



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

Weekly Report - Snowpack / Drought Monitor Update

Date: 2 August 2012

SNOTEL SNOWPACK AND PRECIPITATION SUMMARY

Temperature: [SNOTEL](#) and ACIS 7-day temperature anomaly showed values cooler the West Coast States and warmer conditions elsewhere (Fig. 1). ACIS [7-day](#) average temperature anomalies show the greatest positive temperature departures over northeast New Mexico ($>+8^{\circ}\text{F}$) and the greatest negative departures over southeastern California and southwest Arizona ($<-6^{\circ}\text{F}$). The cooler departures over parts of the Southwest reflect the effects from the Southwest Monsoon (Fig. 1a).

Precipitation: [ACIS](#) 7-day average precipitation amounts for the period ending yesterday shows Arizona the big moisture winner (Fig. 2). In terms of percent of normal, this is clearly reflected by the pattern of the Southwest Monsoon as well as scattered storms across the Northern Rockies (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 moderately higher over parts of New Mexico in response to the Summer Monsoon (Fig. 2b). Since the start of [August](#), values are all over the place as would be expected for the first two days of month. The revised NOAA CPC [Outlook for August](#) is suggesting a rather dry month for the Pacific Northwest while it might be wetter for Arizona (Fig. 2c).

The West: The West remains relatively quiet in most parts, with the West Coast benefitting from below-normal temperatures last week as well. Warmer temperatures continue to plague the Rockies and Front Range while precipitation was mostly confined to Arizona and Colorado, where monsoon rains continue to bring relief. Changes this week on the map are marked by 1-category improvement (from D3 to D2) in north-central and southwestern Colorado as well as eastern Utah. The same can't be said for southeastern Colorado, where D3 has now expanded to cover this region as well as northeastern New Mexico, western Kansas and the Oklahoma Panhandle. To the north, Montana has seen recent dryness as well, leading to a slight expansion of D0 across the northern tier counties. **Author:** [Mark Svoboda, National Drought Mitigation Center](#)

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).

Weekly Snowpack and Drought Monitor Update Report

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 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

Weekly Snowpack and Drought Monitor Update Report

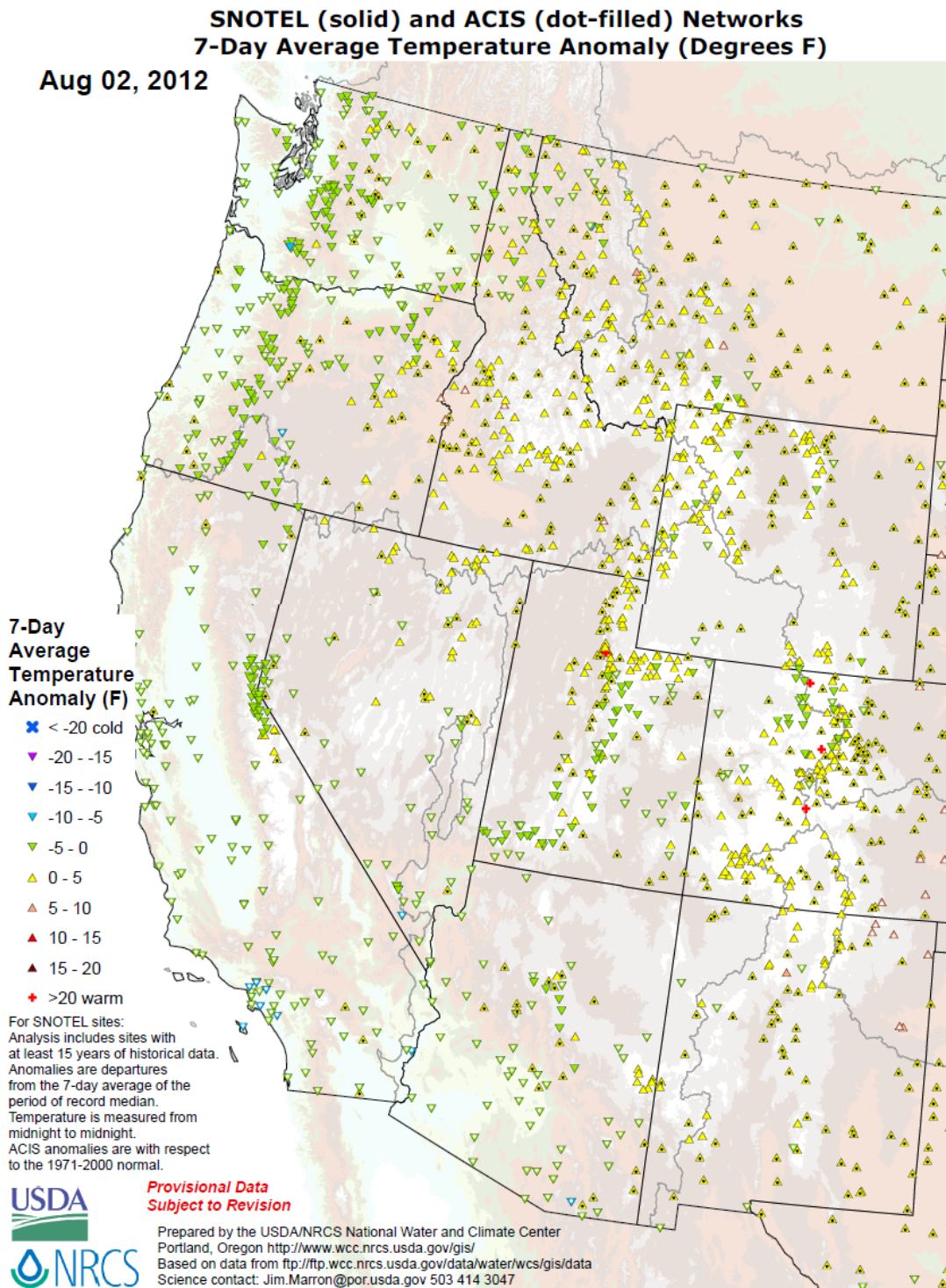
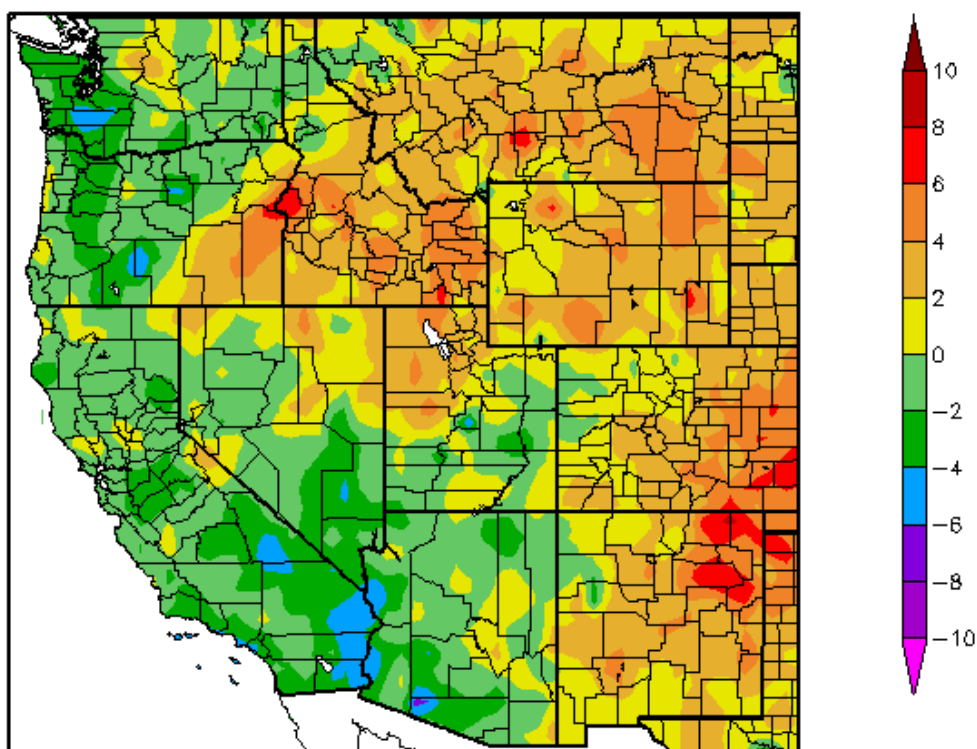


Fig. 1: SNOTEL and ACIS 7-day temperature anomaly showed values cooler the West Coast States and warmer conditions elsewhere.

