

## **Drought Spreads Throughout North Dakota**

For the first time in nearly a year, North Dakota is facing a statewide drought.

The latest drought assessment from the National Drought Mitigation Center (NDMC) shows that 100 percent of the state is experiencing at least abnormally dry conditions, while moderate drought is ruling 55 percent of the state.

“It still is not the worst news,” says Adnan Akyuz, state climatologist and assistant professor of climatology in North Dakota State University’s Soil Science Department. “Thirty-nine percent of the state is experiencing at least severe drought, while 2 percent of the state is under an extreme drought depiction.”

The last time drought covered the entire state was Feb. 20, 2007. That was the end of a 14-week stretch in which 100 percent of the state was classified as at least abnormally dry.

North Dakota is not agriculturally active this time of the year, so the agricultural impacts of a statewide drought may not be apparent, according to Akyuz. He is concerned, however, that the precipitation deficits have the potential to lead to spring moisture shortages.

“Drought conditions as of Feb. 5 are not depicting a promising picture for the upcoming growing season in North Dakota,” he says. “Long-term precipitation statistics look really bad.”

The worst drought conditions are in the southwestern corner and northern third of the state.

The average precipitation in southwestern North Dakota for the 90-day period ending Feb. 7 is only 24 percent of normal, which makes that the worst 90-day period in the state’s history. If it were the growing season, the NDMC would rate the area as “exceptional,” which is the center’s worst drought category.

The current La Nina conditions are expected to last into the spring, which could continue to have an impact on drought conditions, Akyuz says. La Niña is defined as cooler-than-normal sea-surface temperatures in the central and eastern tropical Pacific Ocean that impact global weather patterns. Spring precipitation normally is above normal during La Niña years, but that hasn’t always been the case.

“We should be talking about drought already when there are negligible impacts so that we have time to take mitigation measures for the spring, when we are more vulnerable to greater impacts,” Akyuz says.

For more information about the drought conditions in North Dakota, visit the National Drought Mitigation Web site at [http://drought.unl.edu/dm/DM\\_state.htm?ND,HP](http://drought.unl.edu/dm/DM_state.htm?ND,HP).

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