

U.S. Drought Monitor Forum

Brad Rippey, USDA Meteorologist, Washington, D.C.

Staying Unbiased in the Face of Political and Programmatic Pressure

Jefferson county farmers claim drought designation methods flawed

By MARCUS WOLF
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PUBLISHED: TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 27, 2016 AT 12:30 AM

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Watertown (N.Y.) Daily Times
September 27, 2016

AMANDA MORRISON n WATERTOWN DAILY TIMESState Sen. Patricia A. Ritchie, R-Heuvelton, feels a dried out corn leaf while being shown drought damage in Jefferson County while on a tour of Ronald C. Robbin's farm. (molongoski)

Cliff Mass Weather Blog

Sunday, February 21, 2016

Is Oregon STILL in Severe Drought?

According to the U.S. official Drought Monitor, large portions of eastern Oregon are still in **severe drought** (see below).

The trouble is that virtually all factual, objective information (e.g., snowpack, precipitation, soil moisture, and reservoir levels) suggest just the opposite: **the drought is over**.

This really bothers me. Here we have an official U.S. government entity hyping drought and providing the public with information that is simply wrong. Let me prove this to you.

The **US Drought Monitor** is **Wrong**,
no way is El Dorado Hills and the American River watershed
in "Severe Drought" in 2016.

*El Dorado Hills is not in drought,
the American River watershed is not in drought.
Folsom Lake is in regulatory drought, nature provided ample water in the past year.*

U.S. Drought Monitor
California



K Bar S Lodge

Keystone, South Dakota, April 3 – 5, 2016

U.S. Drought Monitor Facts

- Assembled weekly by one of eleven authors.
- Assisted by more than 400 regional and state experts, some of whom are in the room.
- Authors look at several dozen weather and related variables, ranked historically, in making the weekly drought assessment for each area.
- Other (e.g. public) drought information can be submitted by various channels, including state or regional drought committee; Drought Impact Reporter; and CoCoRaHS.

Contact Information (we don't hide)

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Please let us know what you do and don't like about this web site, as well as your ideas about how it could be more useful to you. Contact us:

DroughtMonitor@unl.edu

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U.S. Drought Monitor Authors

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<http://droughtmonitor.unl.edu/AboutUSDM/ContactUs.aspx>

USDA Disaster Relief and the U.S. Drought Monitor: 2008 Farm Bill

USDA Announces Implementation of Livestock Disaster Assistance Programs

Beginning Today, Producers May Sign Up to Participate in these Programs

WASHINGTON, Sept. 14, 2009 - Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack today announced that producers may begin applying for benefits under the provisions of the Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees, and Farm-Raised Fish Program (ELAP) and the Livestock Forage Disaster Program (LFP). **These permanent disaster programs, authorized in the 2008 Farm Bill**, replace previous ad-hoc disaster assistance programs and are funded through the Agricultural Disaster Relief Trust Fund...

For losses due to drought, qualifying drought ratings are determined using the U.S. Drought Monitor located at www.drought.unl.edu/dm/monitor.html... Producers must have suffered losses that occurred on or after Jan. 1, 2008, and before Oct. 1, 2011.

U.S. Billion-Dollar Disasters, 1980-2016

DISASTER TYPE	NUMBER OF EVENTS	PERCENT FREQUENCY	CPI-ADJUSTED LOSSES (BILLIONS OF DOLLARS)	PERCENT OF TOTAL LOSSES	AVERAGE EVENT COST (BILLIONS OF DOLLARS)	DEATHS
■ Drought	24	11.8%	\$223.8 <small>ci</small>	19.1%	\$9.3	2,993 [†]
■ Flooding	26	12.8%	\$110.7 <small>ci</small>	9.4%	\$4.3	515
■ Freeze	7	3.4%	\$25.3 <small>ci</small>	2.2%	\$3.6	162
■ Severe Storm	83	40.9%	\$180.1 <small>ci</small>	15.3%	\$2.2	1,546
■ Tropical Cyclone	35	17.2%	\$560.1 <small>ci</small>	47.7%	\$16.0	3,210
■ Wildfire	14	6.9%	\$33.0 <small>ci</small>	2.8%	\$2.4	184
■ Winter Storm	14	6.9%	\$41.3 <small>ci</small>	3.5%	\$3.0	1,013
■ All Disasters	203	100.0%	\$1,174.3 <small>ci</small>	100.0%	\$5.8	9,623

[†]Deaths associated with drought are the result of heat waves. (Not all droughts are accompanied by extreme heat waves.)
 The confidence interval (CI) probabilities (75%, 90% and 95%) represent the uncertainty associated with the disaster cost estimates.
 Monte Carlo simulations were used to produce upper and lower bounds at these confidence levels (Smith and Matthews, 2015 .

