

Above-average rainfall relieves some of drought

By Tam Lee

The drought which has afflicted Nebraskans for the past three years has been replaced by abundant rain in some parts of the state, according to one specialist.

"Trends over the past three years predicted more dry weather," said Dayle Williamson, Nebraska Natural Resources Commission director.

"There was a real turn around in the north-central part of the state. That area is much wetter than usual, about 150 per cent (more than) normal," he said.

In contrast, the southeastern part of the state is in a severe drought, and some farmers have lost crops there, he said. Lincoln is about normal, he added.

Precipitation has been normal or above for the state as a whole from March through August, except in June, said Arthur Douglas, UNL Assistant Professor of Geography.

"Drought was predicted by many people, but not by me," Douglas said.

Many people think the three year Nebraska drought is part of a 20-year cycle, he said. Cycles can be predicted by studying sunspots years before a drought occurs, he said.

That method is unreliable for more than six months at a time, he added.

By studying surface temperatures in the Pacific Ocean, Douglas said, he can tell what weather the Midwest will experience.

"Sea surface temperatures strongly affect drought because the ocean supplies most, if not all, the moisture for rainfall," he said.

"The temperature of the ocean affects evaporation and storms," he said. If the ocean temperature rises one degree Centigrade, 11 inches of water will evaporate into the atmosphere.

Douglas said predictions are made by studying temperature change in the Pacific, rather than Atlantic Ocean, because storms move from west to east.

The temperature in the Pacific started to rise at the end of last summer, indicating a wet season, Douglas said.

Despite the additional rainfall this summer, the ground water supply continues to decline in many areas of the state, but is rising in some areas, Williamson said.

The water table is declining, around York, Imperial, Alliance and O'Neill, he said.

"Even with normal rainfall there will be a decline in the water table because of irrigation wells," Williamson explained.

"I look for more and more controls on ground water usage to come along in the future," he said.

"People can't use all the water they want any more."



Photo by Ted Kirk

This boat, sitting in the mud where water used to be, is mute testimony to the effects of a three-year drought.

Veterans not using payment plan

Nebraska's student veterans are almost totally ignoring an advance payment plan designed to stop educational overpayments, according to James Smith, regional director of the Veterans Administration.

Smith said the plan is designed to prevent full semester payments to veterans who withdraw from school before the second semester ends.

The system was enacted by Congress last October and went into effect in June. In the past, veterans who registered for classes received an automatic advance payment for the first six weeks of school. Veterans then received payments on the first of each month.

Smith said with the new system students must apply for the advance payment 30 days before registration. Veterans then receive payments at the end of every month, Smith said.

For veterans who need more help there are delayed-interest loans of up to \$1800 per academic year and a work-study program paying \$625, \$250 to be paid in advance, Smith said.

Smith said the total dollar amounts will remain the same but a gap in payments is created. Under the new system veterans will receive the advance payment on Sept. 1, Smith said, but will not receive the next payment until Nov. 1. Veterans not applying for the advance payment will receive payments on Oct. 1, Nov. 1, and so on, Smith said.

Of the approximately 1500 veterans at UNL, Smith said only a small percentage have applied for the advance payment. Smith said the veterans apparently want to avoid the two month gap in payments.

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