Departure from Normal Temperature (F)
7/26/2012 – 8/1/2012

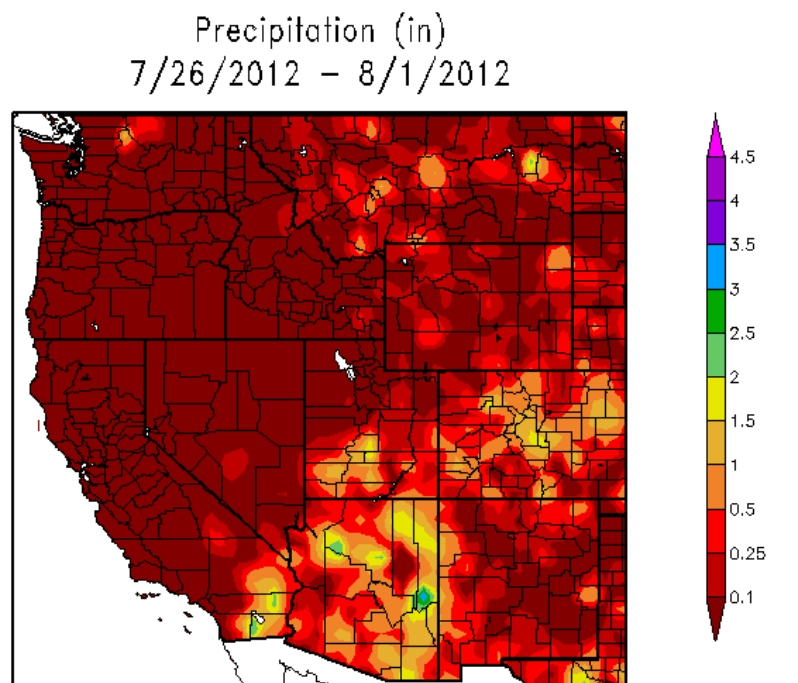


Generated 8/2/2012 at HPRCC using provisional data.

Regional Climate Centers

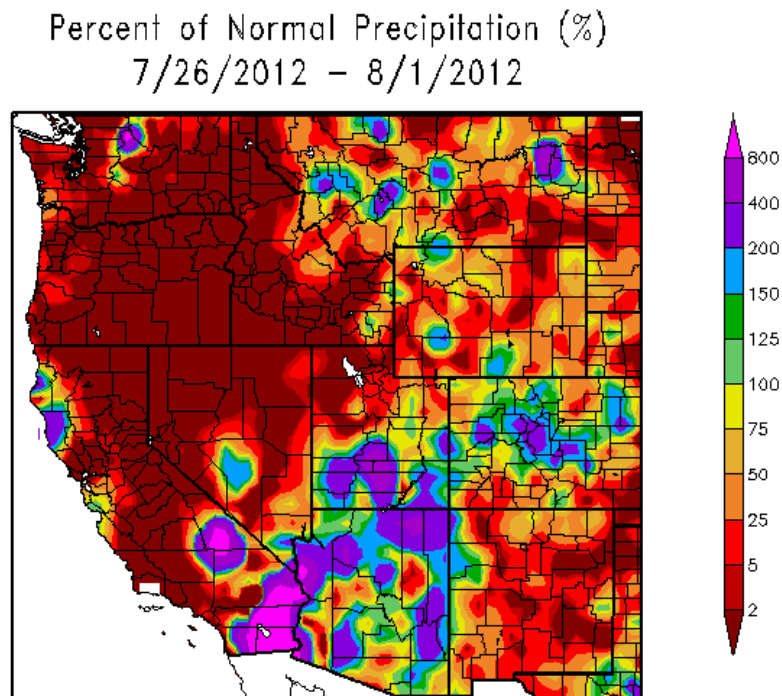
Fig. 1a: ACIS [7-day](#) average temperature anomalies show the greatest positive temperature departures over northeast New Mexico ($>+8^{\circ}\text{F}$) and the greatest negative departures over southeastern California and southwest Arizona ($<-6^{\circ}\text{F}$). The cooler departures over parts of the Southwest reflect the effects from the Southwest Monsoon.

Weekly Snowpack and Drought Monitor Update Report



Generated 8/2/2012 at HPRCC using provisional data.

Regional Climate Centers



Generated 8/2/2012 at HPRCC using provisional data.

Regional Climate Centers

Fig. 2 and 2a: [ACIS](#) 7-day average precipitation amounts for the period ending yesterday shows Arizona the big moisture winner (top). In terms of percent of normal, this is clearly reflected by the pattern of the Southwest Monsoon as well as scattered storms across the Northern Rockies.

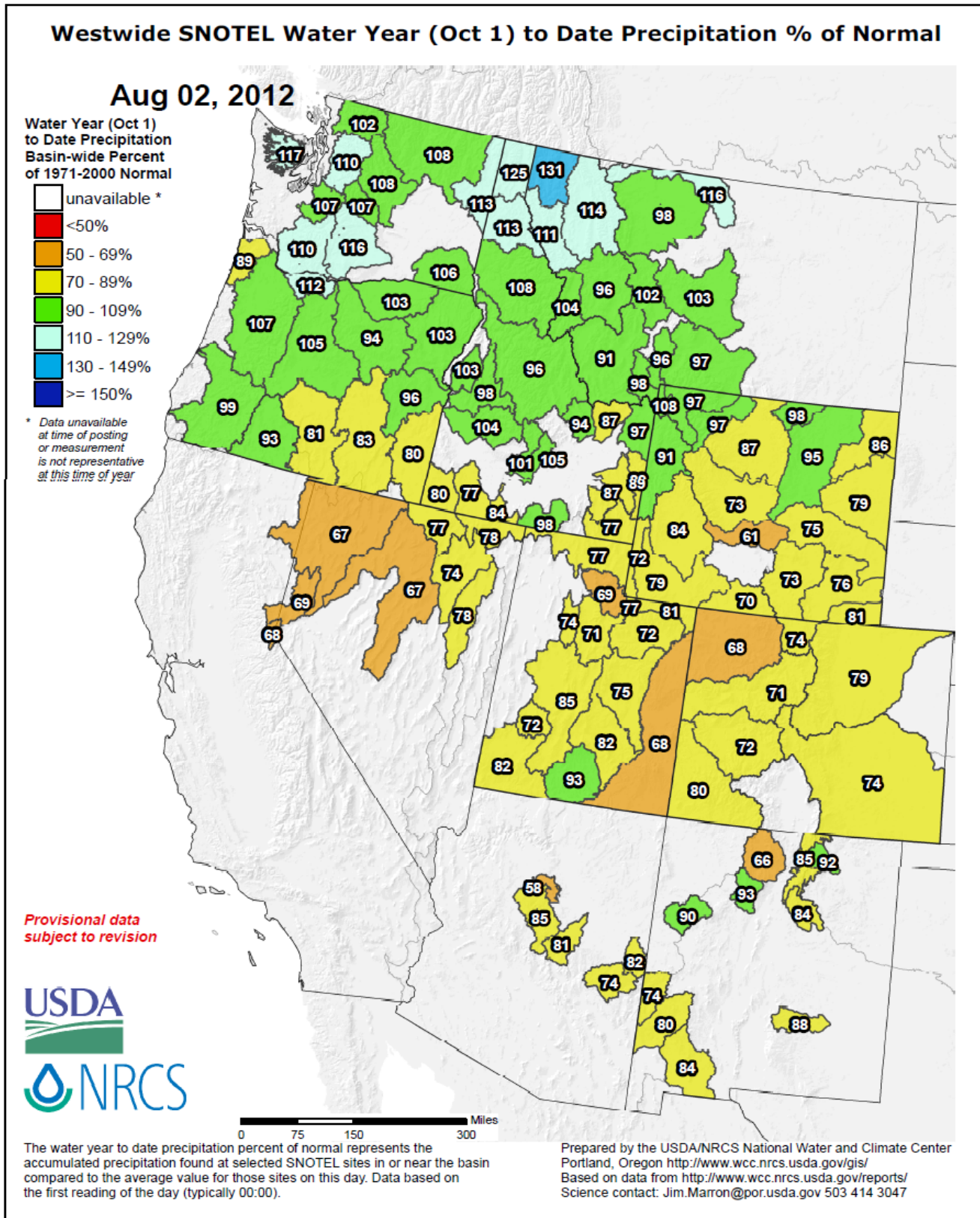


Fig 2b: Since the start of the [2012 Water-Year](#) that began on 1 October 2011, the seasonal moisture has continued to favor the Northern Tier States. Over much of the southern half of the West, drier conditions dominate. However, values are moderately higher over parts of New Mexico in response to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