Source: National Climatic Data Center (<http://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/billions/>)

U.S. Billion-Dollar Disasters, 1980-2016

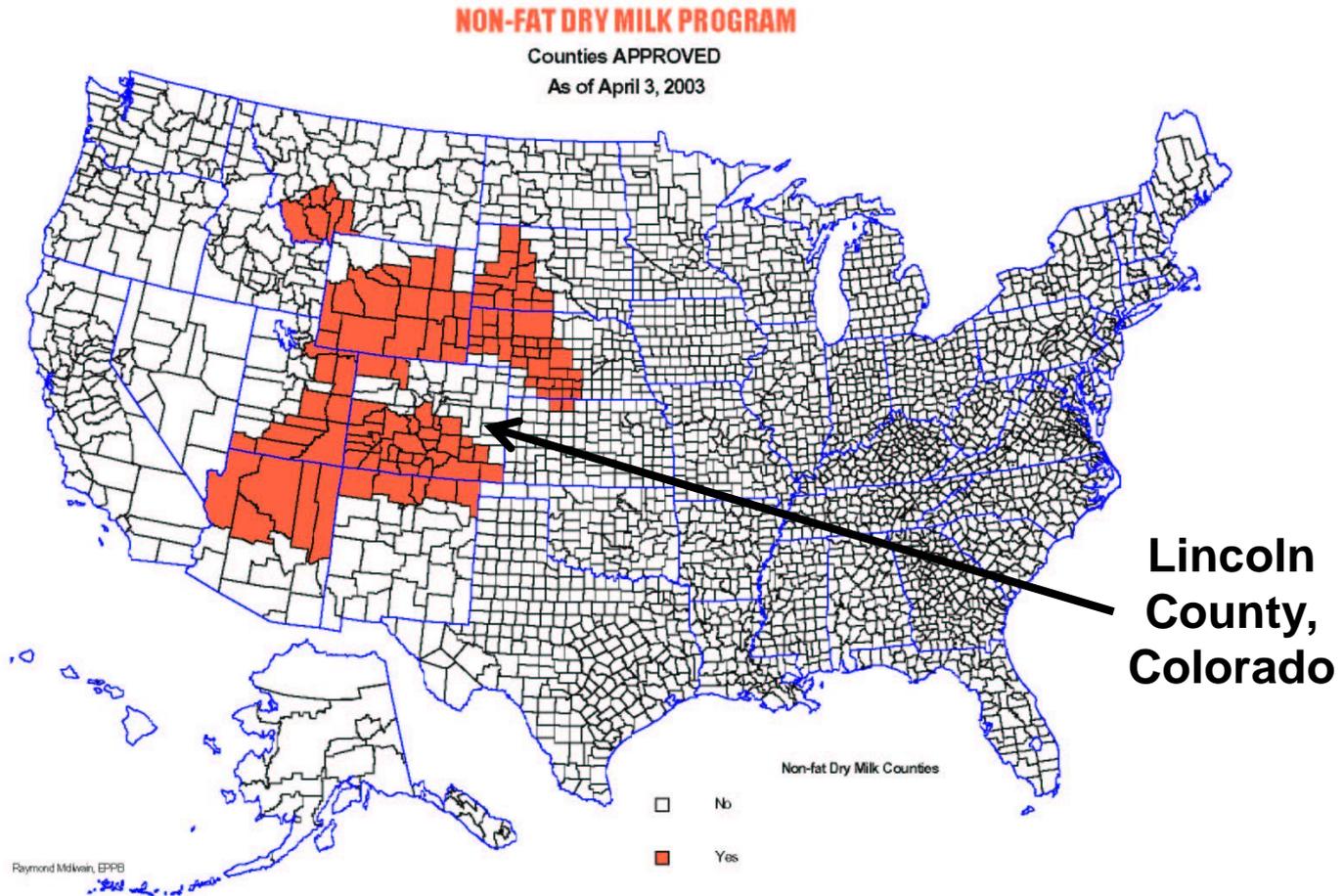
1.	Hurricane Katrina	2005	\$153.8B
2.	Superstorm Sandy	2012	\$ 68.3
3.	Hurricane Andrew	1992	\$ 46.4
4.	Drought	1988	\$ 40.8
5.	Flooding	1993	\$ 35.1
6.	Hurricane Ike	2008	\$ 33.6
7.	Drought	2012	\$ 31.5
8.	Drought	1980	\$ 29.2
9.	Hurricane Ivan	2004	\$ 26.2
10.	Hurricane Wilma	2005	\$ 23.4

