

Drought – National Drought Mitigation Center

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From the Director: June 1998

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From the Director

The 1997–98 El Niño event has certainly raised the public's level of awareness of the impact of climate on society. Although the concern in the United States has focused more on mitigating the potential effects of floods, not all regions of the country are dealing with water surplus situations. An emerging drought in Montana and parts of some surrounding states has caught the attention of scientists and policy makers in recent months. Worldwide, droughts in Central America, Mexico, Brazil, Hawaii, some Pacific island nations, Indonesia, Australia, southern Africa, and elsewhere have attracted the attention of scientists, policy makers, and the media.

Now, as El Niño has lessened in intensity, the threat of La Niña is upon us. Concerns are increasing that the drought in Mexico and parts of the southern United States may intensify and spread into surrounding states in the Southwest. The National Drought Mitigation Center (NDMC) is currently working with the U.S./Mexico International Boundary Water Commission and the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation to organize an August training workshop on drought contingency planning to address short- and long-term issues of drought in the border states region. This workshop will be similar to regional workshops the NDMC organized in 1997–98. Since the last issue of *Drought Network News*, the NDMC has conducted workshops in South Carolina for the Southeast region and in Kentucky for the Midwest and Northeast regions. In addition to the usual mix of participants from local, state, and federal agencies attending these workshops, we have also had representatives from Taiwan, Mexico, Hungary, Korea, and Australia as participants.

The Western Drought Coordination Council (WDCC), formed by the Western Governors' Association in 1997 through a memorandum of understanding with key federal agencies, just completed its first year of activity. The list of accomplishments for the WDCC is quite impressive. The products developed by the WDCC working groups are available on the WDCC web site at <http://enso.unl.edu/wdcc/>. I encourage you to examine these products, described in somewhat greater detail on p. 18 of this newsletter. The NDMC will continue to serve as technical advisor to the WDCC in 1998–99. The annual

work plan for the WDCC is also available on the web site.

The National Drought Policy Act of 1998 (HR 3035) is expected to pass the House of Representatives soon. It has been modified slightly from the version that passed the Senate (S 222) in November 1997. This bill would set up a federal drought commission to examine current laws and programs and make recommendations to the president and congress on the needs for a national drought policy. The U.S. Department of Agriculture will serve as chair for the commission, which will be composed of 16 members.

This issue of *Drought Network News* contains articles on drought monitoring in Africa, climate change and soil moisture relationships in Turkey, El Niño and drought linkages in India, Australian national drought policy, and the accomplishments of the WDCC. *Drought Network News* readers are encouraged to submit articles for the October issue to me no later than **September 1, 1998**, for inclusion in the October issue. Readers are also encouraged to submit announcements and other information of interest to our network members.

Donald A. Wilhite

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