

Rangeland Dying, Orchards Hit by Southland Dry Spell

Water Level Down, Fire Hazards Up

Rangeland in Antelope Valley and other areas of Southern California is in critical condition — drying and dying due to the current drought, County Agricultural Commissioner Harold J. Ryan reported Tuesday.

The dry spell — Southland counties are now in their 46th day without measurable rainfall—has increased farmers' water bills, parched the pasturelands, lowered the water table another notch or two and created extreme fire hazards in local national forests.

It's costing a great deal more to supply orchards and row crops with irrigation water at a time when normal rainfall would provide most of the moisture.

Deciduous Fruits Affected

In Orange, Riverside, and San Bernardino Counties lack of rain and the recent hot weather are affecting deciduous fruit.

Delayed foliation on peach, plum and walnut trees is occurring. This usually results in a short crop.

Buds are developing on citrus, Harold A. Crane, San Bernardino County agricultural commissioner, noted. He said this might indicate early and off-season blooming which can be harmed by late frost conditions.

Although not yet a mid-winter drought record — in 1885 there were 72 consecutive rainless days — January is well on its way to become one of the hottest and driest in history.

Well Below Normal

At the time of the last measurable rainfall Dec. 2, the outlook was for a wet year . . . an upswing in the weather cycle to the damper columns. Season rainfall up to Dec. 2 was above normal. However, today the season total stands at a mere 2.56 in., as compared with a normal of 6.27.

Normal January rainfall is 2.38 in. Normal for February, the wettest month, is 3.37. In the 84 years of keeping track of rainfall locally, only one January, that in 1948, slipped by completely dry.

Markham E. Salisbury, chief engineer of the Los Angeles County Flood Control District, said the lack of rain is creating a water conservation problem.

Dams in the county's high country have little or no water behind them. Winter rainfall is vital to replenish the underground water table, from which this county derives 50% of its water supply.

Residents of the city are using 30% more water than normal at this time of year, Samuel B. Nelson, general manager of the Department of Water and Power, noted.

Nelson said there is no probability, however, of any

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AREA DROUGHT

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water shortage to residents of the city. He said the department is maintaining its Owens River Aqueduct at full capacity by pumping from 45 wells in the Owens Valley and drawing on surplus water.

Snowfall on the eastern slopes of the High Sierra which feeds the Owens River is extremely sparse so far.

The Southern California Edison Co. reports that rainfall recorders for its Big Creek hydroelectric development above Fresno note there has been very little

measurable precipitation along the western slopes of the High Sierra this season.

In national forests throughout Southern California lookout stations normally abandoned at this time of the year are being manned.

"Extreme fire conditions exist in all mountainous regions due to the lack of rain, low humidity, gusty and fuel moisture conditions. If the dry period continues, it will be necessary to close off certain areas from public use," Sim Jarvi, supervisor of Angeles National Forest, declared.

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