

**Wyoming Department of Agriculture:
Climate Issues Update
Spring 2010 – May 20, 2010**

Agriculture in the state continues to be plagued by the variances and unpredictability of climate and weather patterns. The winter provided snow and moisture for the eastern part of the state. The dry pattern continued for the western part and shows up on the U.S. Drought Monitor as 43.4 percent of the state showing anywhere from abnormally dry to severe drought. May provided some timely moisture in many areas of the state which should help forage conditions for the short term. The Drought Monitor has no way of accounting for timing so the full story cannot be understood using this one tool. We are still very concerned about the impacts from the cumulative effects of the long-term drought and continuation of a drier pattern than what was recorded in the last decade.

Timing of moisture and warm-up is very important to agriculture production in the state for several reasons. Considerable spring moisture combined with cool temperatures has delayed planting in some areas and prevented soil warm-up, hindering ideal growing conditions. The moisture is beneficial on one hand, but can induce late-maturing crops susceptible to early freezes as seen in 2009. The timing of moisture can also be critical to hay production in the state. Untimely rains can dramatically reduce the value of a producer's hay crop, literally overnight.

Another factor associated with a cold spring is the delay of rangeland forage production. Plants are dependent on moisture and soil temperature threshold levels for them to come out of dormancy and begin their growth cycle for the year. Each plant has their own set of requirements, so they all respond a little differently. This becomes an issue for ranchers who operate on public lands under federal agency management. Management agencies have static turnout dates that are not based on the individual factors of the year. We actively work with the ranchers and the agencies to build a certain level of flexibility into management actions whenever possible. This includes monitoring to insure management decisions are based on science, not the calendar.

We continue to include grasshoppers as one of our major concerns for agriculture this year. It fits into the climate issues report as the number of grasshoppers predicted is highly dependent on the weather conditions. Even though we have experienced a cooler than average spring in most of the state, conditions to suppress the grasshoppers have not occurred. The hatch has begun in some areas, but has been delayed in others. Grasshoppers can prove devastating to forage and crops if infestations are above the economic threshold level. Monitoring still remains a very crucial activity to detect the presence of grasshoppers so that timely treatment can result in effective suppression if warranted.

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