Weekly Snowpack and Drought Monitor Update Report

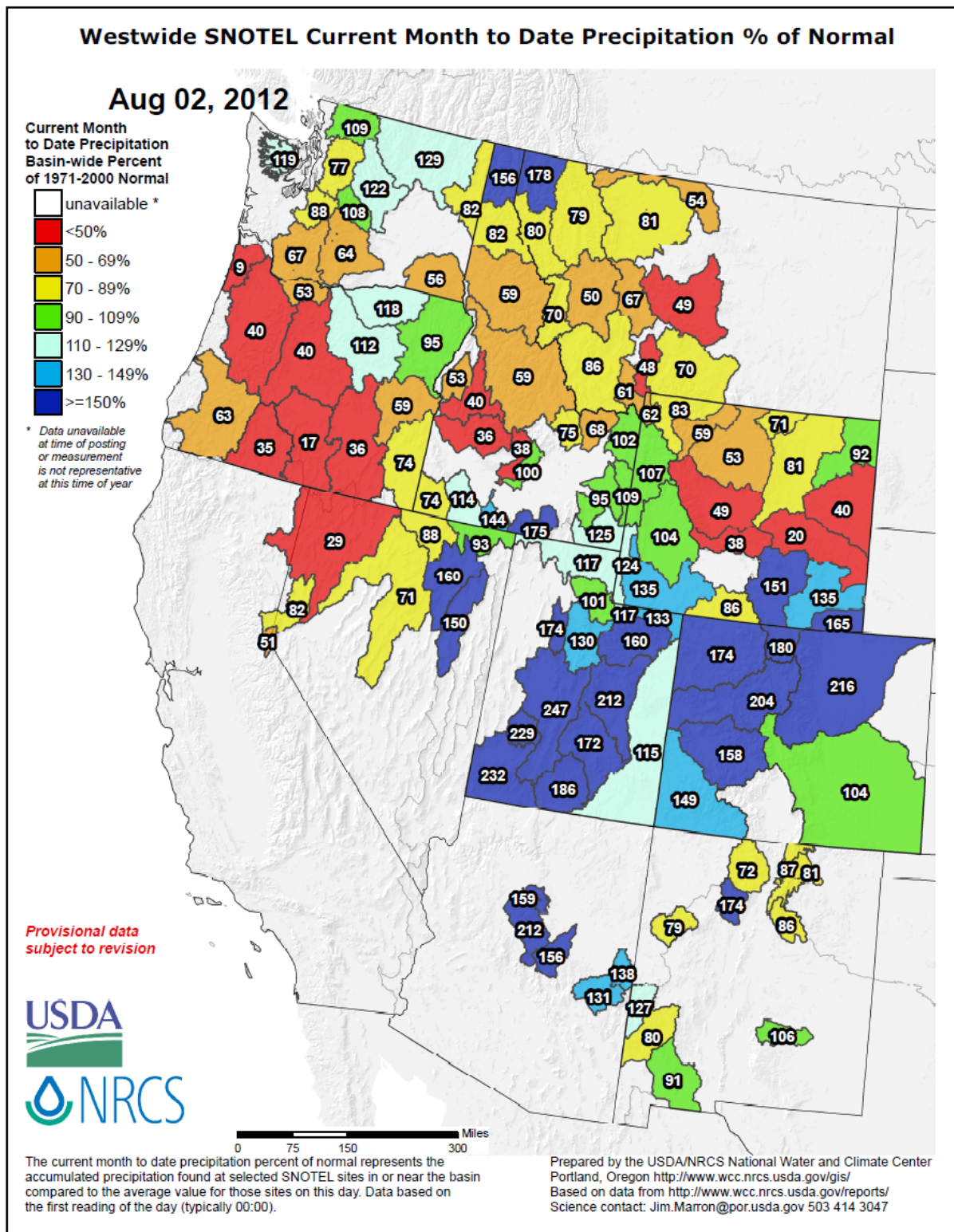


Fig 2c: Since the start of [August](#), values are all over the place as would be expected for the first two days of month. The revised NOAA CPC [Outlook for August](#) is suggesting a rather dry month for the Pacific Northwest while it might be wetter for Arizona.

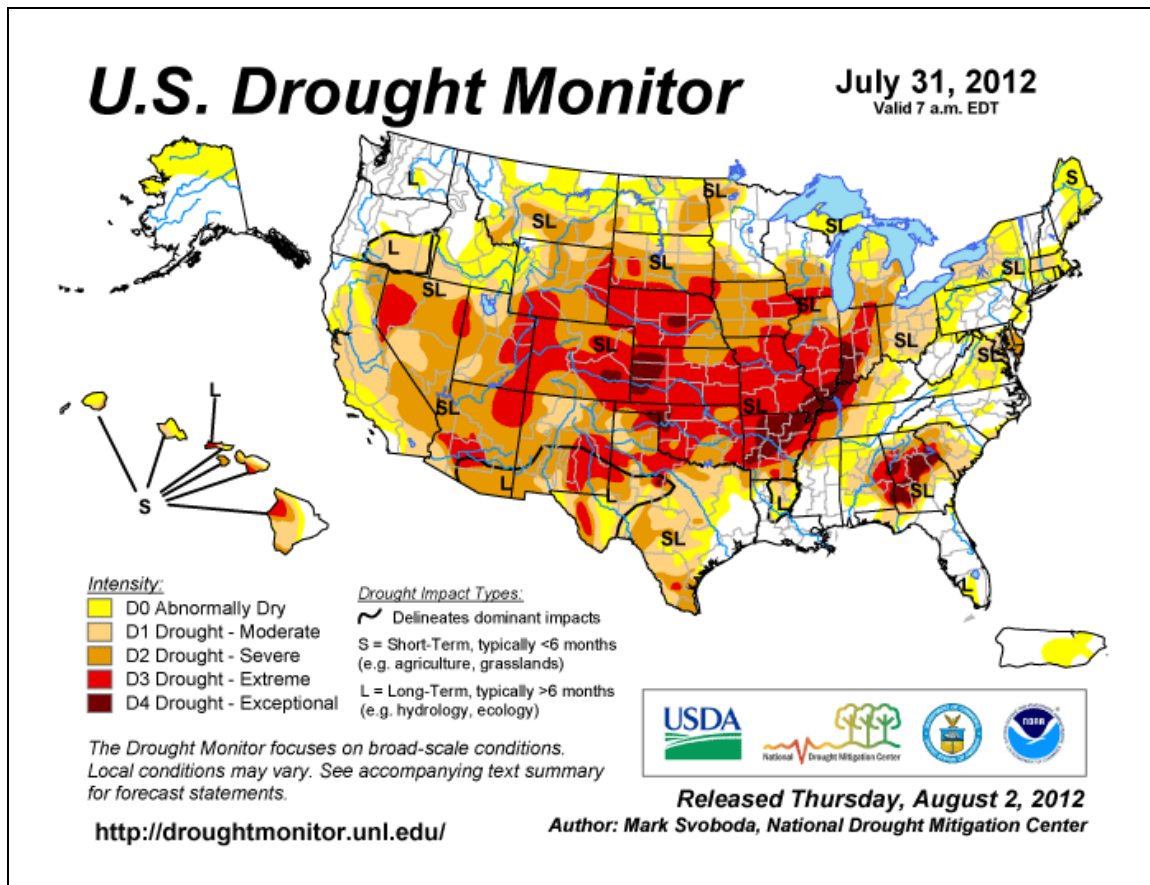


Fig. 3: Current [Drought Monitor](#) weekly summary. The exceptional D4 levels of drought are found over the Southeast and scattered across the corn belt of the Midwest into Colorado. For more drought news, see [Drought Impact Reporter](#). Click for the latest statistics for [California Reservoirs](#). The monthly [drought indicator blend and component percentiles](#) spreadsheet is a great resource for climate division drought statistics.

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**.

31 July 2012 - OKLAHOMA CITY (AP) - Gov. Mary Fallin has declared a state of emergency in all 77 Oklahoma counties due to extreme or exceptional drought conditions.

