

July Weather Far From Normal

July 2008 will go into climatological records as a near-normal month.

But was July's weather really near-normal? Adnan Akyuz, state climatologist and assistant professor of climatology in North Dakota State University's Soil Science Department, doesn't think so.

The official state average temperature for July was 69.3 F, which was just 0.6 F above the 30-year average from 1971 to 2000. That may surprise most North Dakotans.

"Most populated areas in North Dakota experienced cooler-than-normal conditions," Akyuz says. "Only the parts of the state that experienced warmer-than-normal conditions were in the western rural areas of the state. Only 25 percent of the total state was warmer than normal."

The reason for the discrepancy is that the magnitude of the difference in the warmer temperatures was so much greater than that of the cooler temperatures, which skewed the state average toward slightly warmer than normal.

"That is why taking a statewide average becomes very misleading sometimes," Akyuz says.

"Unfortunately, these warmer-than-normal areas were the most drought-stricken areas in North Dakota," he adds. "Severe to extreme drought has persisted since the beginning of this growing season."

The July 29 drought assessment from the National Drought Mitigation Center showed that 100 percent of the state was experiencing at least abnormally dry conditions, while extreme drought was affecting 38 percent of the state.

"It was the second time when 100 percent of the state was covered with at least abnormally dry conditions," Akyuz says. "The last time drought covered the entire state was April 1, 2008. That was the end of a nine-week stretch in which 100 percent of the state was classified as at least abnormally dry."

Officially, the state had an average of 2.73 inches of rain in July. The state normally has an average of 2.75 inches during the month. The least precipitation fell in the western and north-central parts of the state, where extreme drought persisted.

This time of the year, the state is very active agriculturally, so the impacts of a statewide drought are significant, according to Akyuz.

"I am especially concerned about the extent of the extreme drought coverage," he says. "Even though the conditions today improved since last week, 30 percent of the state is still under an extreme drought depiction."

The extreme drought coverage spans from Divide County eastward to Bottineau County and southward to Slope and Hettinger counties.

Daily maximum wind speeds averaged from 28 mph in southwestern North Dakota to 17 mph in northeastern North Dakota during July.

“When you add high wind speeds to dry atmosphere, evaporation from the soil and plants becomes so significant that plants will suffer,” Akyuz says.

The Climate Prediction Center is not calling for any improvement in the existing drought conditions in western North Dakota and eastern Montana.

“For the citizens of North Dakota, July 2008 was far from being a normal,” Akyuz says. “I hope farmers can get some state assistance.”

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.

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