



MANAGEMENT NOTES FOR MARCH THROUGH MAY 2015

TEXAS WEATHER

ARTICLE BY PAUL D. OHLENBUSCH

The weather has been interesting! Many parts of the state had rain and/or snow during January. The amount varied but many areas had above average amounts. Just remember, January is the lowest rainfall month of the year and February isn't much better!

The end of January Drought Monitor indicates just over 40% of the state is considered "out of drought conditions." Figure 1 shows the areas best areas include parts of east Texas, south Texas, and far west Texas. A new statistic offered is the estimated population impacted. 38.5% are in areas out of the drought. That means 61.5% are still under drought conditions. The last time the state was drought "free" was in the winter 2004-2005!

As to El Nino, the Climate Prediction Center predicts it will begin returning to a neutral status in March (Figure 2). The long term outlook is for Texas to have equal chances of average precipitation most of the year with above average temperatures starting in late summer. The drought status will be interesting to follow.

Management for 2015 should be to recover the ability of vegetation to grow normally. To do that, the most desirable plants need to have normal growth with browsing or grazing

taking no more than 25-40 percent of the leaf area by fall freezing. The plant makes all of its food in the leaves. In addition, the plant must store food for producing new leaf growth each year or if it has heavy defoliation at any time. If the reserves are not replaced after use, the plant can die.

Management Suggestions

Water

Water is the most important and critical need. Both the availability and quality of water is the concern. As we move from winter into spring, the need will become more important as we go into summer. Open water sources (troughs, pond, etc.) are the greatest concern. Make sure to monitor the availability of water. For surface water, is there enough available and the quality good enough for the late winter and spring weather. Are your wells producing average or near average production and is the quality what you need. On a rural water system, are you being limited on how much you can use. These are common concerns to consider. With out water you are up a dry creek!

Records

2015 is here and moving on fast! After closing out the 2014 records, how are your financial, land resources and other resources doing? Keep the records up to date so you are always looking at how your management is working and

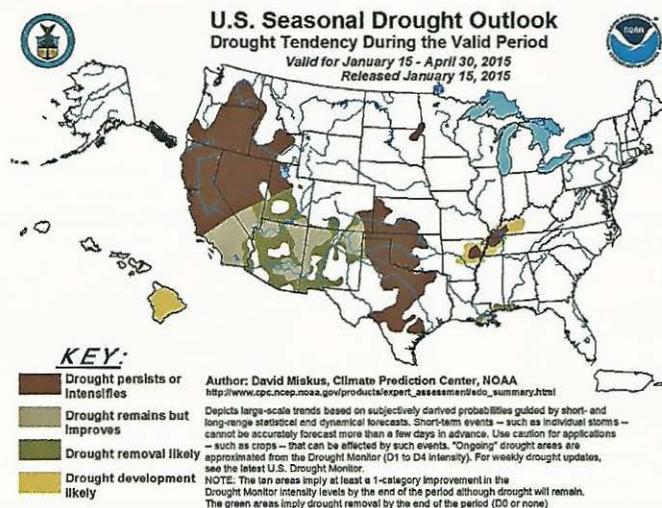


Figure 1: The Climate Prediction Center projects drought conditions will decline in much of Texas over the next few months.

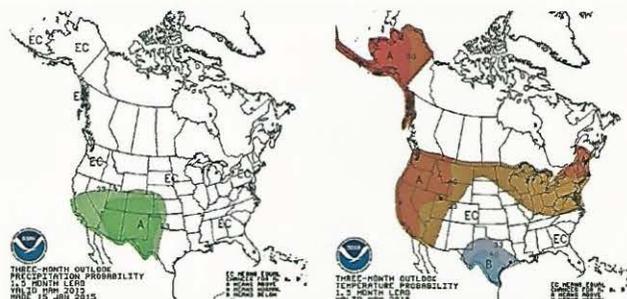


Figure 2: Through May, precipitation (top) is expected to be within average range for the most of the state and temperature is expected to be average over most of the state.





if changes need to be made. This will help you prepare for changes as needed.

Weather Records With potential improved precipitation potential, rainfall records will become more important on your management. Remember the “hat rain” patterns need to be measured with more than one rain gauge around the place. Consider a gauge on every gate post. That way you can cover the whole area and understand how your vegetation has and should respond. If the predications are correct, the drought may continue to moderate somewhat.

Pasture Use and Status Records How are your pastures responding? 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 2015 to maintain or, hopefully, improve them. Your future depends on your land resources being able to meet the requirements of your animals for years to come. If the conditions declining, your feed bills are probably going up or you are selling animals.

Financial Records Hope your pocket book felt good at the end of 2014. Your financial records at the end of the year should have allowed you to adjust your 2015 and 5-year management and economic plans. Continue to monitor the changing conditions and economic changes you have identified as important. Be sure to include how projected average, drought, and wet weather conditions will impact your management decisions. Combining this information with current and projected economic and market conditions will be important for 2015 management and well into the future.

Land Management

Will you be able to do prescribed burns or seedings this year? This is the time to finalize or implement the plans if conditions allow. Planning these operations is much better than just going out and dropping matches or throwing some seed on the ground!

Continue to update your land resource records including current pasture use and status as well as through 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. 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 everyday and you may not notice it!

Physical Assets

By now there should have been a careful review of all improvements such as fences, water sources, and equipment. Make the necessary repairs or replacements as your are able. This can help reduce down time and breakdowns. Ignoring repairs or having equipment unavailable can lead to increased costs, more labor needed, and increased stress.

A Thought

The long range weather forecast is looking better. That's somewhat like the light at the end of the tunnel. Having management plans for average, low, and good conditions (weather, economics, markets, etc.) are an important part of planning. Recent reviews of factors that can lead to failure include being heavily leveraged, having low working capital, having a home-run attitude for costs and markets, not having lenders who are not tuned in to help avoid problems, and having high family living costs. These characteristics are from a recent review of operation failures. Throughout the years I have found them to be true.

Just remember, management is never easy! Having a well developed business plan and following it can help in making management changes easier! 🐾