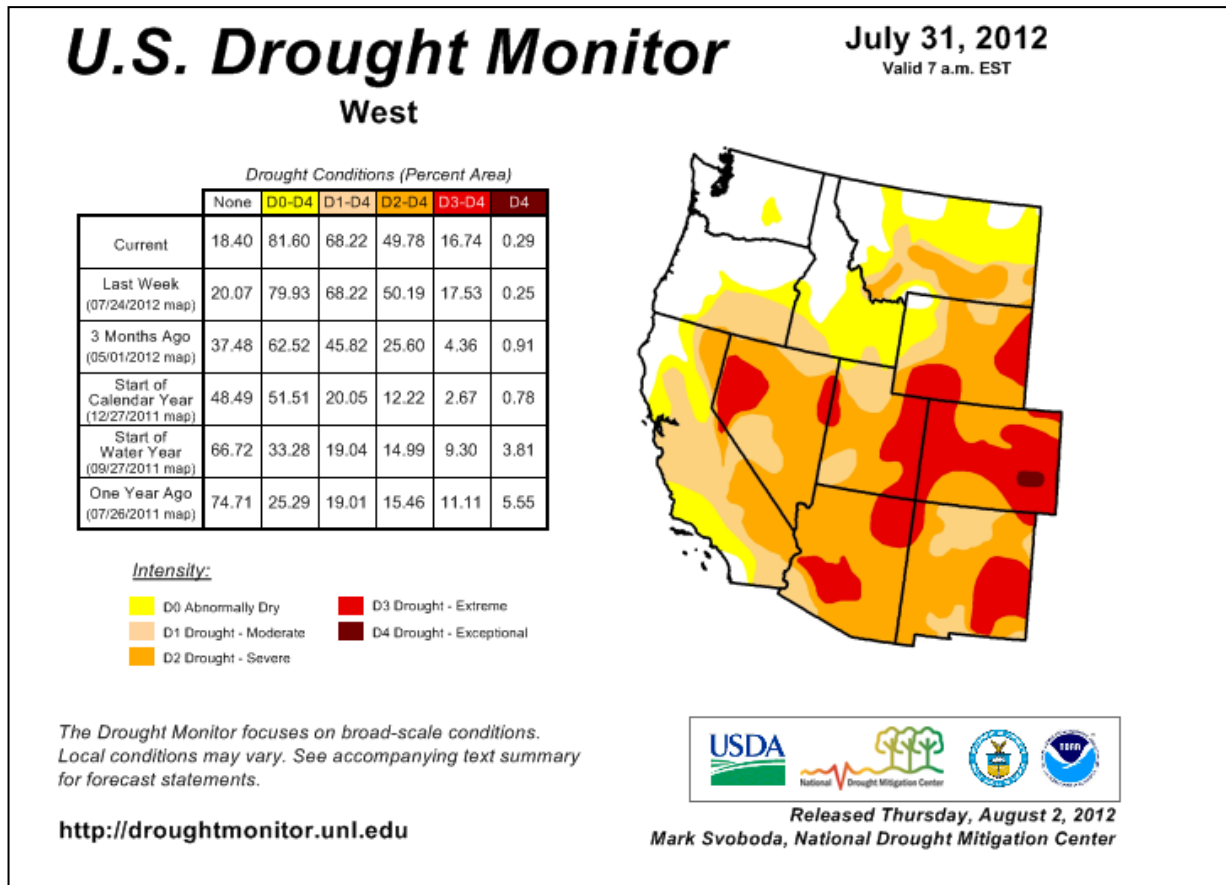


Fig. 3a: Drought Monitor for the [Western States](#) with statistics over various time periods. Note a slight deterioration in D2 to D4 this week.

Agriculture

[Boulder County ranchers feel squeeze of this summer's drought](#) July 24, **Boulder County, Colorado.**
[Drought forces livestock producers to haul water](#) July 26, **Illinois**
[Drought's impact trickling down from Northern states](#) July 26, **Mississippi.**
[Forecast: U.S. drought will burn through \\$12 billion](#) July 26, **U.S.**
[Livestock, ethanol industries squabble](#) July 19, **Iowa.**
[Report: U.S. cattle count lowest in 40 years](#) July 23, **U.S**
[Severe Drought Seen as Driving Cost of Food Up](#) July 25, **U.S.**
[Small farmers also hurt by drought](#) July 22, **Indiana.**
[Texas Cattle Feeders Association President Says Back-to-Back Tough Years Hitting Feedlots Hard](#)
 July 27, **Texas, Oklahoma and New Mexico.**

Water Supply & Quality

[In deep drought, Ill. towns turn to water limits](#) - July 27, **Illinois.**
[Kansas To Halt Release Of Water From 3 Reservoirs](#) - July 26, **Kansas.**
[Water supplies in 8 towns 'in trouble'](#) - July 27, **Nebraska.**

Weekly Snowpack and Drought Monitor Update Report

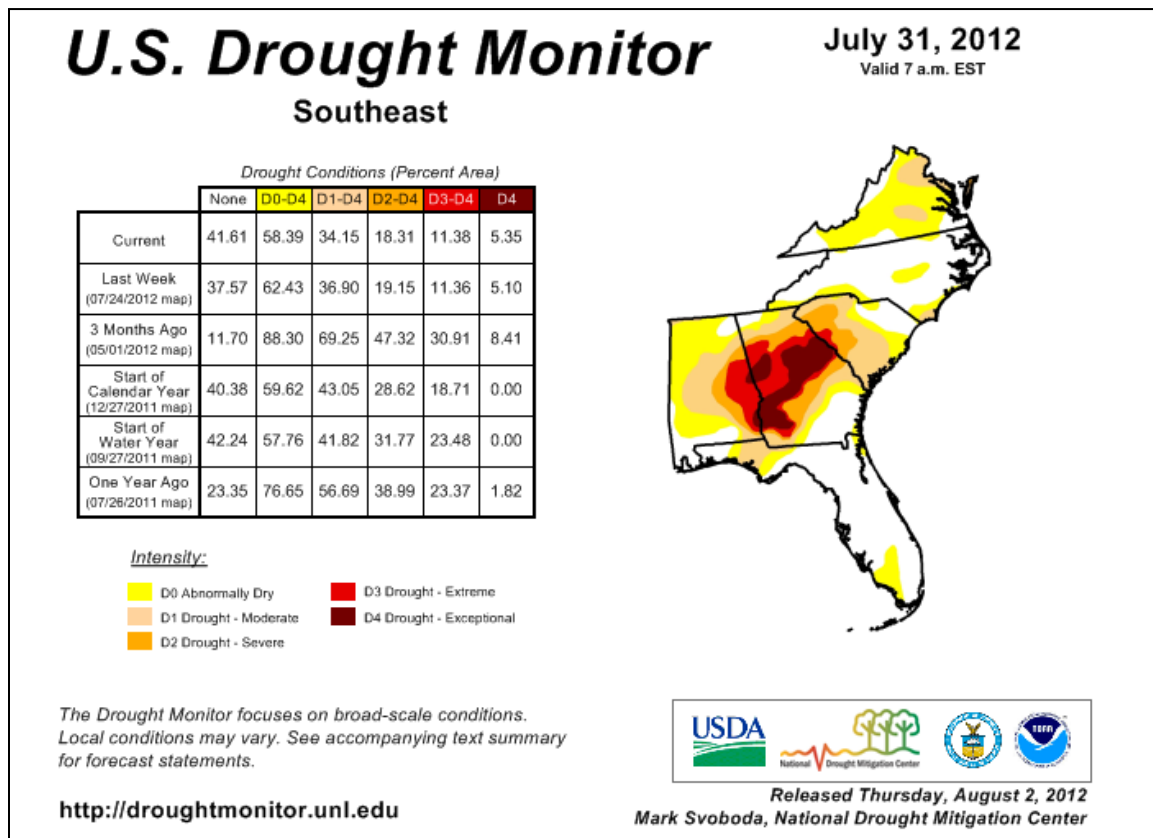


Fig. 3b: Drought Monitor for the [Southeastern States](#) with statistics over various time periods. Note no significant changes this week.

GA

According to the National Agriculture Statistics Service's Georgia Field Office, there were 6.2 days suitable for fieldwork for the week ending Sunday, July 29, 2012. Statewide topsoil moisture was rated at 11% very short, 50% short, 38% adequate, 1% surplus. Subsoil moisture 18% very short, 52% short, 30% adequate, 0% surplus. Precipitation estimates for the state ranged from no rain up to 3.4 inches. Average high temperatures ranged from the mid 70's to the high 90's. Average low temperatures ranged from the mid 60's to the mid 70's.

SC

Triple digit temperatures and summer thunderstorms were present during the week ending July 29, 2012. The week began with temperatures reaching the high nineties but gave way to mercury levels over 100 degrees by Wednesday. Isolated thunderstorms were present providing inches of rain in some areas with little to no rain in others. The coastal areas of the State benefited most with many counties receiving multiple inches of rainfall. The State average rainfall for the period was 0.8 inches.

However, soil moisture conditions dropped to 13% very short, 43% short and 44% adequate. The State average temperature for the week was five degrees above normal with 6.5 days suitable for fieldwork.

Weekly Snowpack and Drought Monitor Update Report

U.S. Drought Monitor

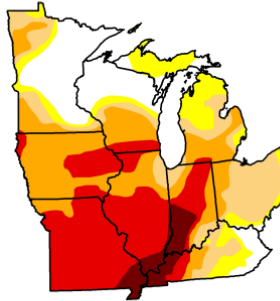
July 31, 2012
Valid 7 a.m. EST

Midwest

	Drought Conditions (Percent Area)					
	None	D0-D4	D1-D4	D2-D4	D3-D4	D4
Current	17.22	62.78	71.01	55.41	31.80	4.96
Last Week (07/24/2012 map)	13.13	66.87	73.69	55.53	28.92	4.33
3 Months Ago (05/01/2012 map)	56.78	43.22	16.58	5.35	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 (07/26/2011 map)	79.30	20.70	0.86	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, August 2, 2012
Mark Svoboda, National Drought Mitigation Center

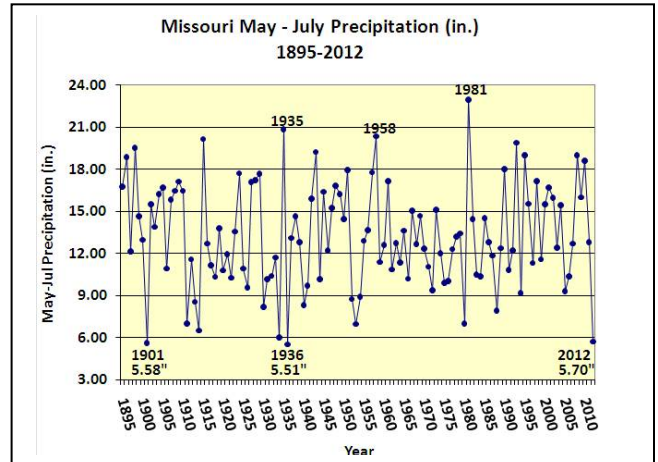


Fig. 3c: Drought Monitor for the [Mid-West](#) with statistics over various time periods. Note no significant changes this week. At right, Missouri is having their 3rd driest May-July period on record.

