



# MANAGEMENT NOTES FOR JANUARY THROUGH MARCH

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As the old saying goes, “in Texas, if you don’t like the weather, stick around for a few minutes!” The Seasonal Drought Outlook through March (Figure 1) indicates much of the eastern third of Texas may emerge from drought while the rest will remain or return to drought. The US Drought Monitor archive data showed about 76% of the state was in drought as of November 26, 2013. The same week in 2012, about 74% was in drought. Not much change over the last year.

Figure 2 shows the Climatic Prediction Center outlook through March 2014. Precipitation has a 30% probability of being below average in the western third of the state. The temperature will have an even chance of being above average over much of the state. Looking beyond March, precipitation is expected to be below average with the temperature being near average.

Now to the future. The drought has been intensifying since before 2000. The Drought Monitor archive database shows how much of the state has been in drought since 2000. Using less than

20% of the state under drought conditions as a base, the following periods were below 20%: late 2002 to early 2003, mid 2004 to early-mid 2004, early 2007 to late 2007, and early 2010 to late 2010 periods. During the 2000-2013 period showed over 50% of the state was under some level of drought conditions. Since mid 2009, over 80% of the state has been under some level of drought!

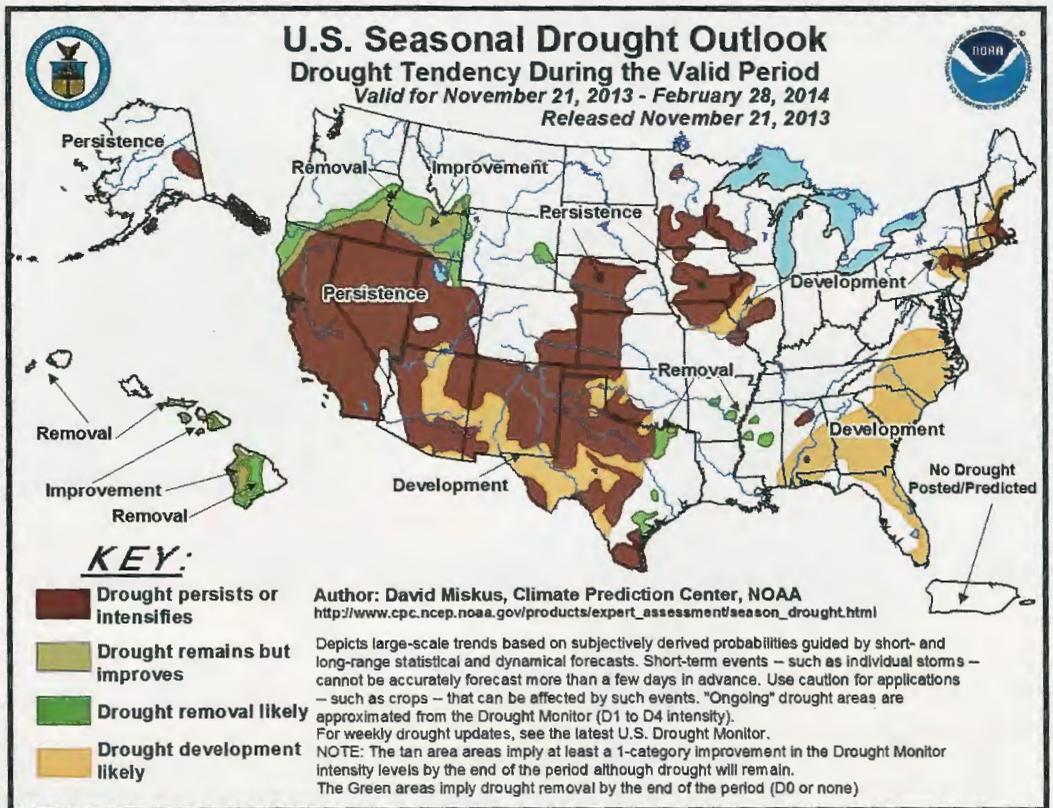


Figure 3 shows the drought pattern using a 4-week average of drought coverage across Texas, emphasizing how widespread the drought has become. Since 2004, Texas has had only 2 short periods with less than 5% of the state under drought conditions. They are October 12, 2004 through March 10, 2005 and May 8, 2007 through October 23, 2007. Since late 2010, drought conditions have persisted over most of the state. If the current predictions hold up, drought will continue for the foreseeable future.

