

**Wyoming Department of Agriculture:
Climate Issues Update
Fall 2009 – November 30, 2009**

This year has presented its own set of challenges climatically for the agriculturists of the state. For the better part of the last decade, the biggest climate issue for agriculture was the drought. Now, in the latter half of 2009, the Drought Monitor reports that none of the state is in any sort of dry condition. According to the Drought Monitor, one year ago, 21.8% was facing some level of drought. Although producers have experienced significant amounts of precipitation, the timing of the precipitation was not always conducive for favorable agriculture production conditions. The Drought Monitor has no way of accounting for timing so the rest of the story is not told by a system that is so heavily relied upon.

Many places in the state received good moisture in the spring and on into a cool summer. This was good for most producers, but did cause a loss of value for early hay production when much of the early cuttings were rained on. The late moisture also led to later planting of row crops some of which were not ready for harvest before severe early freezes in the fall. A significant loss of sugar beets in the Basin occurred as a result of the freeze. Producers in Platte County had a disastrous hail in the middle of the summer. This event wiped out or greatly reduced the value of their crops.

For most of the state, rangeland conditions started out better than average. The grasshopper infestations in several counties interfered with what started out to be a good grass year. Many cattle came off summer pastures earlier than during the severe drought years as a result of the “mowing” of the grass by the hoppers.

As a result of the climate-related challenges agriculture producers faced in the 2009 growing season, several counties have requested the disaster designation status. Big Horn and Park based their request on severe freezes, Platte on the hail and Sheridan on grasshopper infestations and drought conditions. Several counties in Wyoming are included in disaster designations as a result of being contiguous to counties in other states with disaster destinations ranging from blizzards to grasshopper infestations to flooding to tornadoes. The counties included are Campbell, Crook, Goshen, Laramie, Niobrara, Sheridan, and Weston,

The Department of Agriculture is working proactively with other State and Federal agencies in preparation for predicted epic proportion grasshopper infestations in 2010. The more that can be done now to prepare for early treatment will help to minimize the severity of the potential disaster that could occur under ideal climatic conditions in the spring.

The beetle infestations in the forests of Wyoming continue to be of concern to us. The extent of the impacts continues to reveal itself. Some of the things that are of notable concern to us include potential fire risk which leads to even more loss of grazable acres in the short term, downed timber restricting grazing distribution and livestock movement, and most importantly the long-term changes that could threaten degradation of our watersheds.

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