Source: National Climatic Data Center (<http://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/billions/>)

U.S. Billion-Dollar Disasters, 1980-2015

11.	Hurricane Rita	2005	\$ 22.8B
12.	Hurricane Charley	2004	\$ 21.1
13.	Hurricane Hugo	1989	\$ 17.5
14.	Hurricane Irene	2011	\$ 14.4
15.	S. Plains Drought	2011	\$ 12.8
16.	Hurricane Frances	2004	\$ 12.5
17.	Drought	2002	\$ 12.1
18.	T.S. Allison	2001	\$ 11.6
19.	Flooding	2008	\$ 11.2
20.	Tornadoes, Etc.	2011	\$ 10.9
21.	Drought	2013	\$ 10.7
22.	Louisiana Flooding	2016	\$ 10.0

NDM Counties Approved, April 3, 2003



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- My first letter regarding omission from disaster assistance came in 2003 from a rancher in Lincoln County, Colorado.
- The drumbeat of comments and questions from a) ranchers, b) politicians, and c) USDA/FSA grew exponentially louder in 2016, as if there was sudden communal awareness of LFP payouts (est. 2009) and federal drought disaster declarations (est. 2012)!
 - Jefferson Co., NY
 - Black Hills (SD/WY)
 - Alabama
 - Georgia
 - South Carolina
 - Tennessee

Sample Note from USDA/FSA, October 28, 2016

- To quantify losses in Giles County, Tennessee, [FSA has] had over 200 reports filed from farmers on losses already and expect between 700 and 850; almost 100% of the cattle farms will have losses.
- We are getting many reports on herd health, mainly respiratory issues related to dust and low body condition scores.
- We have had over a dozen cattle operations report they have no water and are going to streams or other sources to pump it into tanks to haul to their herds; other farmers are moving cattle herds to water sources. We know there are many more without normal water supplies that are hauling it.

Walking the Fine Line

- County-level drought impacts are crucial but often lack historical perspective.
- Authors must weigh impact reports and possible motives (e.g. wanting D3 instead of D2 for higher LFP payouts) when looking at historical datasets.
- Authors often hear: “I’ve been farming [fill in the blank] years and this is the worst it has ever been.”

Bottom Line

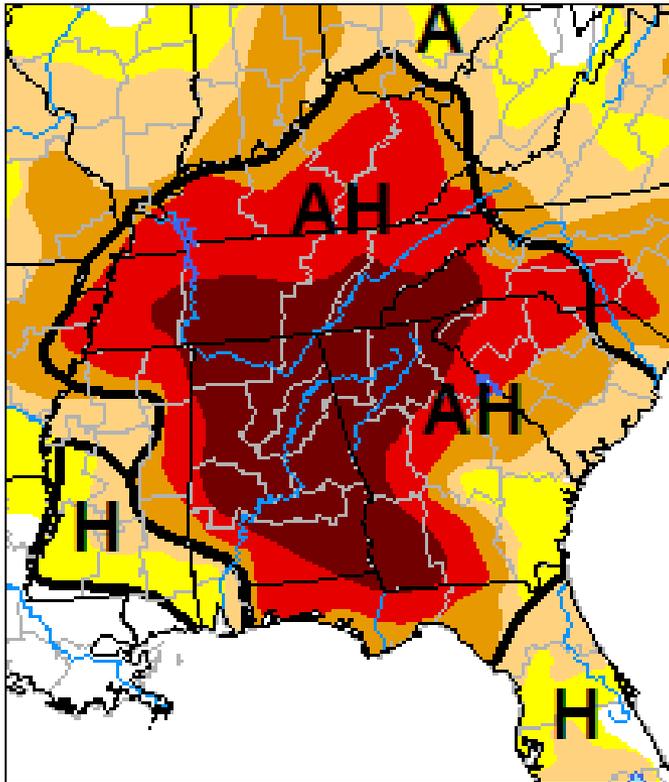
- Authors “listen to” impact reports.
- Authors are increasingly cognizant that there are attempts to politically or programmatically alter the drought depiction.
- Authors are non-political, career employees; final depictions are scientifically driven and supported by multiple datasets.

