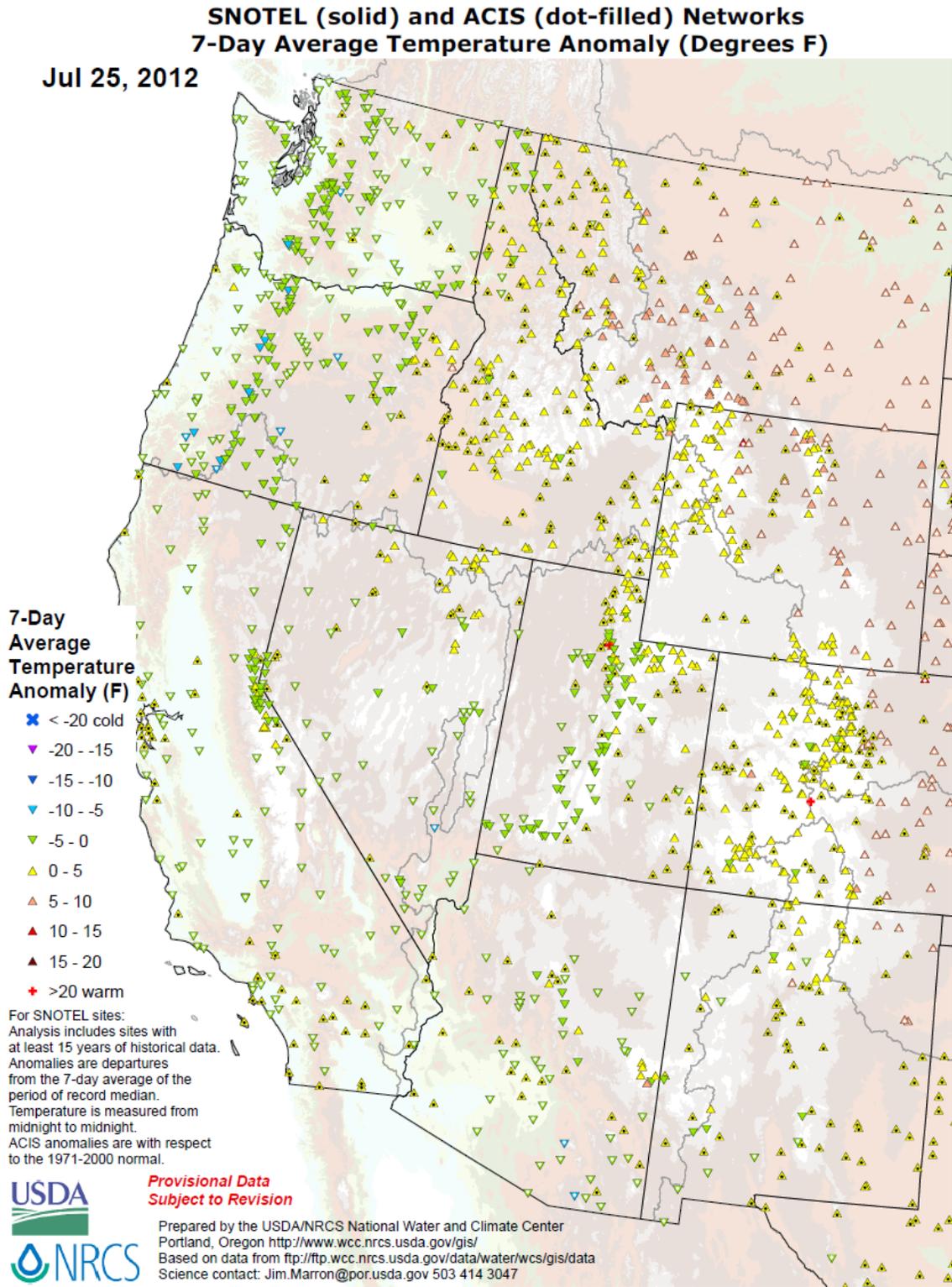
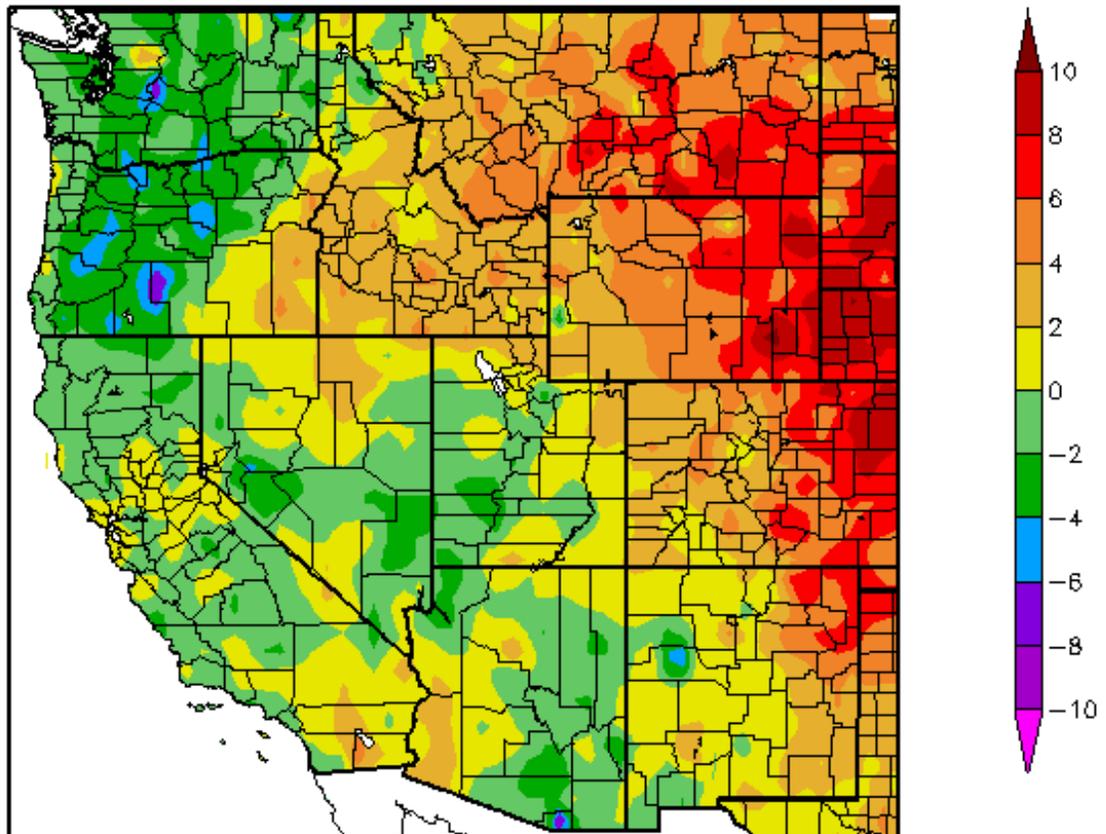


Fig. 1: SNOTEL and ACIS 7-day temperature anomaly showed values cooler over Washington and Oregon and warmer conditions over the Western High Plains.

Departure from Normal Temperature (F)
7/19/2012 – 7/25/2012



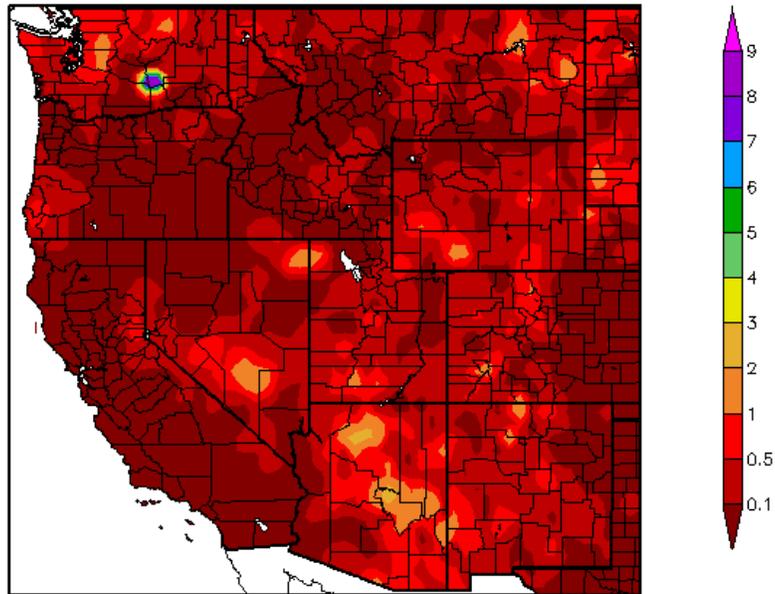
Generated 7/26/2012 at HPRCC using provisional data.