### MANAGEMENT SUGGESTIONS

#### Water

As always, the availability and quality of water is the concern. During winter, there is the possibility of open water sources (troughs, pond, etc.) freezing over during periods of extended freezing temperatures. When this happens, consider breaking through the ice regularly and as needed to allow animals to drink. Any water source that is frozen and restricts animal access can cause reduced animal performance.

If you rely on surface water, is there enough available and the quality good enough for the winter weather? If you rely on wells, has production been normal or dropping and is the quality what you need? If you are on a rural water system, are you being limited on how much you can use? These are the common concerns in some areas this year. Consider your water situation as the most critical need. Without water you are up a dry creek!

#### Records

It's the beginning of the year and time to review and update the management for 2014. After closing out the 2013 financial records, evaluating of the land resources, and how 2013 impacted 2014 management, it is time to get going! Keep the records up to date, so you always are looking at where you are and what needs to be changed, so you can prepare or make changes as needed.

**Weather Records** Review your rainfall records and their impact on your management. The patterns have been highly variable even compared to the neighbors. Remember the "hat rain" patterns, so have more than one rain gauge around the place. That is how you can cover the whole area and know how your vegetation may respond. If the predications are correct, the drought may be continuing.

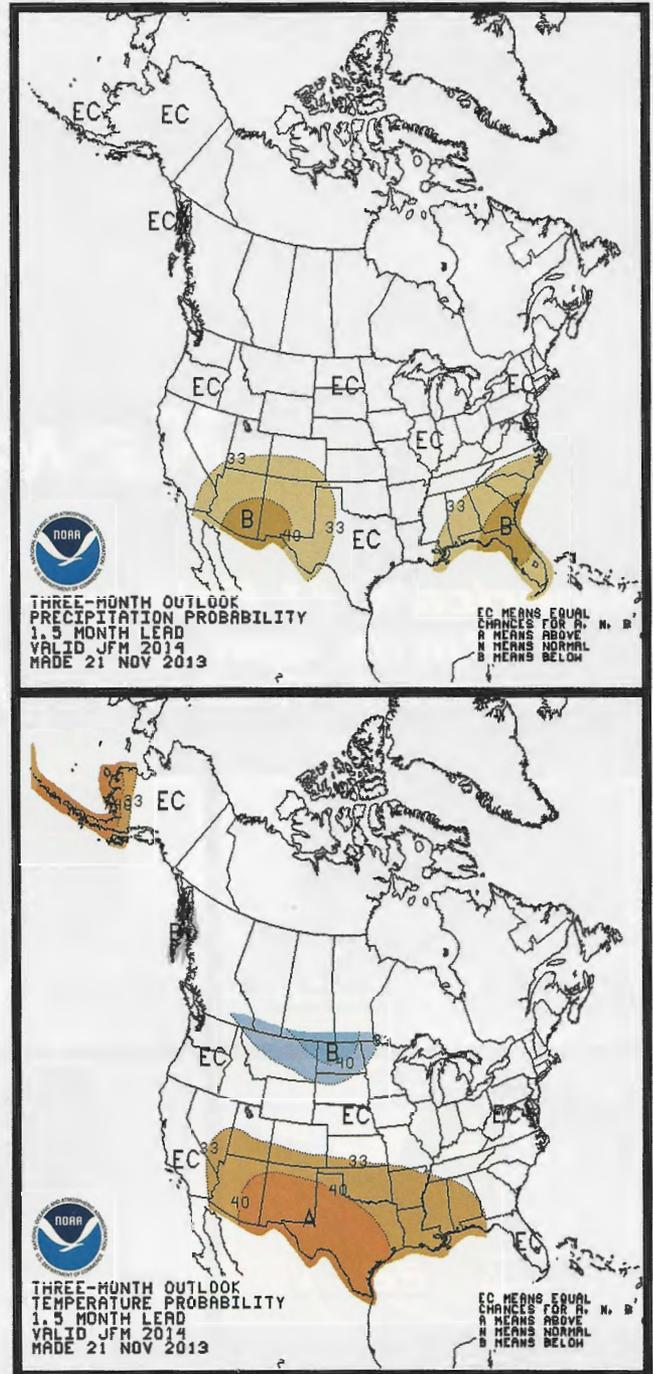
**Pasture Use and Status Records** Are your pastures ready for 2014? How did your pastures end the year? If you were able to maintain them in good condition, I commend you. If not, how do you plan to change your management for 2014 to maintain or, hopefully, improve them in 2014. Your future depends on your land resources being able to meet the requirements of your animals. If the conditions are declining, your feed bills are probably going up or you are selling animals.