U.S. Drought Monitor

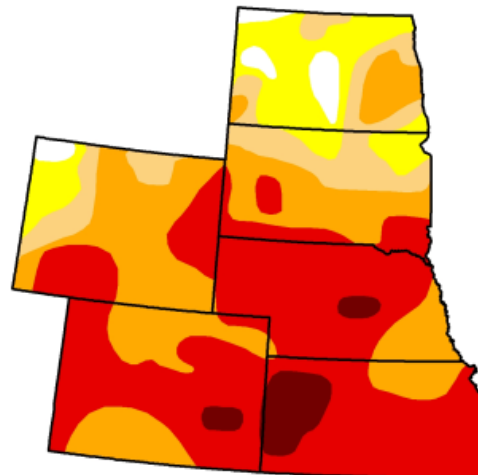
July 31, 2012
Valid 7 a.m. EST

High Plains

	Drought Conditions (Percent Area)					
	None	D0-D4	D1-D4	D2-D4	D3-D4	D4
Current	2.36	97.64	87.16	77.25	48.26	4.01
Last Week (07/24/2012 map)	2.32	97.68	86.74	76.98	44.51	2.51
3 Months Ago (05/01/2012 map)	57.05	42.95	13.27	6.41	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 (07/26/2011 map)	79.57	20.43	15.17	11.97	6.64	2.31

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.

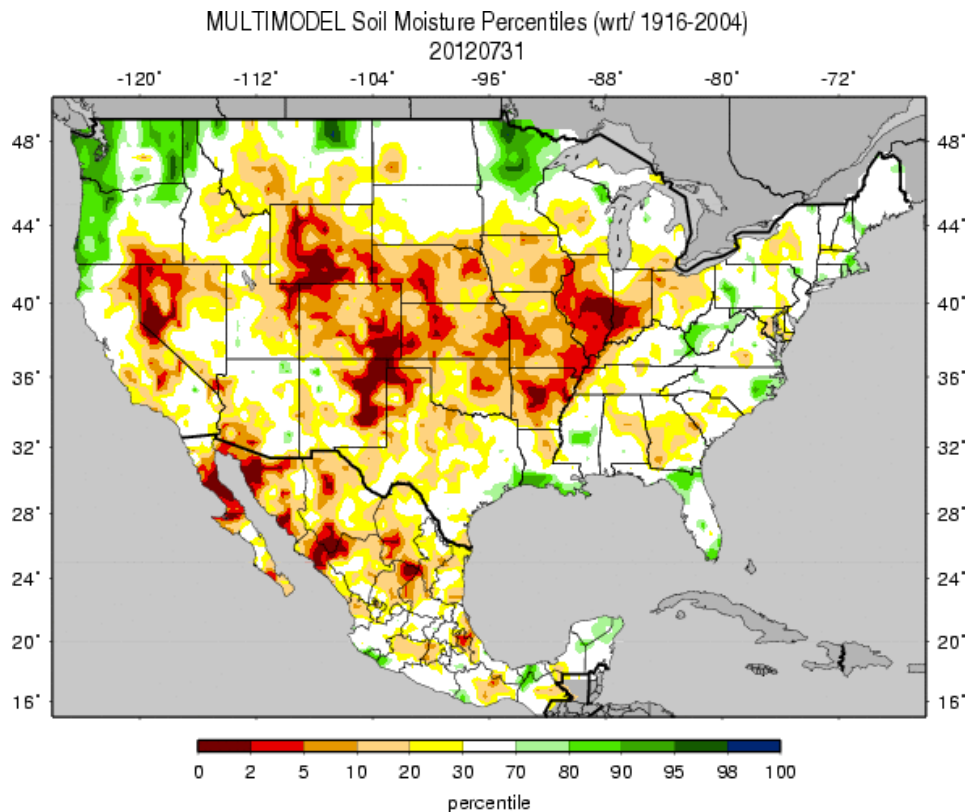
<http://droughtmonitor.unl.edu>



Released Thursday, August 2, 2012
Mark Svoboda, National Drought Mitigation Center

Fig. 3d: Drought Monitor for the [High Plains](#) with statistics over various time periods. Note some increase in D3 and D4 this week. See the latest [Kansas Drought Report](#).

Weekly Snowpack and Drought Monitor Update Report



Figs. 4: Soil Moisture ranking in [percentile](#) as of 31 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. Not much change since last week.

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](#).

Weekly Snowpack and Drought Monitor Update Report

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

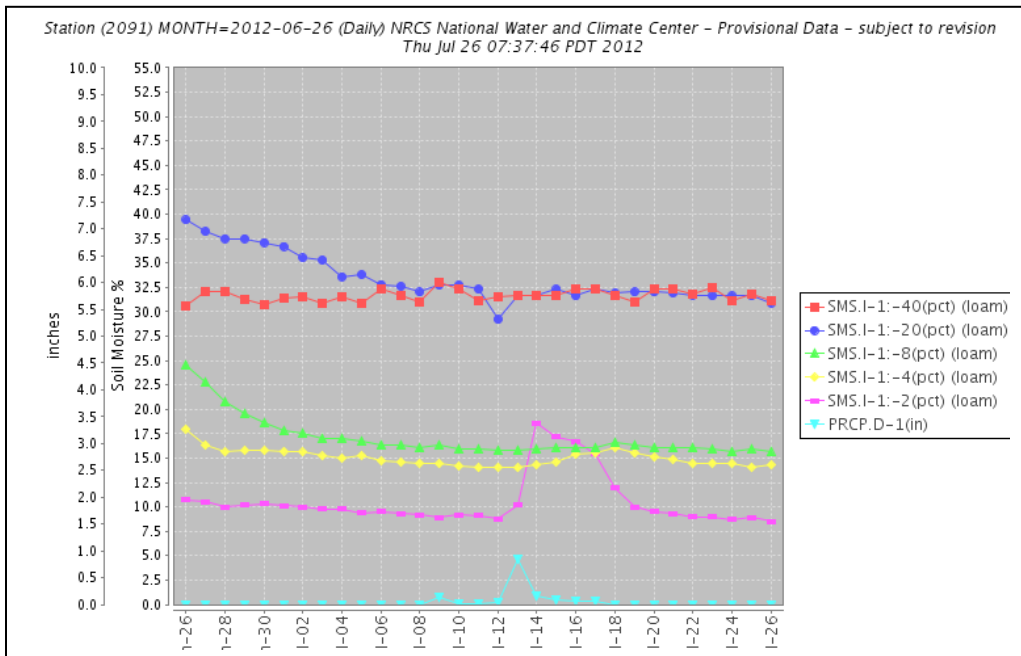


Fig. 5: This NRCS resource shows a site over [southeastern Arkansas](#) with good deep soil moisture but lower moisture nearer the surface.

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);