Regional Climate Centers

Fig. 1a: ACIS [7-day](#) average temperature anomalies show the greatest positive temperature departures over southeastern Wyoming (>+10°F) and the greatest negative departures over south central Oregon (<-6°F). The cooler departures over parts of the Southwest reflect an ever increasing Southwest Monsoon. For more details see [July Southwest Climate Outlook](#).

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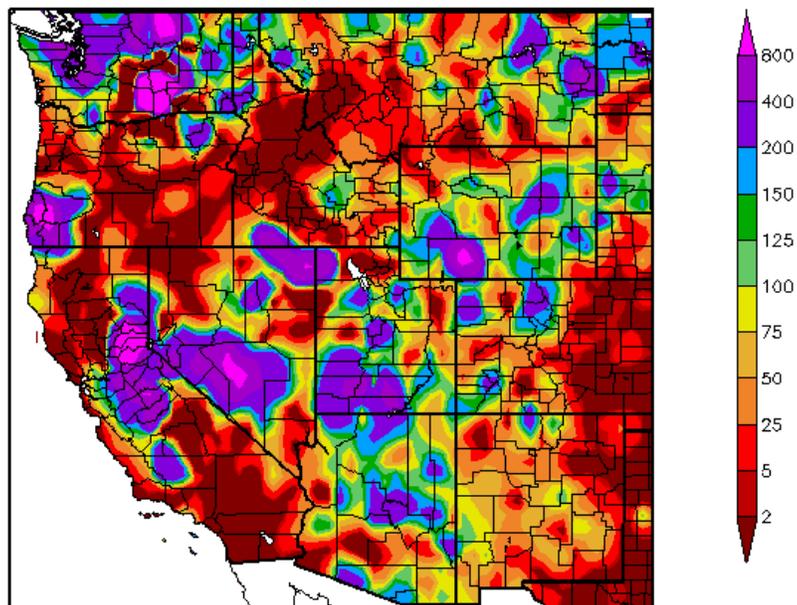
Precipitation (in)
7/19/2012 - 7/25/2012



Generated 7/26/2012 at HPRCC using provisional data.

Regional Climate Centers

Percent of Normal Precipitation (%)
7/19/2012 - 7/25/2012



Generated 7/26/2012 at HPRCC using provisional data.

Regional Climate Centers

Fig. 2 and 2a: [ACIS](#) 7-day average precipitation amounts for the period ending yesterday shows widely scattered thunderstorms dominating (top). In terms of percent of normal, this is clearly reflected by the pattern of violet and red bins across the West.

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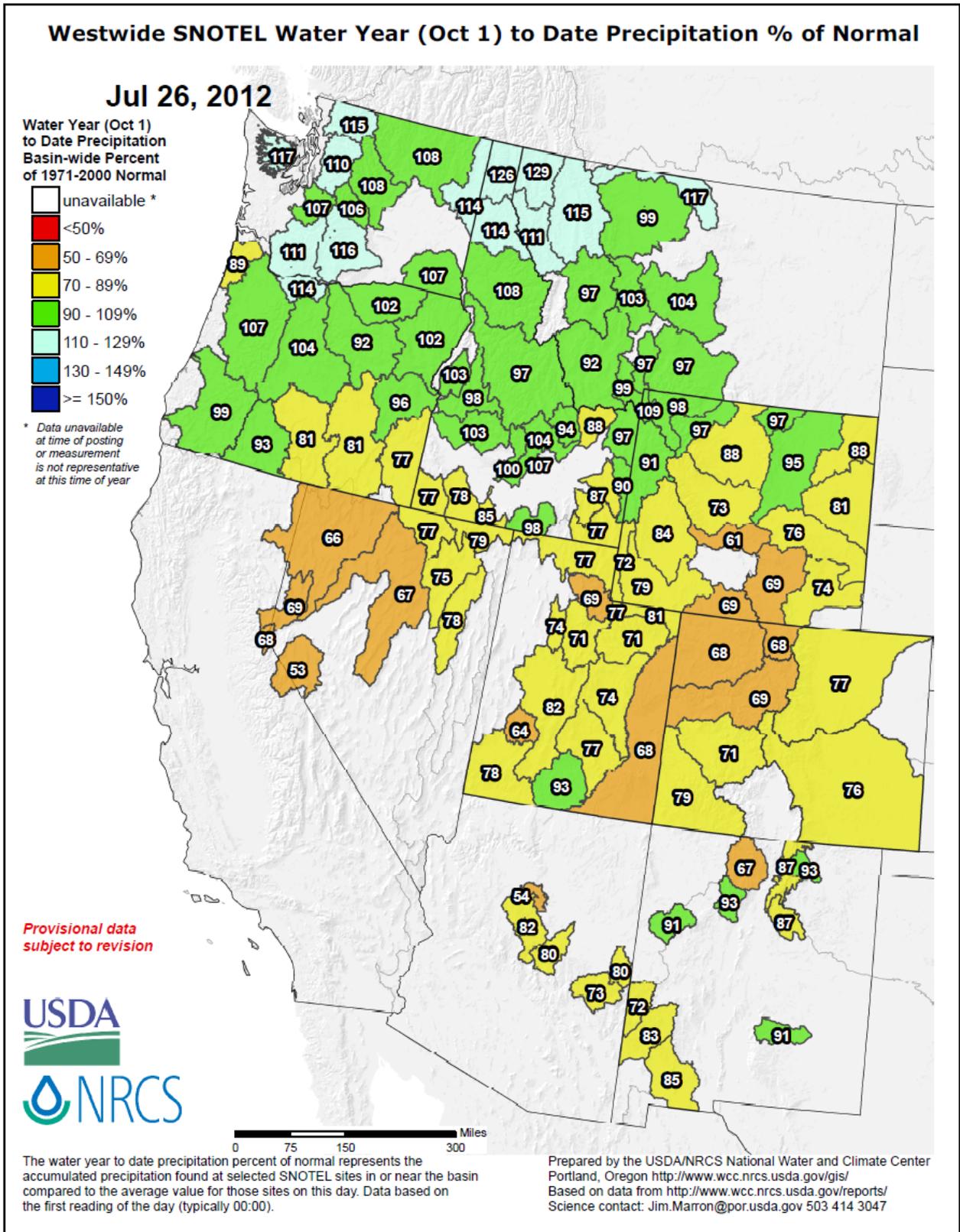


Fig 2b: Since the start of the [2012 Water-Year](#) that began on 1 October 2011, the seasonal moisture has continued to favor the Northern Tier States. Over much of the southern half of the West, drier conditions dominate. However, values are slowly increasing over parts of New Mexico in response to the Summer Monsoon.