**Financial Records** How did your pocket book feel at the end of 2013? If you evaluated your financial records at the end of the year, you should be able to adjust your 2014 and 5-year management and economic plans based on the changing conditions you identified. Be sure you included projected weather conditions and how your animals

might respond. This information, together with current and projected economic and market conditions, will impact 2014 and well into the future.

#### Land Management

Evaluate any prescribed burns or seedings done over the past several years. Has your management and the weather allowed the areas to improve as you planned? This is the time to finalize the plans for 2014 and prepare for prescribed burns and seedings. Planning these operations is much better than just going out and dropping matches or throwing some seed on the ground!



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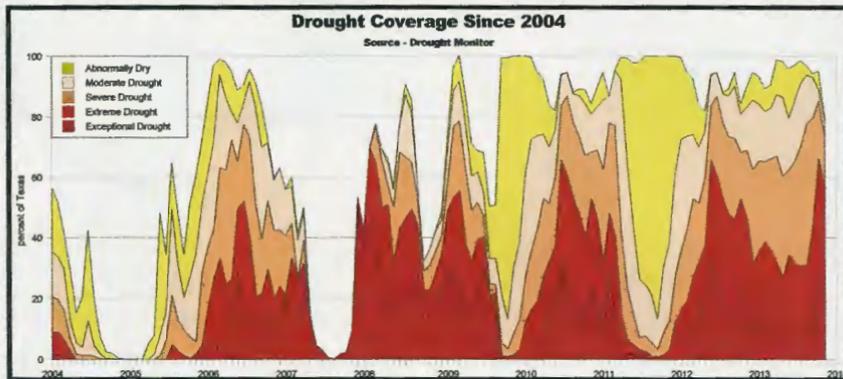
## MANAGEMENT NOTES

Continue to update your land resource records, including current pasture use and status, as well as new photos or other means. If you haven't started a land resource record, please consider starting now.

Good photographs can provide a record of change over years. This has been a good tool. It requires having established points you can return to and photograph at least once each year. Photographs can be a great help in seeing how your resources have changed. Combining the land use records with the other records is a valuable tool to determining how your land resources are responding to management. You are working in the vegetation regularly and it is changing a little every day and you may not notice it!

### Physical Assets

If you conducted a careful review of all improvements, such as fences, water sources, and equipment, you should have able a plan for major repairs or even replacements for 2014 and beyond. Reducing downtime and breakdowns with timely repairs and/or replacements should be the goal. Ignoring repairs or missing potential equipment can lead to increased costs, labor, and stress.



### A Thought

Your operation is often your life. Managing your operation to provide profitability, efficiency, and sustainability could insure your future. Looking to the future by basing your management decisions on long term and short term management goals together with your past efforts is a valuable tool. Using factual data can help implement and modify your future plans. Weather, economic conditions, and your personal life all interact. But, they need to be kept in a reasonable balance.

Just remember, management is never easy! Having a well developed business plan can help in making management changes! 🍷