

# Missourians Urged To Report Drought Information Online

COLUMBIA, MO.

**H**as drought affected your farm, business or community? Missourians can help scientists and decision-makers assess, plan for and respond to droughts by using a simple online tool to report local conditions, said a University of Missouri Extension climatologist.

Drought is a slow-moving natural hazard that affects millions of people worldwide each year by triggering a cascade of agricultural, economic, environmental and social impacts. Understanding these impacts is crucial for drought planning, mitigation and response.

"No instrument or third party will be able to describe a drought situation as well as someone living in the area and experiencing the situation," said Pat Guinan, state climatologist with the MU Extension Commercial Agriculture Program.

The Drought Impact Reporter (DIR), <http://droughtreporter.unl.edu>, lets anyone report drought conditions and their local impact to the National Drought Mitigation Center in Lincoln, Neb. DIR has been online since 2005, but the revamped version that launched in October is more user-friendly, Guinan said.

Contributions to the DIR appear in an interactive map on the DIR website. They are also used by the authors of the NDMC's Drought Monitor map (<http://droughtmonitor.unl.edu/>), which provides a detailed weekly assessment of the extent and severity of drought throughout the U.S.

"It's a huge task for the authors to discern drought conditions across all 50 states," Guinan said. Weather station data on precipitation, temperature and other indicators sometimes doesn't tell the whole story of what's going on at the local level, such as struggling crops, wells and farm ponds that are drying up, and wildlife looking for food along roads and in people's yards.

Greater participation and input from Missourians will provide a more accurate portrayal of drought in the state, he said. This can help ensure that authorities mount a swift and appropriate response and aid scientists seeking to better understand drought.

Kelly Helm Smith, NDMC communication and drought resources specialist, asks that participants submit reports every month or even more frequently during drought. "Start and end dates

are very helpful," Smith said. "Regular reporting would help establish the pattern that a report covers of conditions during a particular span of time."

When someone submits information to the Drought Impact Reporter, that information is classified as a "report." If the report contains information that describes "an observable loss or change that occurred at a specific place and time because of drought," a moderator will also record it as an "impact."

For example, the NDMC received the following user report with impact information:

*We live on the Jasper - Lawrence County line and the drought of 2011 is worse or rivals 1980. The rains were very spotty. It would rain a mile from here and not rain a drop here. Ponds are extremely low or dry. One neighbor in Lawrence County has been feeding hay since July. Many of the farmers in the area have culled their herds, in some cases by more than half. Many of the neighbors have also begun feeding hay, some of which have been doing so for over a month. Many of the herds in the area are grazing corn stalks. Fall stockpile is not existent. Corn and soybean yields in the area are very low.*

Another example of a user report talks about a precipitation shortfall but does not include impact information:

*The last time we had more than one inch of rain was on May 24 when they got 1.84 inches. They have had a couple of smaller rains since then but it has been hot, dry and windy almost every day. Only 0.75 inches fell in July.*

The following sample user report speculates about an event that would be considered an impact. It is valuable because it points to the likely occurrence of an impact and shows a high level of drought awareness, but it is not an impact yet:

*Mandatory watering restrictions will be implemented in My City, USA, unless it rains a lot before Tuesday.*

Reports come from media, individual users, data submitted by Community Collaborative Rain, Hail and Snow Network (CoCoRaHS) observers, National Weather Service drought information statements, information gathered by states on burn bans and water restrictions, and other summary reports compiled by agencies or organizations. △



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