Weekly Snowpack and Drought Monitor Update Report

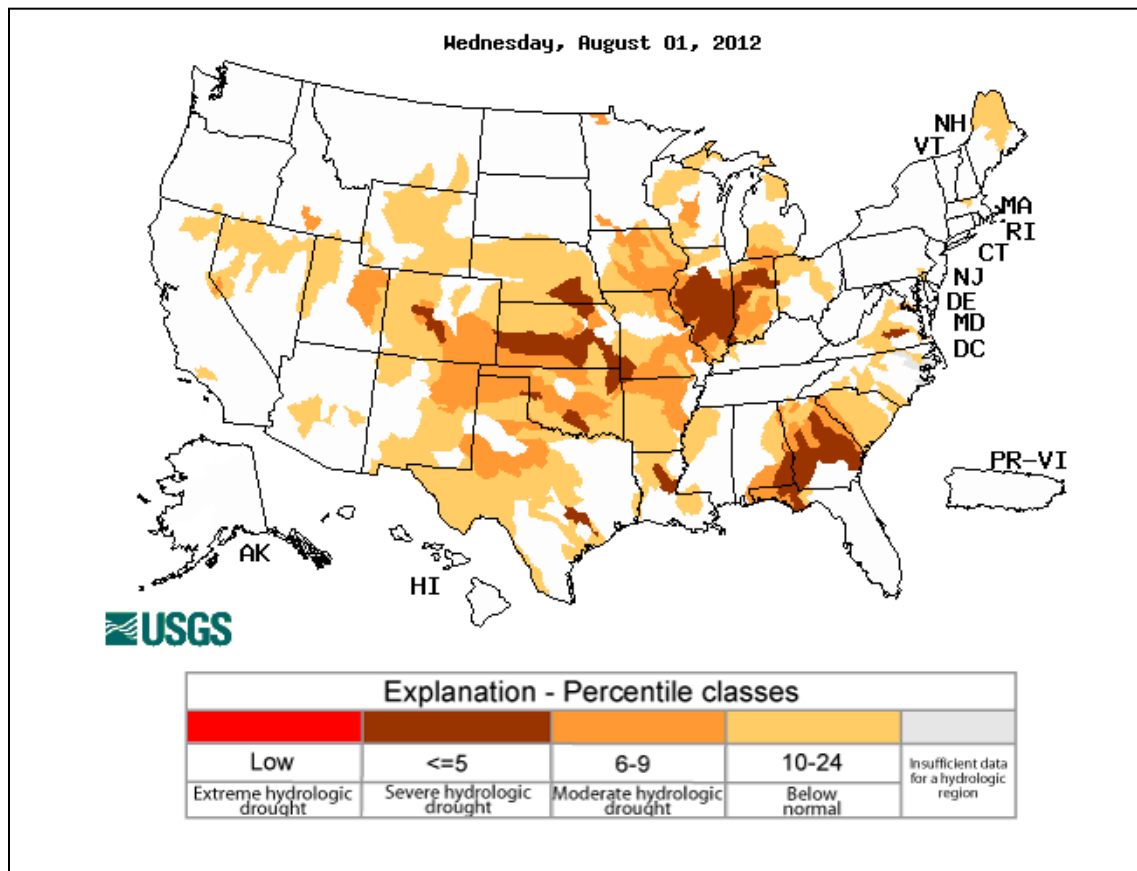


Fig. 6: Map of below normal 7-day average [streamflow](#) compared to historical streamflow for the day of year. **Severe** conditions exist over parts of Colorado, Kansas, Nebraska, southwest Missouri, Oklahoma, Texas, Illinois, Indiana, Louisiana, and Virginia.

Weekly Snowpack and Drought Monitor Update Report

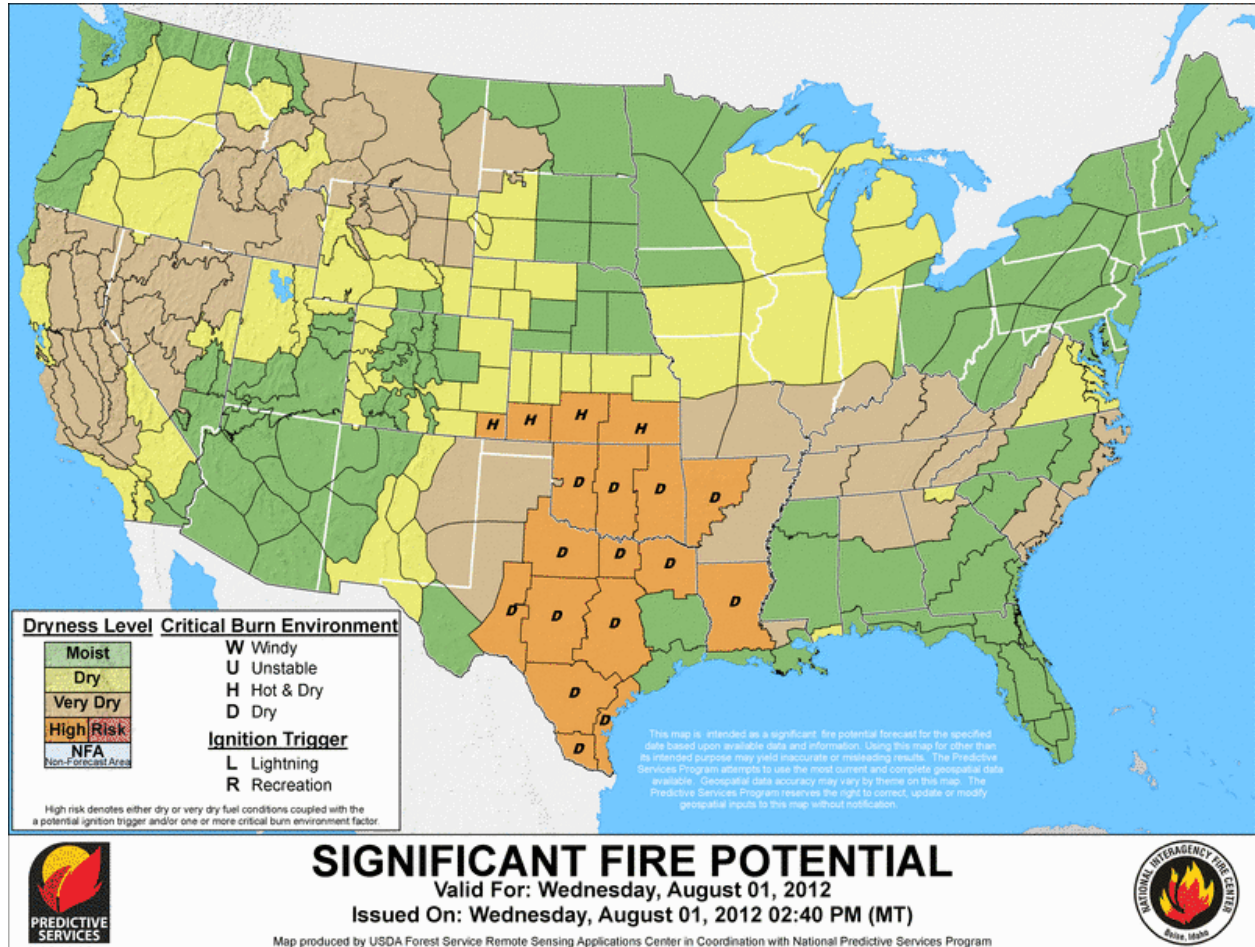


Fig. 7: [Significant fire potential](#) from yesterday. This resource also provides forecasts out to 7 days. Also check out: [NOAA's Fire Server](#). Risk has increased over Southern Plains during the past several days. Also see: [Experimental Southwest area wildland fire smoke impact awareness page](#)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

Weekly Snowpack and Drought Monitor Update Report

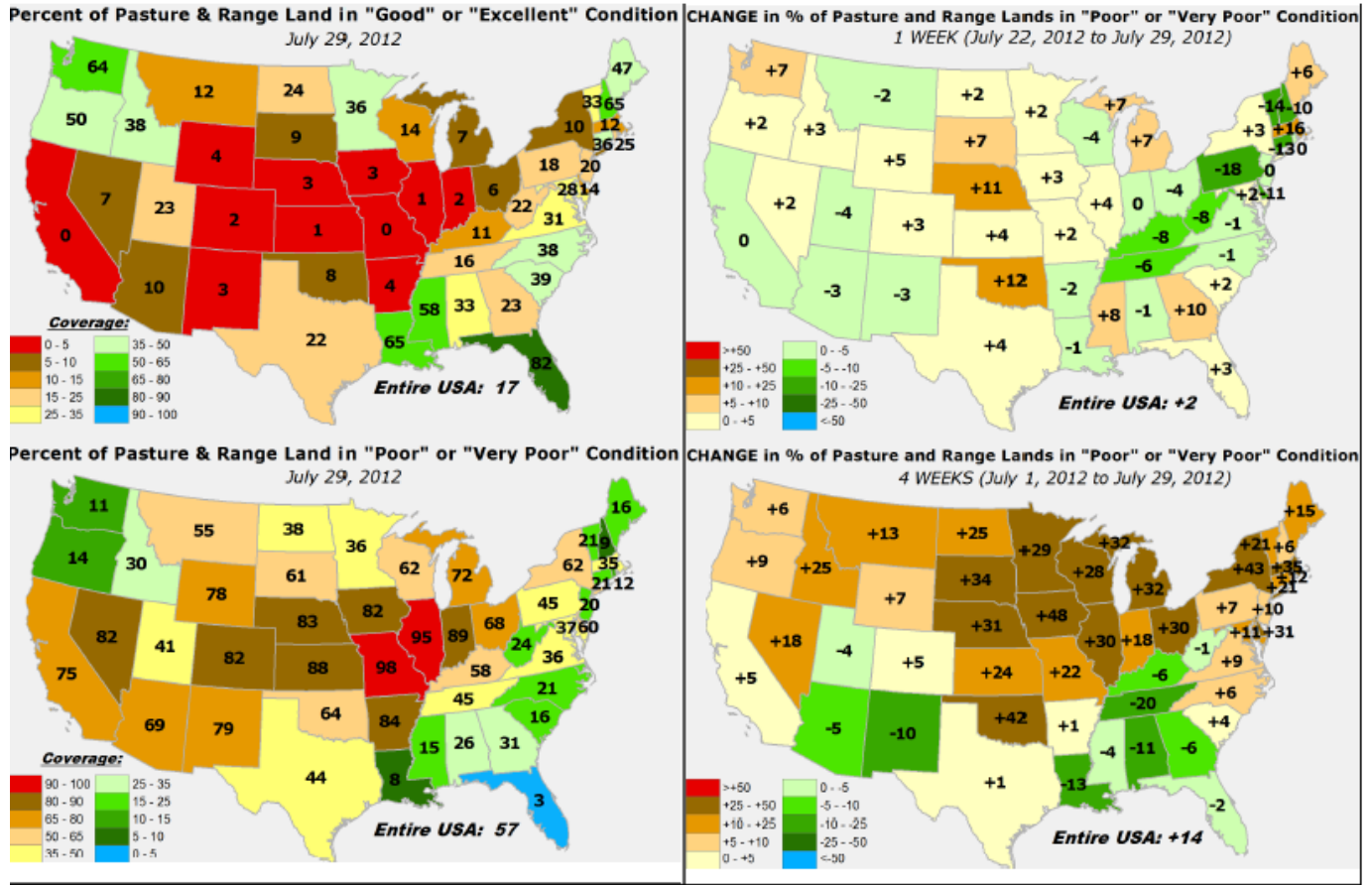


Fig. 8: [Pasture and range land conditions](#) and changes during the past week. Colorado and Nevada have the most poor or very poor conditions (lower left panel). Utah has experienced the most improvement this week over the West (upper right panel). Iowa has experienced the worst decline nationally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