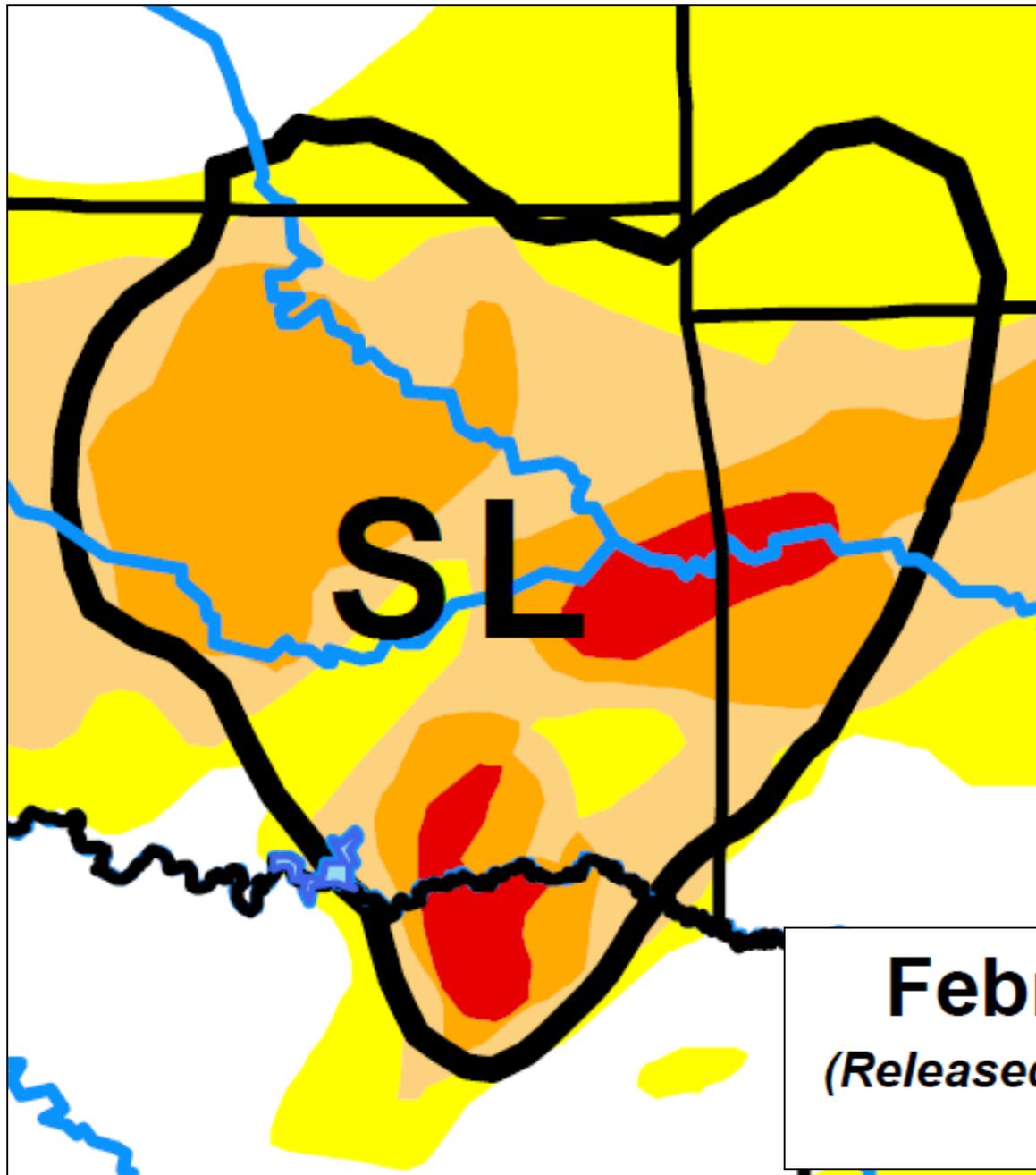
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Drought Monitor Authors

- Intentionally biased? No, never.
- Stressed? Often. (We start seeing things.)





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