



SEPTEMBER 2006 DROUGHT UPDATE

Water Availability Task Force Co-Chairs

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Executive Summary

An El Niño event has developed and is likely to continue into early 2007. If the El Niño event strengthens further, that would favor a wet fall from northeastern Colorado into southeastern Wyoming. A persistent El Niño should also benefit water supplies in the southwest part of Colorado – an area negatively impacted by this year's low snowpack and precipitation values.

- Statewide, the 2006 water year (Oct-Sept) precipitation ended on an average note with a slight drop from 2005. Annual precipitation levels are at 96% of average with notable recovery in the southern to southwest portion of the State, due to beneficial summer moisture. The southeast part of the State continues to be significantly below average for annual precipitation despite summer rains.
- The Surface Water Supply Index (SWSI) values for August 2006 have increased in four of the seven basins compared to July 2006 with marked improvement in the Rio Grande and San Juan Dolores Basins. Streamflows throughout the State were about average with the exception of the South Platte Basin, where flows were significantly below average and were tracking the driest year of 1964.
- Reservoir storage throughout the State is near average for this time of year with some key exceptions. Irrigation reservoirs in the South Platte Basin are extremely low levels and near empty in some cases, while municipal reservoirs are in excellent shape. John Martin Reservoir, in the Arkansas Basin, may have reached its lowest level, causing concern for the remaining fisheries pool. Reservoir carryover storage in the Gunnison Basin will be greater than usual going into the winter season.
- The agriculture sector in Colorado continues to experience impacts from persistent drought conditions over several years. Harvested corn acreage in State is down by 110,000 acres from last year, in spite of the fact that 2006 is expected to be the 2nd largest corn crop on record nationally. This will negatively affect corn prices for Colorado farmers.
- Range and non-irrigated pasture conditions are still rough in places. Currently 36% of acreage is rated poor to very poor, 42% is fair, and 20% is good on a statewide basis. While late season precipitation has been welcome, it promotes excessive weed growth hampering grass recovery and forcing livestock producers to provide supplemental feeding driving costs up.
- According to the US Drought Monitor (9/19/06) drought intensity status has decreased for much of Colorado, with the drought category for the northeast section being lowered from severe to moderate drought. The category for the northwest, southeast, and central Colorado was also lowered from moderate to abnormally dry.
- According to the National Interagency Fire Center the Seasonal Wildland Fire Potential Outlook for Colorado, Sept - Nov 2006 is normal resulting from beneficial monsoonal weather patterns in late summer.
- Predictions from the NOAA-CIRES Climate Diagnostics Center are that Colorado will experience higher than average temperatures through January 2007 and that Colorado has an equal chance of above or below normal precipitation during that same time period.