

Management Notes: March Through May

Texas weather has again proven it will be highly variable! During January, record or near record highs were followed by record or near record lows on several occasions. Ice, sleet and snow made it to Houston! Then February continued the pattern with similar weather. Actual precipitation levels were from little to maybe average at best. Wonder what the weather will be going into Spring.

The Seasonal Drought Outlook through May (Figure 1) indicates much of the eastern half of Texas appears to have emerged from drought while the rest remains in drought. The Drought Monitor archive shows as of November 26, 2013 about 24% of the state was considered not in drought compared to about 44% a year later. With four years of most or all of the state in some level of drought, the perennial native vegetation will require several years to fully recover. Many woody plants are still stressed or have died while the grasses and forbs have reduced their size or even died. It will take time, moisture, and management for everything to recover and thrive. Some predictions are that trees could continue to die from drought stress for up to 20 years!

Figure 2 shows the Climatic Prediction Center outlook through May 2014. Precipitation has a 33% or greater probability to be below average in the eastern third of the state with the temperature being above average over the entire state. Looking beyond May, precipitation is expected to be below average with the temperature being near average.

Some Management Considerations Managing Water

The condition, quality, and availability of water continues to be the major concern. During the winter into spring period, there is still the possibility of open water sources (troughs, pond, etc.) freezing over extended periods of low temperatures. If this happens, breaking through the ice regularly to allow animals to drink is the primary need. Any water source that is frozen and restricts animal access can cause reduced performance, increased stress, and disease that may lead to death.

If you rely on surface water, is there enough available and the quality good enough for the rest of winter and into the spring months. If you rely on wells, can you expect water production to be 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 have been the common themes in some areas this year. Hope you don't have too many



Figure 1. Much of the eastern half of Texas appears to have emerged from drought while the rest remains in drought.

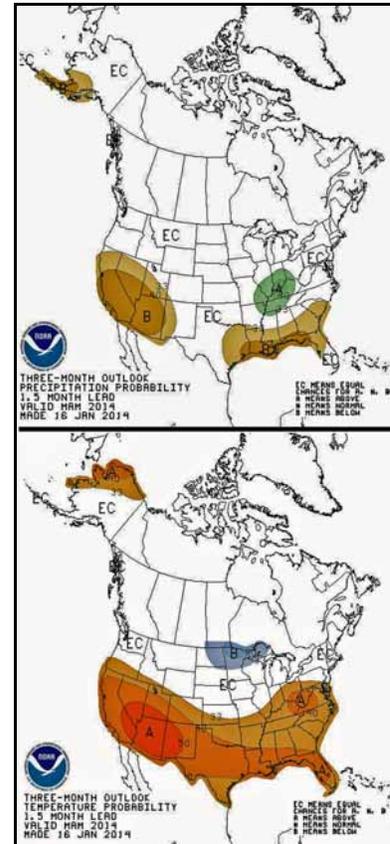


Figure 2. Through May, precipitation (top) is expected to be within average range except for the eastern part of the state and temperature is expected to be above average over all the state.

problems. Your water situation is the most critical need. Without water you are up a dry creek and a paddle doesn't help!

Records

2014 is well underway! I hope you have closed the 2013 financial records, completed your evaluation of the land resources, and know what impacts 2013 has made that require adjustments for 2014.

Weather Records Review your rainfall records and how it impacted your management. The patterns have been highly variable even for neighbors. In many areas the patterns remind me of the "hat rain" pattern, that is you can cover the whole rain area with a hat! If the pattern of last year continues as predicted, management will get tougher.

Pasture Use and Status Records How did your pastures end the year? If you were able to maintain them in good condition I applaud you. If not, have you planned and implemented the necessary changes in your management for 2014 to at least maintain or maybe improve them.

Financial Records By now you should have adjusted your 2014 and 5-year management and economic plans based on last year's results and the predicted changing weather and economic conditions. You should have included how projected weather conditions, their effect on animals together with current and projected economic and market conditions will impact your operation in 2014.

Land Management

Determine if any prescribed burns or seedings to be done this year can be done with a high probability of success both in applying the practice and as well as getting positive results. In your past efforts, has your management and the weather allowed the areas to grow and improve as you planned. Begin planning adjustments for 2015 based on what you can see being accomplished this year. Planning these operations is always better than just going out and dropping matches or throwing some seed on the ground!

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

Photographs have always been a good method when using 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 use of the two sets of records is a valuable tool in determining how your land resources are responding to your management. You are working in the vegetation regularly and it is changing a little everyday and you may not notice the changes!

Physical Assets

Review your improvements such as fences, water sources, and equipment to determine if major repairs are needed, have been made or finished, or if replacements have been received. Timely repair and/or replacement, can reduce management and operation problems. Neglected, broken, or missing items can lead to increased costs, labor, stress, and maybe not being able to manage in a timely manner. If herd size has been reduced, there may be opportunities for major repairs and improvements.

Many operations have reduced herd size to better fit the resources available. If expansion is being considered, a slow approach should be considered. Precipitation has not been at the

levels to insure water and forage for 2014. If the drought continues, can you afford to feed the increased numbers?

A Thought

If you manage your operation for profitability, efficiency, and sustainability today it can hopefully insure you a future. Base your management decisions on your long term and short term management goals blending in the influences of your past efforts with what is currently happening. Management is the second most important factor in looking to the future. Through planning your management you combine your past and present experiences to help implement and modify your future plans. Remember, the weather, economic conditions, and your personal life will always interact. Please keep your personal life in a reasonable balance with the rest of your demands.

(Note: Updated maps can be accessed through <http://www.grassbydesign.com/TDA/NOAA.htm>.)

Paul D. Ohlenbusch
Grass by Design
(www.grassbydesign.com/tda)