Weekly Snowpack and Drought Monitor Update Report

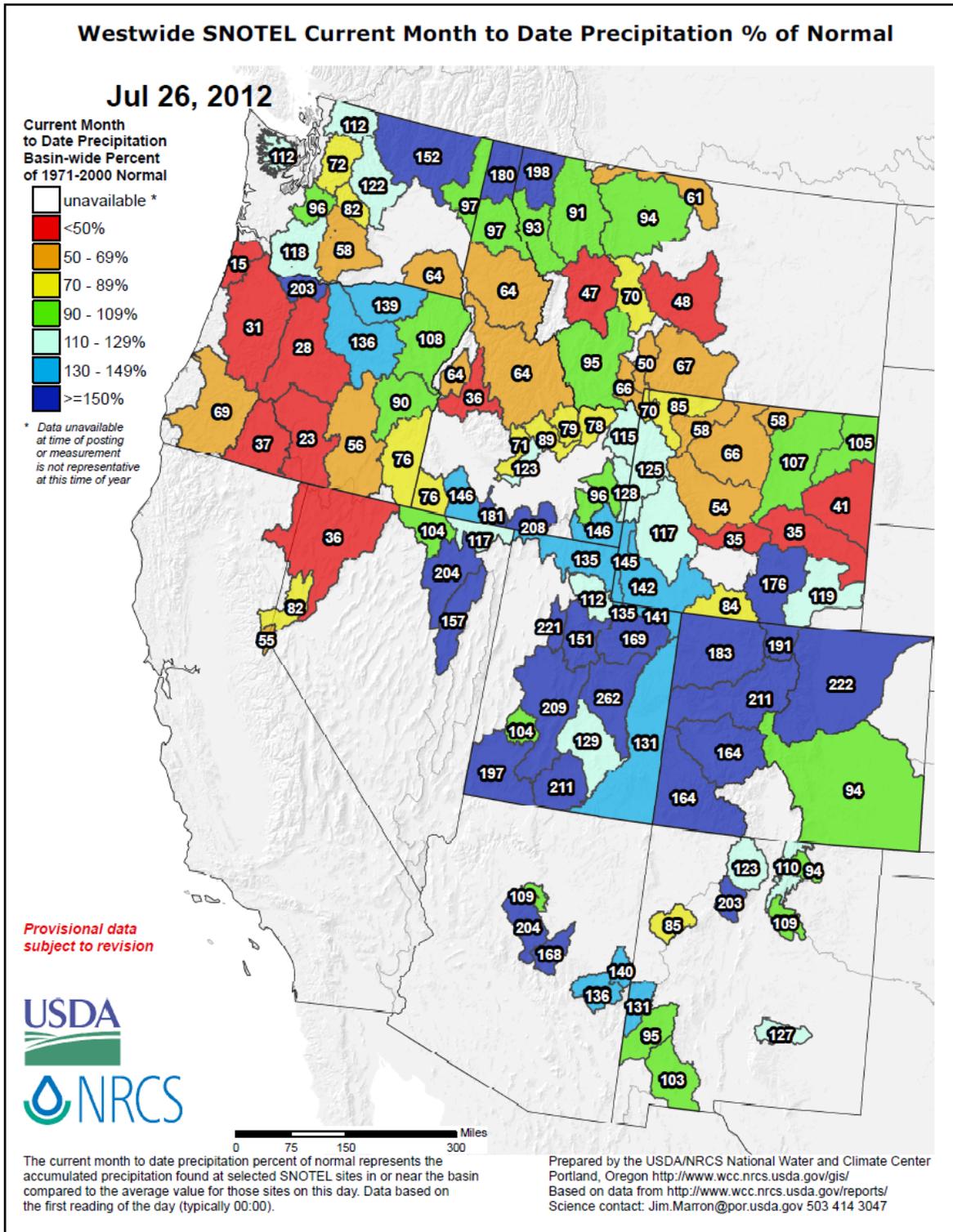


Fig 2c: Since the start of [July](#), parts of the Cascades, Northernmost and Central Rockies, Upper Snake River Basin, and 4-Corner States have been much wetter than the long term average.

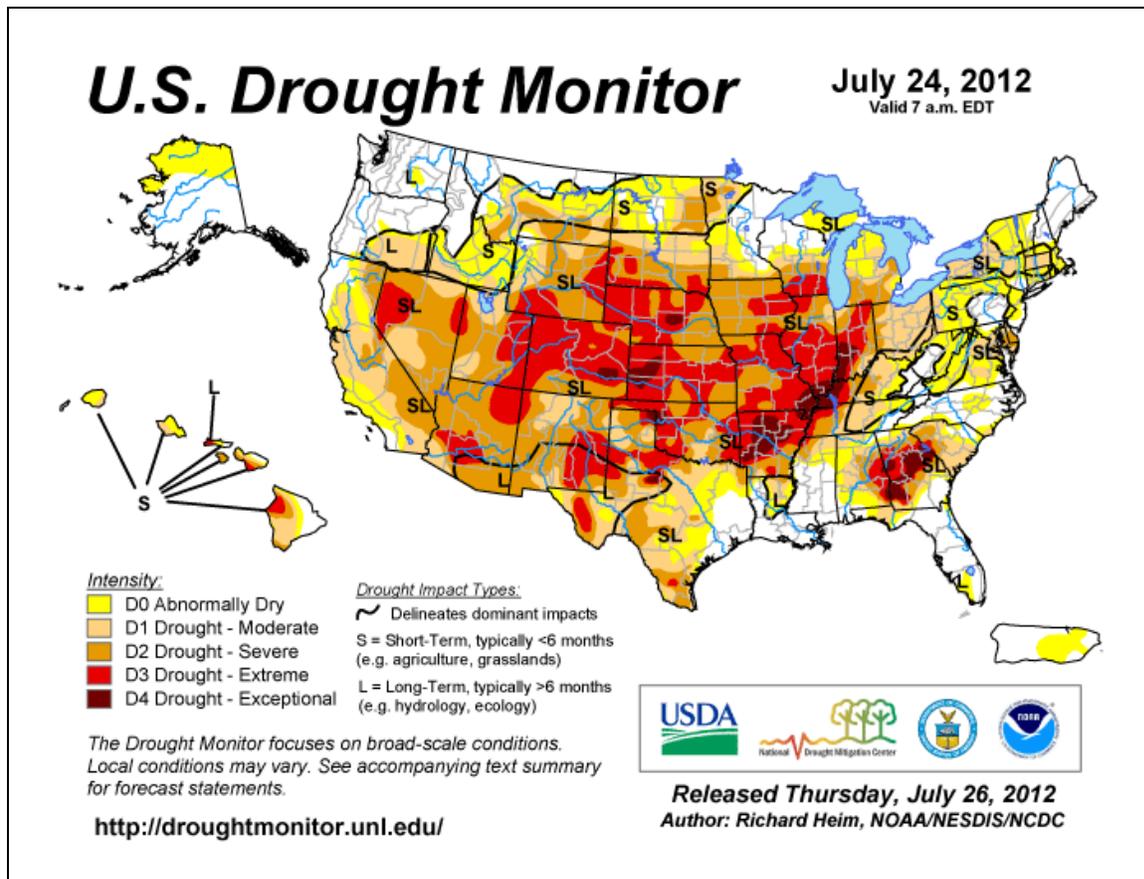


Fig. 3: Current [Drought Monitor](#) weekly summary. The exceptional D4 levels of drought are found over the Southeast and scattered across the corn belt of the Midwest into Colorado. For more drought news, see [Drought Impact Reporter](#). Click for the latest statistics for [California Reservoirs](#). The monthly [drought indicator blend and component percentiles](#) spreadsheet is a great resource for climate division drought statistics. **A great article about the people who produce these weekly maps can be found [here](#) and is definitely worth reading.**

There were 16,132 articles for the week. To put that in context, there are maybe 2,000 articles weekly during a slow period, but there have been weeks of 6,000 or so during frantically busy times like when Texas was in drought last summer. – Denise D. Gutzmer, Drought Impact Specialist, National Drought Mitigation Center

Agriculture

- [Amid drought, state turns off tap on 1,100 irrigators](#) July 20, **Eastern Nebraska.**
- [Drought dries up hay crop; prices in Colorado climbing sky-high](#) July 18, **Colorado.**
- [Drought puts the heat on area farmers](#) July 20, **Western New York.**
- [First drought, now pests are descending on parched Colorado farms](#) July 20, **Colorado.**
- [Hay shortages, parched pastures hurt horses in drought](#) July 17, **Illinois**
- [Heat, drought make for more flavorful produce](#) July 20, **U.S.**
- [Ranchers Selling Cattle As Drought Worsens](#) July 16, **West central South Dakota.**
- [Southern Montana sees record heat, low precipitation](#) July 11, **Montana.**