Also see: [Vegetation anomaly map](#)

Weekly Snowpack and Drought Monitor Update Report

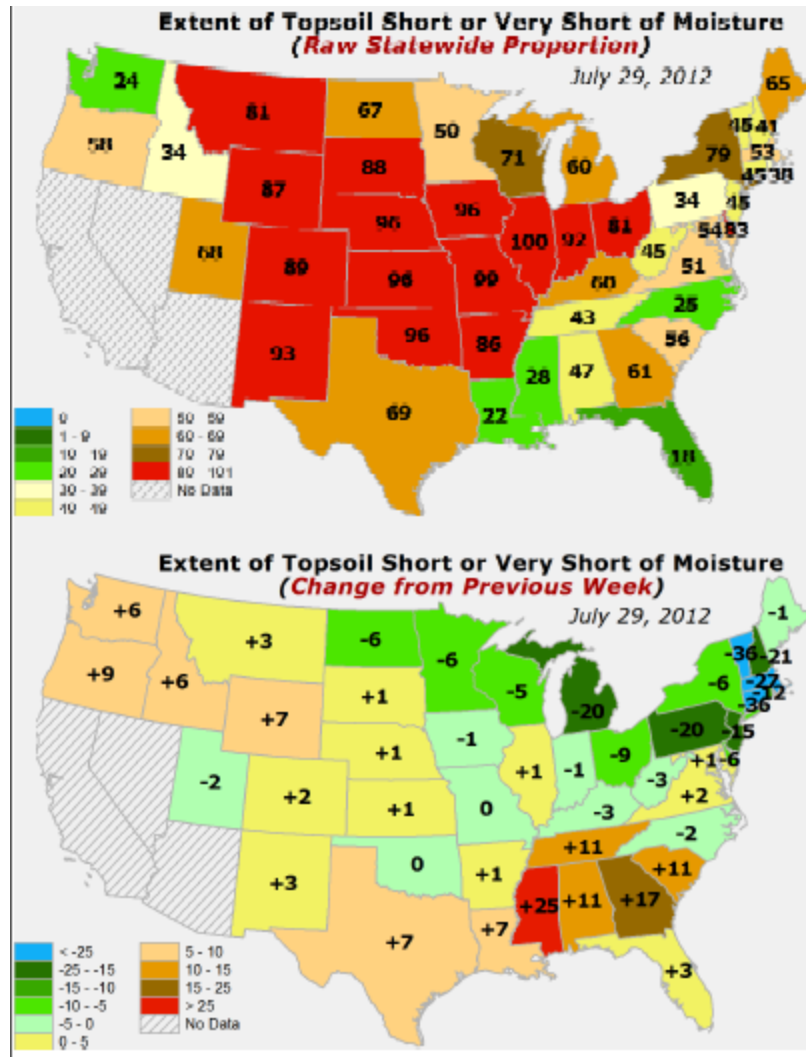


Fig. 9: [Top Soil conditions](#) and changes during the past week. Much of the Rocky Mountain States, the Great Plains, and Great Lakes Region experiencing extreme dryness (top panel). Louisiana has experienced the worst decline nationally due the past (bottom panel).

National Drought Summary -- July 31, 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/>.

The Northeast and Mid-Atlantic: Short-term dryness led to an introduction of D0 in eastern and northern Maine. Vermont, New Hampshire and eastern New York also shared in a slight

Weekly Snowpack and Drought Monitor Update Report

reduction of D0 compared to last week. Moderate rains across a good portion of Pennsylvania led to 1-category improvements and this trend continued down into parts of northwestern Maryland, West Virginia and western Virginia. In the Carolinas, favorable rains improved the D1 along coastal South Carolina and led to a reduction of D0 in eastern North Carolina as well. Low streamflows and ground water levels have led to a slight expansion of D2 in the Delmarva Peninsula.

The Southeast: Good rains (3 to 5 inches) fell across most of Tennessee, and parts of central Alabama also shared in good rains last week, leading to widespread 1-category improvements this week. Alabama continues to be affected by the long-term nature of multi-year D2-D3 entrenched across the eastern half of the state. This pattern continues across the border into Georgia, which has not seen much rainfall of late either, leading to an expansion of D3 and D4 in north-central and northwestern locales.

The Midwest: Most of the region registered above-normal temperatures for the period ending Tuesday morning. In fact, preliminary data show that July came in at 5-10 degrees above normal for the month of July. The region continues to be impacted not only by oppressive heat, but also by depleted soil moisture, desiccated pastures and widespread crop damages, livestock culling and elevated fire risk. Recent concerns have now turned to soybeans and water supply as the drought's duration persists. Some fared a bit better than others; southern Minnesota and southern and eastern Wisconsin benefitted the most from rains, leading to general 1-category improvements this week. Rains also fell across northern Indiana and southern Michigan, leaving things pretty much unchanged from last week. That said, there is a slight expansion of D3/D4 across western and central Indiana. Much of southern Ohio and eastern Kentucky also saw measurable improvement on the order of 1-category this week, pushing the drought to the west. Longer-term impacts still remain even given the short-term relief, but parts of eastern Kentucky and Ohio are seeing a rebound in streamflows, which is a good sign. In the western half of the region, things continue to worsen across Missouri and Arkansas, with continued deterioration and encroachment of D3 and even D4.

The Great Plains: Expansion is noted across most of the region this week as abnormally hot temperatures (5 to 10 degrees above normal) continue to plague the region, bringing stress to pastures, crops, livestock/wildlife, trees and humans alike. Rainfall during the last week was confined to small patches in the Black Hills and northeastern South Dakota and southeastern North Dakota. Those areas receiving the 2- to 3-inch rains were improved 1-category in the Dakotas. The same can't be said to the rest of the region as D1-D3 continue to advance across more of eastern Nebraska, southeastern South Dakota, Kansas, Oklahoma and the Texas Panhandle. In Kansas and the Panhandles of Oklahoma and Texas, D4 has also expanded, given the intense conditions and extreme impacts being observed. These areas can't seem to shake off last year's drought and have now been dragged back into it this year, with the exception being southeastern Texas, which has continued to see a much more favorable wet pattern the past several months.

In addition to the large geographic footprint of this year's drought, the quick onset and rapid ramping up of intensity, coupled with extreme temperatures and subsequent impacts, has really left an imprint on those affected and has set this drought apart from anything we have seen at this scale over the past several decades.

The West: The West remains relatively quiet in most parts, with the West Coast benefitting from below-normal temperatures last week as well. Warmer temperatures continue to plague

Weekly Snowpack and Drought Monitor Update Report

the Rockies and Front Range while precipitation was mostly confined to Arizona and Colorado, where monsoon rains continue to bring relief. Changes this week on the map are marked by 1-category improvement (from D3 to D2) in north-central and southwestern Colorado as well as eastern Utah. The same can't be said for southeastern Colorado, where D3 has now expanded to cover this region as well as northeastern New Mexico, western Kansas and the Oklahoma Panhandle. To the north, Montana has seen recent dryness as well, leading to a slight expansion of D0 across the northern tier counties.

Hawaii, Alaska and Puerto Rico: Most of the islands continue with the status quo this week, but deterioration is noted on both Kauai and Molokai this week, where lowland dryness continues to hinder pasture growth and is hampering livestock operations.

Alaska and Puerto Rico remain unchanged this week.

Looking Ahead: The 5-day forecast (August 1-6) calls for a mixed bag of potential, with the best chances of precipitation being located over western Colorado, the northern and Central Plains (including northwestern Minnesota), parts of the Upper Midwest, the Northeast and the Southeast. Temperatures are expected to be above normal in the Pacific Northwest, Northeast, and Southern Plains while the Northern Plains may come in a bit cooler than normal.

For the period August 7-11, a continuation of the recent pattern is expected to persist with above-normal temperatures dominating most of the country, the areas of exception being the West Coast and Florida. Below-normal precipitation appears likely in the southern and east-central Plains spreading into Missouri and northern Arkansas. Those areas projected to see a greater likelihood of precipitation are the Four Corners, Upper Great Lakes, Gulf Coast, Atlantic Seaboard and the northern tier states in the Northeast from New York to Maine.

