

Drought Concerns NE Gov. Heineman

(KLZA) In his weekly newsletter to residents of Nebraska Governor Dave Heineman shares information on the expected weather conditions facing Nebraska this spring and summer.

Dear Fellow Nebraskans:

I want to share an update on the expected weather conditions we are facing as a state, in particular so our farmers and ranchers can make the best decisions for their businesses and families in the upcoming seasons.

In 2012, Nebraska experienced record-setting heat and dryness. We would like a return to normal weather pattern in 2013, but as spring approaches, it is apparent that conditions have not improved. According to the U.S. Drought Monitor, most of Nebraska remains in the “exceptional” drought category.

Unfortunately, we are actually in a worse situation this spring compared to last year. After a fairly wet four previous years, that included major flooding in 2011, dryness was just beginning to creep into the Panhandle and northeast Nebraska in April 2012. While conditions deteriorated quickly, we had entered the 2012 growing season with full reservoirs, good stream flows, moisture in the soil and good pasture conditions. All of these items are lacking as we approach this growing season.

The consequences of another season of drought will likely be felt most intensely by our agricultural community. That is why the University of Nebraska Extension staff members have been especially focused on giving our farmers and ranchers the information they need to make drought management decisions that are right for their particular operation.

Over the winter months, Extension staff has hosted webinars and seminars. They have been interviewed for countless news articles about drought mitigation options. This has included information on pasture stocking rates, alternative forage uses, deficit irrigation, crop seeding rates and growing forages under a pivot, among others. Many Nebraska farmers and ranchers are utilizing these resources and developing a feasible plan to manage their operations through another dry year.

Besides agriculture, our public water system supply managers also need to be planning ahead to prepare for potential low water supplies. State officials have communicated with appropriate county, city, and Natural Resources District officials regarding preparations for another dry season. Water systems that were impacted in 2012 may have the greatest likelihood to see impacts again this season.

Officials also are planning ahead for another potentially challenging year for wildfires. Recently, the Nebraska Emergency Management Agency and the Nebraska Forest Service conducted wildland fire training in Lincoln for Nebraska Army National Guard aviation personnel, equipping these individuals with basic training for wildland fire suppression.

There is a wealth of information available for all Nebraskans, urban and rural alike, to help deal with drought-related challenges. Much of it can be found by visiting the University of Nebraska Extension site at <http://droughtresources.unl.edu>. There also is information available at www.droughtcentral.nebraska.gov.

Each of us can do our part to manage low water resources in the face of the ongoing drought. Every little bit can help as we work to conserve water resources for public drinking supplies, for fighting fires, and for agriculture.

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