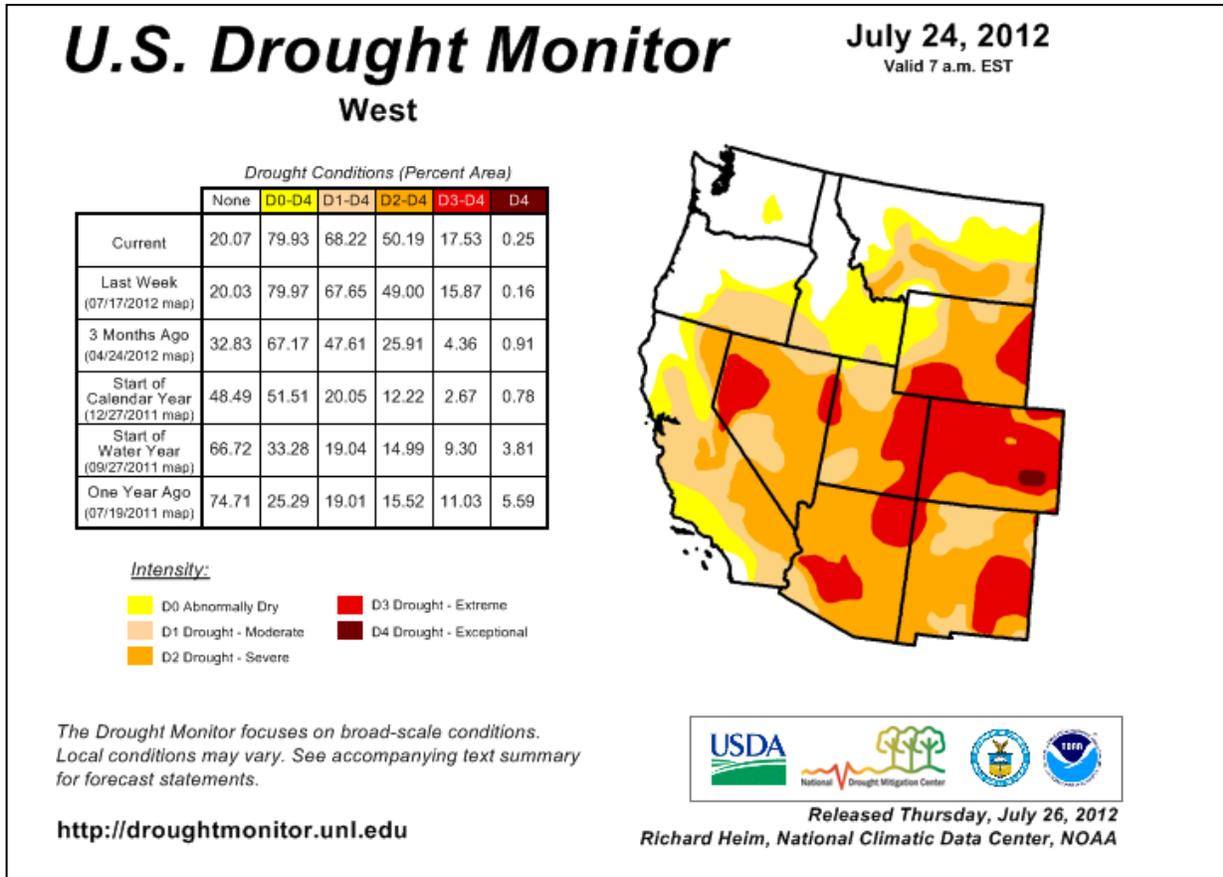


Fig. 3a: Drought Monitor for the [Western States](#) with statistics over various time periods. Note a slight deterioration in D1 to D4 this week.

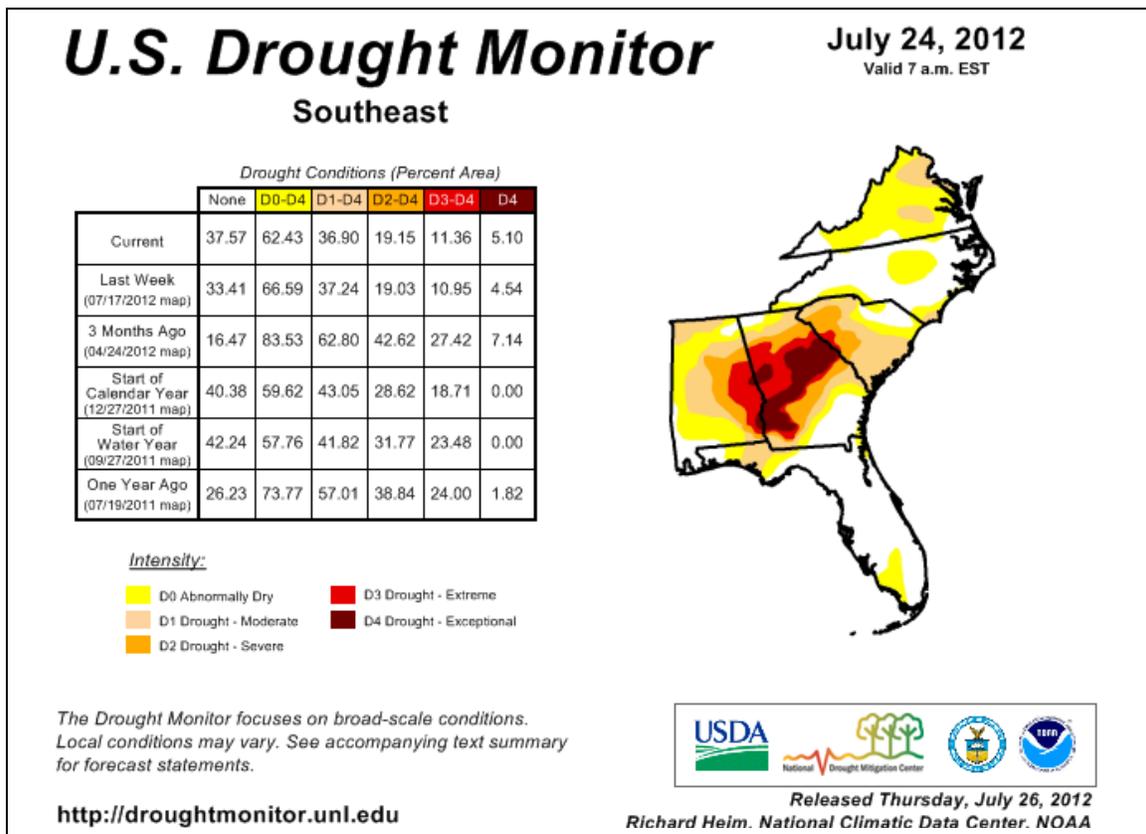


Fig. 3b: Drought Monitor for the [Southeastern States](#) with statistics over various time periods. Note a slight deterioration in D3-D4 this week.

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U.S. Drought Monitor

July 24, 2012

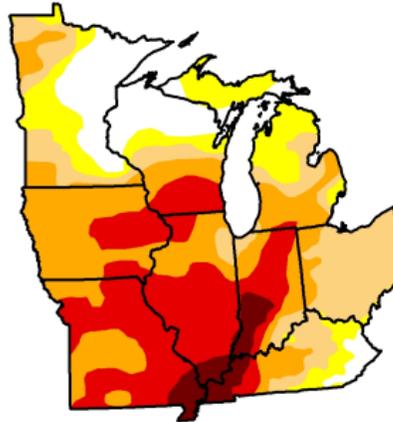
Valid 7 a.m. EST

Midwest

	Drought Conditions (Percent Area)					
	None	D0-D4	D1-D4	D2-D4	D3-D4	D4
Current	13.13	86.87	73.69	55.53	28.92	4.33
Last Week (07/17/2012 map)	14.09	85.91	72.70	48.12	11.89	0.84
3 Months Ago (04/24/2012 map)	58.78	41.22	16.08	5.98	0.00	0.00
Start of Calendar Year (12/27/2011 map)	71.84	28.16	13.42	6.80	0.00	0.00
Start of Water Year (09/27/2011 map)	58.85	41.15	14.01	5.03	0.00	0.00
One Year Ago (07/19/2011 map)	89.78	10.22	0.10	0.00	0.00	0.00

Intensity:

- D0 Abnormally Dry
- D1 Drought - Moderate
- D2 Drought - Severe
- D3 Drought - Extreme
- D4 Drought - Exceptional



The Drought Monitor focuses on broad-scale conditions. Local conditions may vary. See accompanying text summary for forecast statements.

<http://droughtmonitor.unl.edu>



Released Thursday, July 26, 2012
Richard Heim, National Climatic Data Center, NOAA

Fig. 3c: Drought Monitor for the [Mid-West](#) with statistics over various time periods. Note marked increase D4 this week.

U.S. Drought Monitor

July 24, 2012

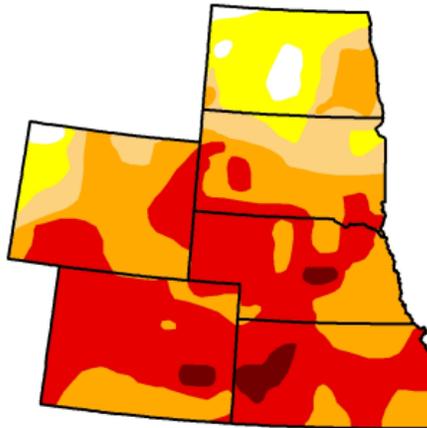
Valid 7 a.m. EST

High Plains

	Drought Conditions (Percent Area)					
	None	D0-D4	D1-D4	D2-D4	D3-D4	D4
Current	2.32	97.68	86.74	76.98	44.51	2.51
Last Week (07/17/2012 map)	3.52	96.48	85.88	68.44	28.07	1.35
3 Months Ago (04/24/2012 map)	43.85	56.15	25.85	5.70	0.00	0.00
Start of Calendar Year (12/27/2011 map)	61.66	38.34	18.12	7.22	2.07	0.04
Start of Water Year (09/27/2011 map)	70.09	29.91	17.44	11.97	6.22	2.96
One Year Ago (07/19/2011 map)	80.28	19.72	14.46	11.12	6.40	1.86

Intensity:

- D0 Abnormally Dry
- D1 Drought - Moderate
- D2 Drought - Severe
- D3 Drought - Extreme
- D4 Drought - Exceptional



The Drought Monitor focuses on broad-scale conditions. Local conditions may vary. See accompanying text summary for forecast statements.