Author: [Mark Svoboda, National Drought Mitigation Center](#)

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

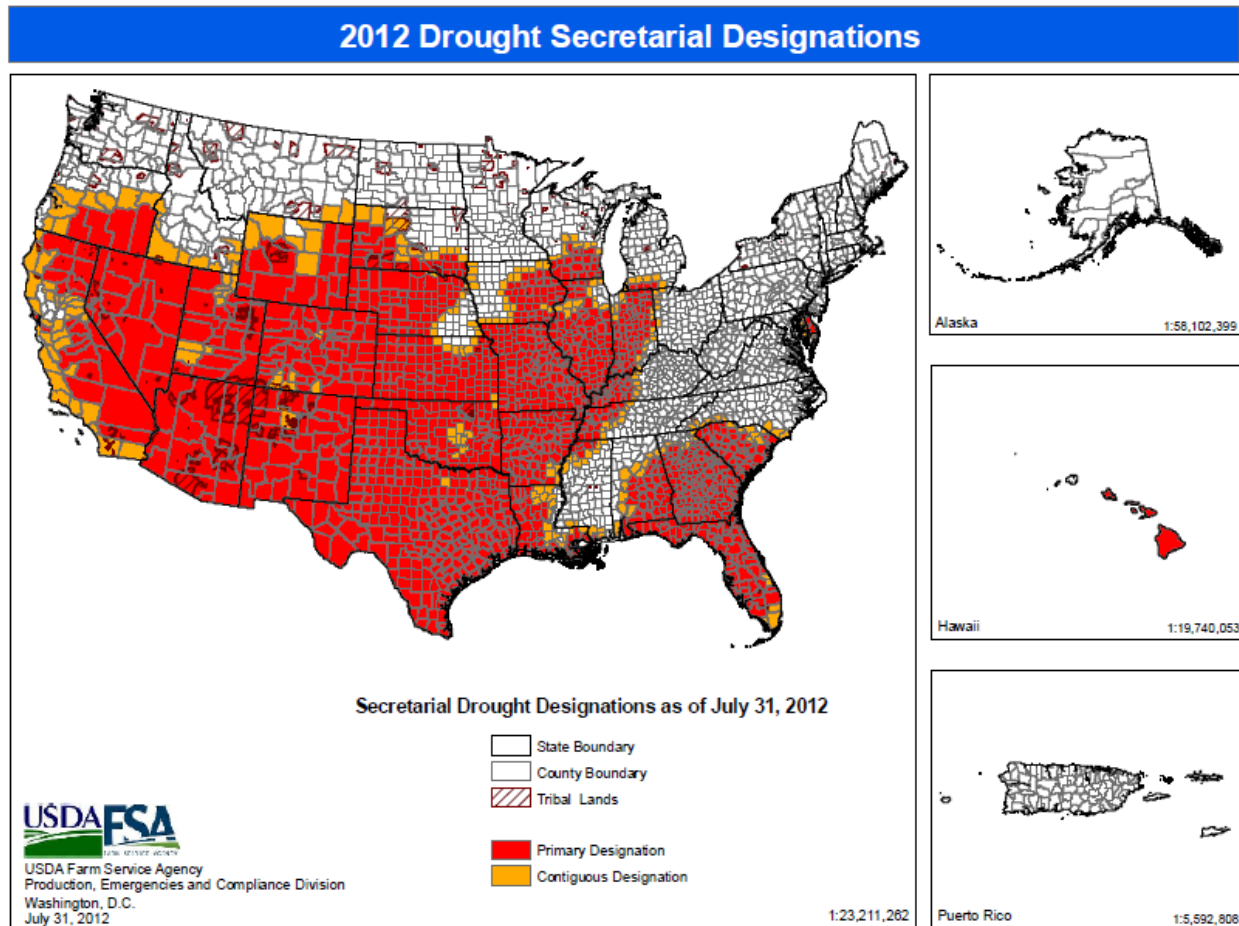
Drought or Dryness Types

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

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

Updated August 1, 2012

Special Drought Update



Map shows designations across the country under USDA's amended rule. The faster, more efficient process will immediately expand assistance to more than 1,000 counties in 26 states.



Release No. 0260.12

Contact:

Office of Communications (202)720-4623

Agriculture Secretary Vilsack Announces New Drought Assistance, Designates an

Weekly Snowpack and Drought Monitor Update Report

Additional 218 Counties as Primary Natural Disaster Areas

Nearly 4 Million Acres of Land Open to Haying and Grazing; Obama Administration-wide drought response continues

WASHINGTON, Aug. 1, 2012—Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack today announced two new pieces of disaster assistance for farmers and ranchers impacted by the nation's worsening drought. First, Vilsack is expanding emergency haying and grazing on approximately 3.8 million acres of conservation land to bring greater relief to livestock producers dealing with shortages of hay and pastureland. Second, the Secretary announced that crop insurance companies have agreed to provide a short grace period for farmers on insurance premiums in 2012. As a result, farming families now have an extra 30 days to make payments without incurring interest penalties on unpaid premiums.

Earlier in the day, Vilsack signed disaster designations for an additional 218 counties in 12 states as primary natural disaster areas due to damage and losses caused by drought and excessive heat. Counties designated today are in the states of Arkansas, Georgia, Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Mississippi, Nebraska, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Tennessee, and Wyoming. More than half (50.3 percent) of all counties in the United States have been designated disaster areas by USDA in 2012, mainly due to drought.

"President Obama and I will continue to take swift action to get help to America's farmers and ranchers through this difficult time," said Vilsack. "The assistance announced today will help U.S. livestock producers dealing with climbing feed prices, critical shortages of hay and deteriorating pasturelands. Responding to my request, crop insurance companies indicated that producers can forgo interest penalties to help our nation's farm families struggling with cash flow challenges. The Obama Administration intends to continue helping those who farm or ranch and live and work in rural America through this period of hardship."

Emergency Haying and Grazing

In response to the expanding drought, Secretary Vilsack today announced that livestock producers and other participants in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) will now be able to hay and graze acres that have been ineligible in the past. Many of these additional acres have wetland-related characteristics and are likely to contain better quality hay and forage than on other CRP acres. There are approximately 3.8 million acres that will now be eligible for emergency haying and grazing, subject to certain conditions. Haying and grazing may only occur under strict compliance rules to help minimize impacts on these sensitive specialty practices. In addition, USDA will conduct follow-up monitoring and evaluation of these opened CRP areas to study the effects of the drought and USDA's emergency haying and grazing actions. Producers should contact their local Farm Service Agency offices for additional information.

Federal Crop Insurance

Secretary Vilsack announced today that crop insurance companies have agreed to provide a short grace period for farmers on insurance premiums in 2012. To help

Weekly Snowpack and Drought Monitor Update Report

producers who may have cash flow problems due to natural disasters, Secretary Vilsack sent a letter to crop insurance companies asking them to voluntarily defer the accrual of any interest on unpaid spring crop premiums by producers until November 1, 2012. In turn, to assist the crop insurance companies, USDA will not require crop insurance companies to pay uncollected producer premiums until one month later.

During the 2012 crop year, USDA has designated 1,584 unduplicated counties across 32 states as disaster areas—1,452 due to drought—making all qualified farm operators in the areas eligible for low-interest emergency loans. The U.S. Drought Monitor indicates that 66 percent of the nation's hay acreage is in an area experiencing drought, while approximately 73 percent of the nation's cattle acreage is in an area experiencing drought. During the week ending July 29, USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service reported that U.S. soybeans rated 37 percent very poor to poor, matching the lowest conditions observed during the drought of 1988. NASS also reported that 48 percent of the U.S. corn crop was rated very poor to poor, while 57 percent of the nation's pastures and rangeland are rated very poor or poor condition.

Last week, President Obama met with Secretary Vilsack and members of his Cabinet to discuss additional steps the Administration could take to help farmers, ranchers and business owners manage and recover from the current drought. Later in the week, President Obama directed Secretary Vilsack to convene a meeting of the White House Rural Council to update members and stakeholders on the Administration response to the drought. Vilsack will update Rural Council members and stakeholders again next week on new steps taken by the Administration to combat the drought.

Under Secretary Vilsack's leadership, USDA has announced a variety of steps to get assistance to producers impacted by the worsening drought, including:

Allowing additional acres under CRP to be used for emergency haying or grazing. The action allows lands that are not yet classified as "under severe drought" but that are "abnormally dry" to be used for haying and grazing.

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.

Authorizing 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.

Encouraging 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.

Reducing the emergency loan interest rate from 3.75 percent to 2.25 percent.

Lowering the reduction in the annual rental payment to producers on CRP acres used for emergency haying or grazing from 25 percent to 10 percent in 2012.

Simplifying the Secretarial disaster designation process and reduced the time it takes to designate counties affected by disasters by 40 percent.

USDA agencies have been working for weeks with state and local officials, as well as

Weekly Snowpack and Drought Monitor Update Report

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 and small agricultural cooperatives that are economically affected by the drought in their community.

Also today, U.S. Department of Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood will convene a call with states to listen and discuss the ways in which U.S. DOT can work with Governors and State Departments of Transportation to help communities impacted by the drought. Secretary LaHood will be joined by both Anne Ferro, Administrator of the Federal Motor Carriers Safety Administration and Greg Nadeau, Deputy Administrator for the Federal Highways Administration.

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.