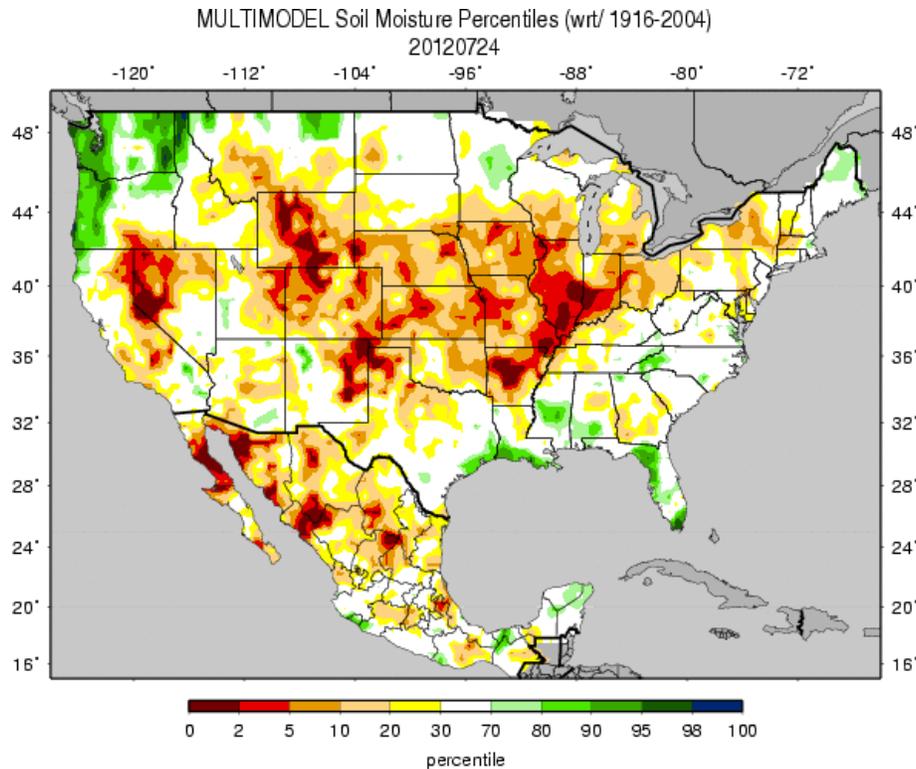
<http://droughtmonitor.unl.edu>



Released Thursday, July 26, 2012
Richard Heim, National Climatic Data Center, NOAA

Fig. 3d: Drought Monitor for the [High Plains](#) with statistics over various time periods. Note slight increase in D4 but a significant increase in D3 this week.

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Figs. 4: Soil Moisture ranking in [percentile](#) as of 24 July shows dryness over much of the US. Exceptions include the Coastal Region of Oregon & Washington, northeast Montana, and much of the immediate coastal areas on the Gulf of Mexico.

Useful Hydrological Links:

USDA western U.S. mountain snow water content anomaly map.

USGS (U.S. Geological Service) [observed streamflow](#);

NOAA Climate Prediction Center (CPC) modeled runoff [anomalies](#) and [percentiles](#);

VIC (University of Washington Variable Infiltration Capacity macro scale hydrologic model) [1-](#), [2-](#), [3-](#), and [6-](#)month and [water year-to-date](#) runoff percentiles;

NLDAS (North American Land Data Assimilation System) modeled streamflow [anomalies](#) and [percentiles](#);

NLDAS model runoff [anomalies](#) and [percentiles](#);

USGS groundwater observations ([real-time network](#), [climate response network](#), [total active network](#));

USDA snow water content observations for the West (SNOTEL station [percentiles](#) and [percent of normal](#), SNOTEL basin [percent of normal](#) and [percent of average](#)) and Alaska ([SNOTEL station percent of normal](#), [SNOTEL basin percent of normal](#));

USDA reservoir storage as [percent of capacity](#).

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Soil Climate Analysis Network ([SCAN](#))

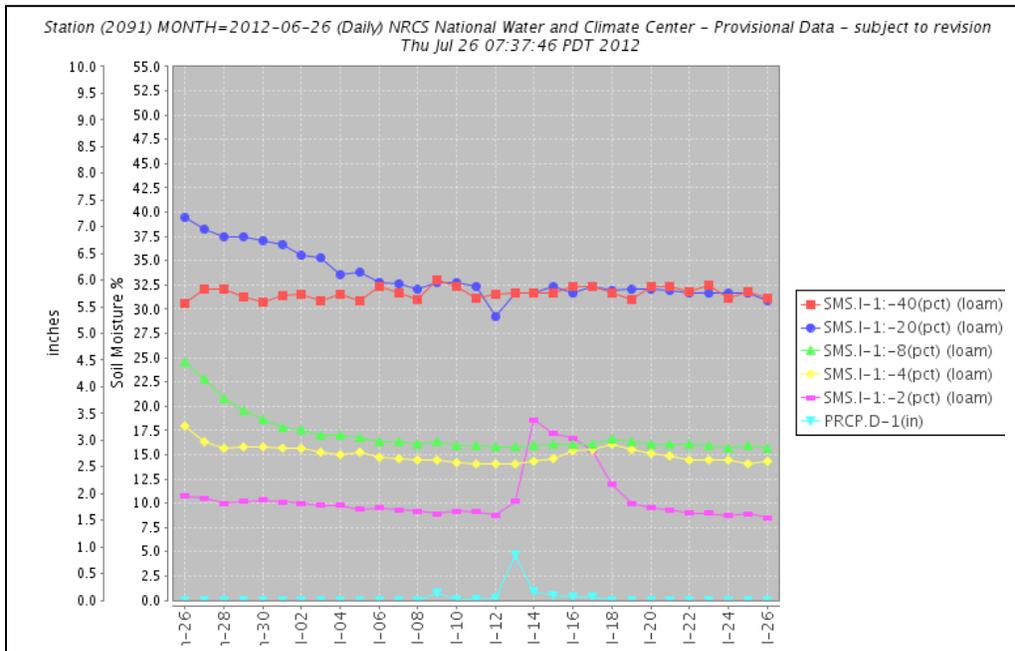


Fig. 5: This NRCS resource shows a site over [southeastern Arkansas](#) with good deep soil moisture but lower moisture nearer the surface.

Useful Agriculture Links:

- USDA (U.S. Department of Agriculture) [observed soil moisture conditions](#), [departures and percentiles](#), and comparison to [5-year average](#) and [10-year average](#);
- the Palmer [Crop Moisture Index \(CMI\)](#), which intensified during the month in the West and Lower to Mid-Mississippi Valley (weeks [1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#), [5](#));
- CPC modeled soil moisture [anomalies](#) and [percentiles](#) for end of May, and [soil moisture anomaly change](#) compared to previous month;
- CPC's Leaky Bucket model [soil moisture percentiles](#);
- NLDAS modeled soil moisture percentiles for the [top soil layer](#) and [total soil layer](#);
- VIC modeled [soil moisture percentiles](#), and [soil moisture percentile change](#) compared to previous month;
- USDA observed [pasture and rangeland conditions](#);
- [Vegetation Drought Response Index \(VegDRI\)](#);
- the NOAA/NESDIS satellite-based [Vegetation Health Index \(VHI\)](#);
- the USGS agro-hydrologic model ([Soil Water Index](#), [Water Requirement Satisfaction Index](#));
- Selected SNOTEL Sites (measured [2"](#), [4"](#), [8"](#), [20"](#), and [40"](#) soil moisture depths);

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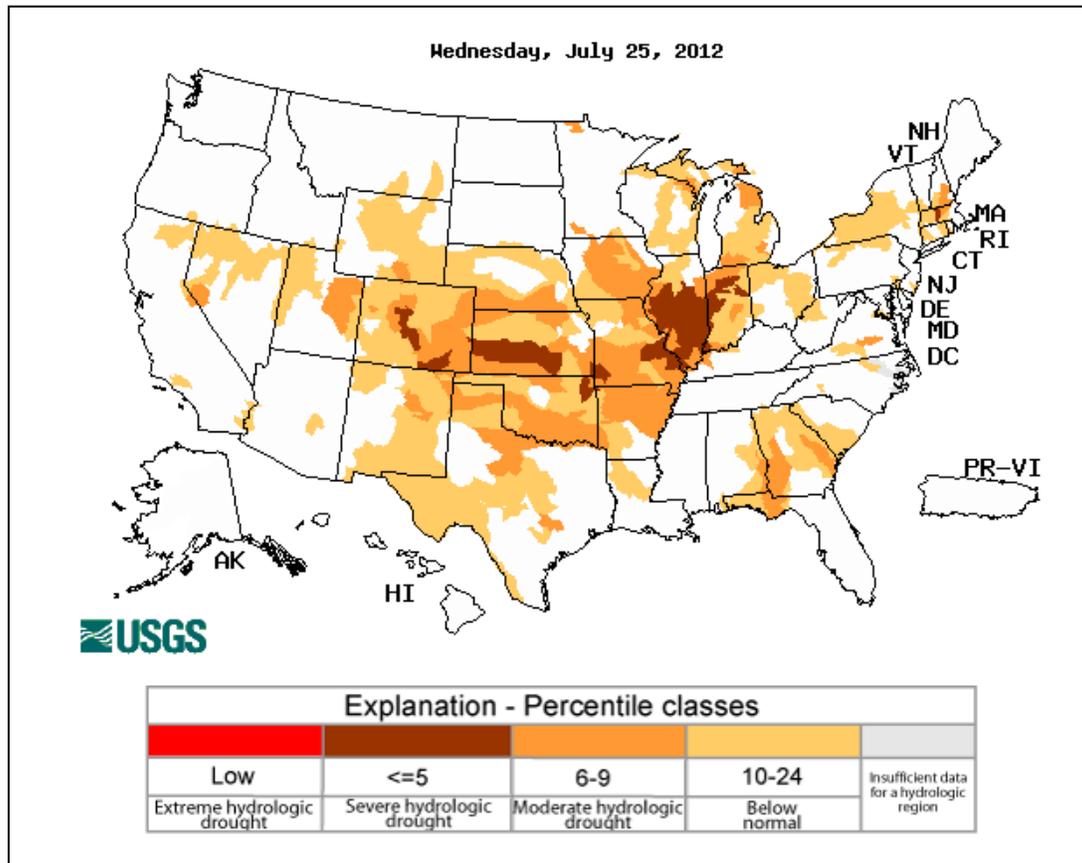


Fig. 6: Map of below normal 7-day average [streamflow](#) compared to historical streamflow for the day of year. **Severe** conditions exist over parts of Colorado, Kansas, northern Oklahoma, Missouri, Wisconsin, Illinois, and Indiana.

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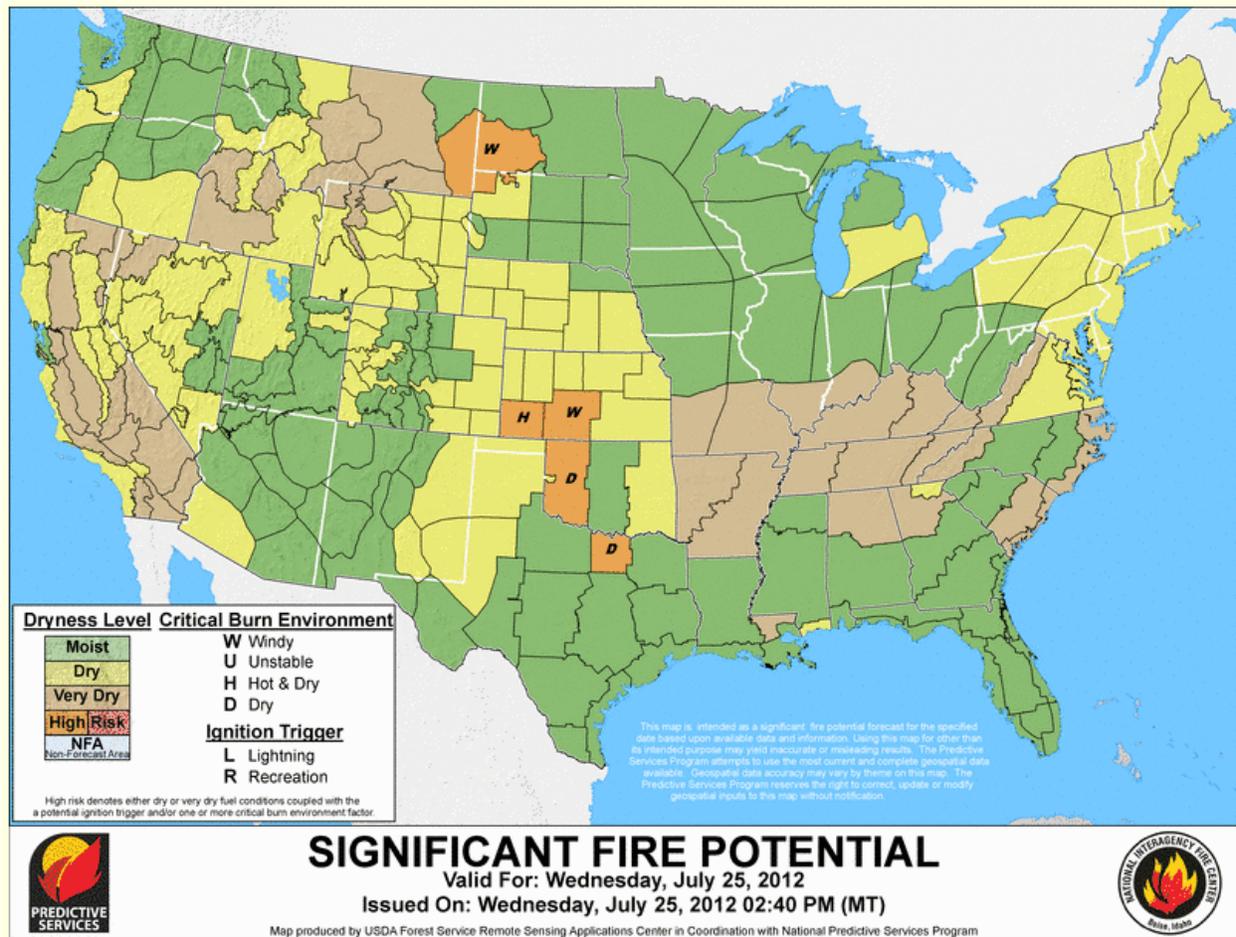


Fig. 7: [Significant fire potential](#) from yesterday. This resource also provides forecasts out to 7 days. Also check out: [NOAA's Fire Server](#). Risk has increased over Wyoming during the past several days. Also see: [Experimental Southwest area wildland fire smoke impact awareness page](#) and the latest, [National Interagency Fire Agency Report](#). Note high risk over much of Colorado and parts of southern Wyoming and New Mexico.

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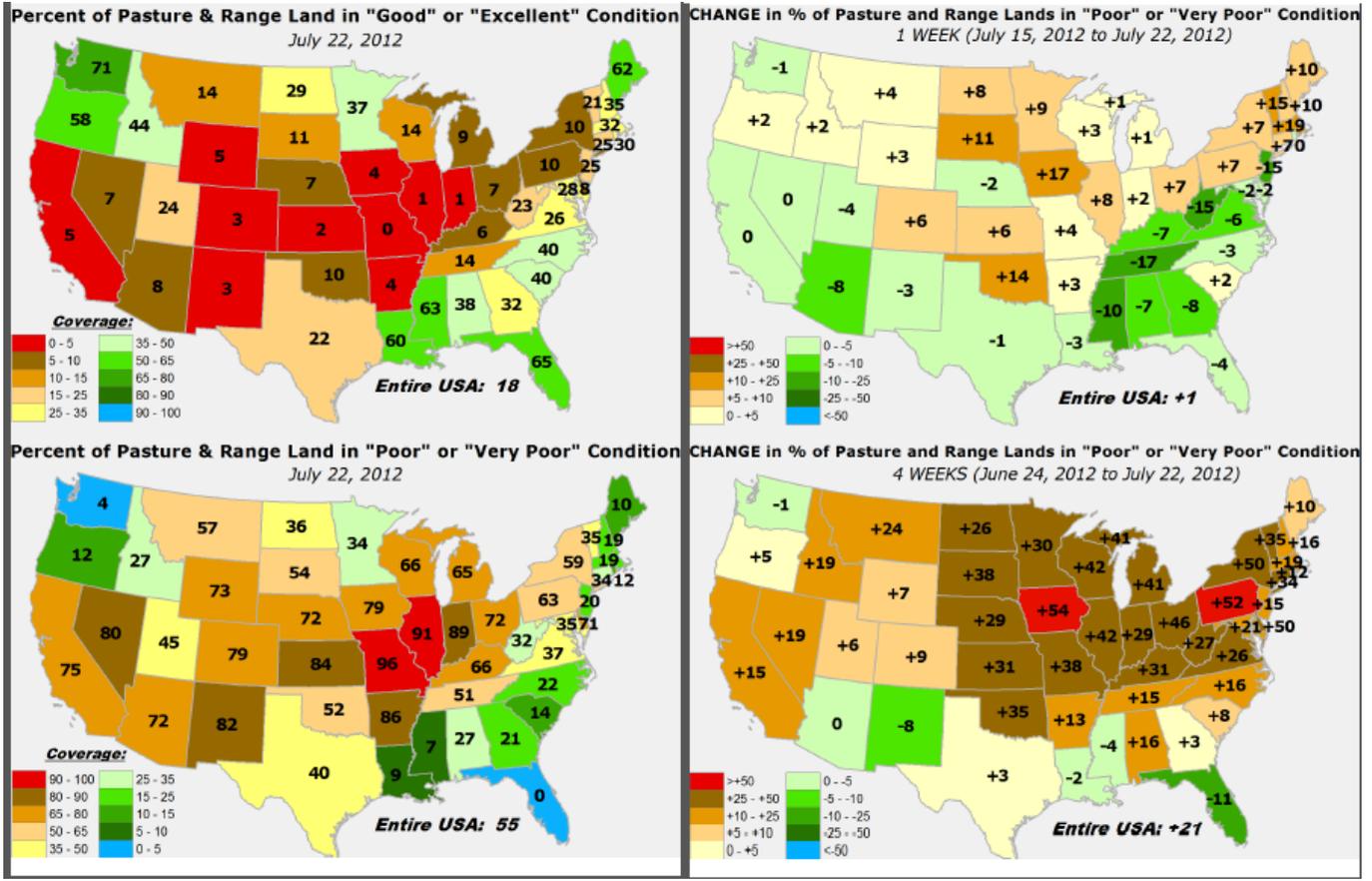


Fig. 8: [Pasture and range land conditions](#) and changes during the past week. New Mexico still has the most poor or very poor conditions (lower left panel). Arizona has experienced the most improvement this week over the West (upper right panel). Iowa has experienced the worst decline nationally due the past 4 weeks (lower right panel).

Also see: [Vegetation anomaly map](#)

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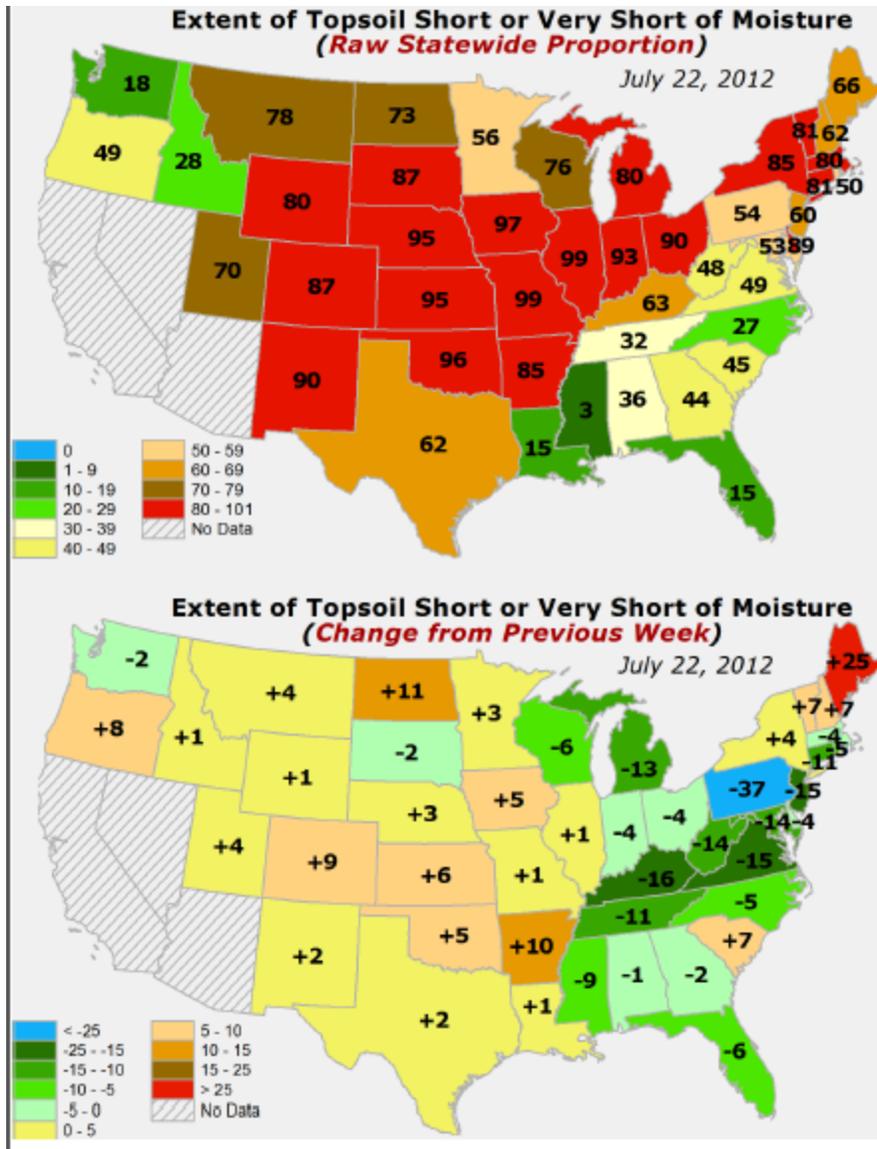


Fig. 9: [Top Soil conditions](#) and changes during the past week. Much of the Rocky Mountain States, the Great Plains, Great Lakes Region, and New England are experiencing extreme dryness (top panel). Maine has experienced the worst decline nationally due the past (bottom panel).

National Drought Summary -- July 24, 2012

The discussion in the Looking Ahead section is simply a description of what the official national guidance from the National Weather Service (NWS) National Centers for Environmental Prediction is depicting for current areas of dryness and drought. The NWS forecast products utilized include the HPC 5-day QPF and 5-day Mean Temperature progs, the 6-10 Day Outlooks of Temperature and Precipitation Probability, and the 8-14 Day Outlooks of Temperature and Precipitation Probability, valid as of late Wednesday afternoon of the USDM release week. The NWS forecast web page used for this section is:

<http://www.cpc.ncep.noaa.gov/products/forecasts/>.

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Weather Summary: A strong upper-level ridge of high pressure continued to dominate the nation's weather this U.S. Drought Monitor (USDM) week, bringing well above-normal temperatures to much of the country east of the Rockies. Beneath the core of the high, hot and dry weather baked the central and southern Plains to Ohio Valley. Monsoon showers and thunderstorms brought areas of rain to the West, cool fronts moving along the high's northern edge triggered scattered showers and thunderstorms in the northern tier states, and a front skirting the high dropped beneficial rain along its eastern and southern peripheries. July 22 U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) reports indicated that 55 percent of the nation's pasture and rangeland was in poor to very poor condition, breaking last week's record. In the Plains and Midwest states, crop losses mounted, ranchers liquidated herds, and trees continued to drop leaves and branches. On July 25, USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack designated 76 additional counties in six states as drought disaster areas, bringing the total for the 2012 crop year to 1369 counties across 31 states. Over two dozen large wildfires were burning by the end of the USDM week – most in the West but several in the Plains.

The Northeast and Mid-Atlantic: Light to locally moderate rain fell across parts of the region. The rains were generally enough to keep the drought depiction status quo, although enough fell to dent D0 and D1 in northern Maryland. D1-D2 expanded across the Chesapeake Bay and into northern Virginia where rains were below-normal, and D0-D1 expanded in southern New England which experienced subnormal precipitation and widespread low stream levels. According to USDA statistics, 80 percent or more of the topsoil was rated short or very short of moisture in New York, Vermont, Massachusetts, and Connecticut, and half or more of the pasture and rangeland was rated poor or very poor in Delaware, Pennsylvania, and New York.

The Southeast, Deep South, and Southern Texas: Areas of beneficial rain, locally over three inches, fell from the central Appalachians to Tennessee Valley, central to coastal North Carolina, the Lower Mississippi Valley, and parts of western Florida. D0-D2 were pulled back from West Virginia to Tennessee, extreme northern Alabama, northwest Georgia, and parts of North Carolina, and D0-D1 were reduced in Louisiana and Mississippi. But the showers and thunderstorms were spotty, with many areas getting below-normal rainfall or hardly any at all. D0 expanded in southern and northeastern Florida, D1 was added to the southern coast of North Carolina and expanded in the Florida panhandle, and D1-D4 expanded in parts of Alabama and Georgia.

The Great Plains to Midwest: Frontal showers and thunderstorms dropped locally an inch or more of rain over parts of the Dakotas, Upper Mississippi Valley, and southern Great Lakes. In the Dakotas and Minnesota it was enough to slightly trim a few of the drought areas, but the 2+ inches from southern Wisconsin to northern Indiana was able to only maintain status quo. Most other areas were not as lucky. Pasture, rangeland, and crop condition continued to deteriorate from the Colorado High Plains to the Ohio and Mid-Mississippi valleys, and from Oklahoma to the Dakotas. Temperatures reached 100 degrees Fahrenheit or hotter across parts of the Great Plains to Midwest every day this week, and some locations have not had significant rain for the last 30 days. July 22 USDA statistics indicated over 90 percent of the topsoil was short or very short of moisture in Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska, Missouri, Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio, with virtually all (99 percent) short or very short in Missouri and Illinois. Over 80 percent of the pasture and rangeland was in poor or very poor condition in Kansas, Arkansas, Missouri, Illinois, and Indiana. Corn, Soybean, Sorghum, and Alfalfa losses continued to mount, ponds dried up, and wells failed in several of the states. D0-D4 expanded region-wide.

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The West: Monsoon showers dropped locally an inch or more of rain to parts of the West, but amounts were mostly less than half an inch. D3 was eliminated in extreme southern Arizona, D2 and D3 were pulled back slightly in parts of New Mexico, and D0 shrank in western Montana. But D3 expanded in western Nevada and D0-D2 grew in central to northern California (mostly in the San Joaquin Valley). Over 80 percent of the topsoil was rated short or very short of moisture in New Mexico, Colorado, and Wyoming. Three-fourths (75 percent) or more of the pasture and rangeland was classified as poor or very poor in California, Nevada, New Mexico, and Colorado.

Hawaii, Alaska and Puerto Rico: The precipitation pattern was mixed over Alaska this week, with drier-than-normal amounts observed at the northern, southeastern interior, and most panhandle stations, and above-normal precipitation at most stations to the west. It was a drier-than-normal week at most Hawaiian stations, but drought conditions were consistent with the existing depiction. Locally 2 to 5 inches of rain fell over parts of Puerto Rico this week. The D0 in western Puerto Rico was eliminated due to a re-evaluation of long-term conditions, but otherwise the depiction over Puerto Rico, Hawaii, and Alaska remained unchanged from last week.

Looking Ahead: Forecast models for July 25-30 show a front piercing the upper-level high early in the period, bringing scattered showers and thunderstorms to Great Plains and Midwest core drought area. Rainfall amounts may reach an inch in places, with a few locations receiving possibly 2 or more inches. The heaviest amounts from the front and low pressure system are expected to be in the Upper Great Lakes and Northeast, where locally 3 inches or more of rain may fall. Parts of the South could see an inch or more of rain as the front makes its way to the Gulf Coast. Monsoon showers could drop up to an inch of rain, total, across the Four Corners states, and frontal rains in the Northern Rockies could bring scattered light showers, but the rest of the West should be dry. Temperatures may dip from the frontal passage, but the week should average warmer than normal for most of the country.

For July 31-August 8, dry weather is expected to dominate from the West Coast to Northern Rockies, and from the Central to Southern Plains. Above-normal precipitation is forecast for the Southwest and from the Upper Mississippi Valley to Ohio Valley, parts of the Southeast, and from the Mid-Atlantic states to coastal Northeast. Above-normal temperatures are expected for much of the country, especially the Rockies and Plains states, while below-normal temperatures may hug the West Coast. Western Alaska is forecast to be wetter than normal, northern Alaska warmer than normal, and the southern areas cooler than normal.

Author: [Richard Heim, National Climatic Data Center, NOAA](#)

Dryness Categories

D0 ... Abnormally Dry ... used for areas showing dryness but not yet in drought, or for areas recovering from drought.

Drought Intensity Categories

D1 ... Moderate Drought

D2 ... Severe Drought

D3 ... Extreme Drought

D4 ... Exceptional Drought

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Drought or Dryness Types

S ... Short-Term, typically <6 months (e.g. agricultural, grasslands)

L ... Long-Term, typically >6 months (e.g. hydrology, ecology)

Updated July 25, 2012

Drought Declaration Update

Release No. 0250.12

Contact:
Office of Communications (202)720-4623

USDA Designates an Additional 76 Counties in 6 States as Primary Natural Disaster Areas Due to Worsening Drought

Producers in 1,369 Counties in 31 States Eligible for Disaster Assistance

WASHINGTON, July 25, 2012—Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack today designated 76 additional counties in six states as primary natural disaster areas due to damage and losses caused by drought and excessive heat. During the 2012 crop year, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has designated 1,369 counties across 31 states as disaster areas—1,234 due to drought—making all qualified farm operators in the areas eligible for low-interest emergency loans. The additional counties designated today are in the states of Indiana, Illinois, Kansas, Michigan, Nebraska and Wisconsin. The [U.S. Drought Monitor](#) currently reports that two-thirds of the continental United States is in a moderate to exceptional drought.

"President Obama requested that USDA take the steps within our existing programs to support struggling farmers and ranchers and we announced these new measures earlier this week," said Vilsack. "The President and I are committed to ensuring that agriculture remains a bright spot in our nation's economy by sustaining the successes of America's agricultural economy through these difficult times. As USDA officials visit drought-stricken areas to stand with our producers and rural communities, the urgency for Congress to pass a food, farm and jobs bill is greater than ever. The hardworking Americans who produce our food and fiber, feed for our livestock, and contribute to a home-grown energy policy—they need action now. That is why USDA is taking every possible step to help farmers through this difficult time."

During the week ending July 22, the portion of the U.S. corn crop rated in very poor to poor condition climbed to 45 percent, according to [USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service](#). Soybeans rated very poor to poor rose to 35 percent. Such ratings for both commodities have increased for seven consecutive weeks. During the same period, from June 3 to July 22, the portion of the U.S. corn rated good to excellent fell from 72 to 26 percent. Soybeans rated good to excellent tumbled from 65 to 31 percent. The current corn and soybean ratings represent the lowest conditions at any time of year since 1988. At the same time, more than half—or 55 percent—of the nation's pastures and rangeland are rated in very poor or poor condition.

Last week, President Obama and Secretary Vilsack met to discuss additional steps the Administration could take to help farmers and ranchers recover when disaster strikes. [Five days later, Vilsack announced](#) USDA's use of existing authority to help create and encourage more flexibility within USDA's major conservation programs as well as the Federal Crop Insurance Program. USDA announced that it will allow additional acres under CRP to be used for

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emergency haying or grazing. The action will allow lands that are not yet classified as "under severe drought" but that are "abnormally dry" to be used for haying and grazing. In addition, USDA is allowing producers to modify current Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) contracts to allow for grazing, livestock watering, and other conservation activities to address drought conditions, and has authorized haying and grazing of Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) easement areas in drought-affected areas where haying and grazing is consistent with conservation of wildlife habitat and wetlands. USDA has expedited its authorization process for this haying and grazing. Vilsack also announced plans to encourage crop insurance companies to provide a short grace period for farmers on unpaid insurance premiums, as some farming families can be expected to struggle to make ends meet at the close of the crop year.

Increasingly hot and dry conditions from California to upstate New York have caused significant crop damage to many crops, including corn and soybeans, as well as pastures and rangeland. Vilsack has instructed USDA subcabinet leaders to travel to affected areas to augment ongoing assistance from state-level USDA staff and provide guidance on the department's existing disaster resources. To deliver assistance to those who need it most, the Secretary effectively reduced the interest rate for emergency loans from 3.75 percent to 2.25 percent, while creating greater flexibility for ranchers within the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) for emergency haying and grazing purposes. In addition, the disaster designations announced today fall under a new, streamlined process that simplifies Secretarial disaster designations and will result in a 40 percent reduction in processing time for most counties affected by disasters.

The Secretary of Agriculture is authorized to designate disaster counties to make disaster assistance programs available to farmers and ranchers. During times of need, USDA has historically responded to disasters across the country by providing direct support, disaster assistance, technical assistance, and access to credit. USDA's low-interest emergency loans have helped producers recover from losses due to drought, flooding and other natural disasters for decades.

USDA agencies have been working for weeks with state and local officials, as well as individuals, businesses, farmers and ranchers, as they begin the process of helping to get people back on their feet. The U.S. Small Business Administration has also made 63 agency declarations in 33 states covering 1,675 counties, providing a pathway for those affected to apply for an Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL). SBA's EIDLs are available to small, non-farm businesses that are economically affected by the drought in their community.

Also today, USDA released an infographic that helps to illustrate how growth and diversity in the U.S. agriculture sector since the 1988 drought has better positioned American agriculture to endure the current natural disaster. For this and other updates about USDA's efforts to respond to the drought, please visit www.usda.gov/drought.

The Obama Administration, with Agriculture Secretary Vilsack's leadership, has worked tirelessly to strengthen rural America, maintain a strong farm safety net, and create opportunities for America's farmers and ranchers. U.S. agriculture is currently experiencing one of its most productive periods in American history thanks to the productivity, resiliency, and resourcefulness of our producers. A strong farm safety net is important to sustain the success of American agriculture. USDA's crop insurance program currently insures 264 million acres, 1.14 million policies, and \$110 billion worth of liability on about 500,000 farms. In response to tighter financial markets, USDA has expanded the availability of farm credit, helping struggling farmers refinance loans. In the past 3 years, USDA provided 103,000 loans to family farmers totaling \$14.6 billion. Over 50 percent of the loans went to beginning and socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers.