Information Regarding Available Irrigation Water

Spokane Region

The following information has been compiled using data from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) regarding irrigation water supply for the 2015 planting season. RMA has not made any determinations regarding water reductions or insurable cause of loss within the insurance period, but is providing information it has gathered for reference by Insurance Providers:

Idaho

NRCS's monthly Idaho Water Supply Outlook Reports and other resources are available at:
http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/id/snow/

Summary:

According to NRCS's April 1, 2015, Idaho Water Supply Outlook Report, irrigation shortages are expected across Idaho's central basins and Southern Idaho border from the Owyhee Basin to the Bear River Basin, with the exception for those with Bear Lake water rights. Water users that rely on water from the Upper Snake can expect marginally adequate supplies, but if accompanied by additional demands on the system from a dry spring, shortages may be more likely. Boise basin water users should see marginally adequate supplies to make it through the season, and any additional rains will help to ensure supplies are available come summer's end. NRCS SNOTEL data shows that about half of Idaho's basins were reporting less than 50 percent of median snowpack.

Weiser, Payette, Boise River Basins:

The NRCS Idaho Water Supply Outlook Report forecasts that higher than average storage could potentially help to mitigate forecasted stream flows that range from 50 percent to 65 percent of average in the Payette river basin, while the Boise river basin and its tributaries are forecasted at 50 percent to 70 percent depending on the stream and location. In the Weiser river basin projected volumes are expected to be 46 percent of normal. Adequate irrigation supplies are expected for the Treasure Valley users, although dependent on actual snow melt rates and precipitation received. NRCS forecasts leave the three reservoirs at the minimal storage levels by summer's end.

Wood & Lost Basins:

According to NRCS data provided in the Idaho Water Supply Outlook Report, water year to date precipitation amounts vary with highest percentages in the Big Wood basin at 80 percent of average and lowest (in the state) at only half of average in the Medicine Lodge-Beaver-Camas basins. Near record low stream flows for the April-September period are predicted for the Big Lost River below Mackay Reservoir at only 37 percent of average. Groundwater return flows may help buffer this, but based on lessons learned last year, water masters had a challenge delivering water to down valley users. Similar situations occurred in the Little Wood basin with their forecasted stream flows at only 25-30 percent of average. The Big Wood River below Magic Reservoir is forecast at 13 percent of average. NRCS's Surface Water Supply Index (which combines current reservoir storage with streamflow forecast) is at the bottom of the scale at near -4.0 for the Little Wood and Big Lost. NRCS projects users should plan and prepare for supplies similar to or even less than last year depending upon your water right.

Upper Snake River Basin

Water year to date precipitation amounts are about 75 percent of average in the Henrys Fork and Eastern Idaho, and increase to 85 percent for the Snake River above Palisades Reservoir. Snowpacks range from 61 percent in the Henrys Fork-Falls basins to 90-95 percent in the Pacific, Buffalo, Gros Venture, Hoback and Greys tributaries in the Upper Snake in Wyoming. If the weather remains warm and dry with moderate melt rates, less melt water may show up in the streams and reservoirs making water supplies even tighter. Compound this with early irrigation demands that are exceeding natural streamflow levels, and it means that it may be a challenge to fill some of the reservoirs. The NRCS Idaho Water Supply Outlook Report advises users to plan and operate under conservative plans to stretch this year's water supplies.

Southside Snake River Basin

NRCS data shows that water year to date precipitation totals range from a high of 93 percent of average in the Oakley basin (nearly the highest in the state) to 81 percent in the Bruneau basin; however, snowpacks are nearly non-existent. The current forecast for Oakley Reservoir inflow is for 54 percent of average while Salmon Falls Creek is forecast at 36 percent. Based on the Surface Water Supply Index provided by NRCS, which combines current reservoir storage with streamflow forecast, there will not be enough to produce adequate irrigation volumes.

According to NRCS, shortages are also unavoidable in the Owyhee basins with the river forecast at only 20 percent of average, similar to last year. With 192,500 acre-feet in the reservoir, which is 12,000 acre-feet more than a year ago, irrigation supplies will be the same or even less than last year. Even with the meager amount of snow in the mountains, there is still the potential for another increase in the Bruneau River and Salmon Falls Creek based upon snowmelt-streamflow relationship but it won't last for long without some rain. The Owyhee River is at near record low flow and the other rivers will be at baseflow levels for most of the summer which means reservoirs will be depleted by summer's end. The Owyhee Irrigation District announced on April 13, 2015, that the allotment for Owyhee Irrigation water has been set at 1.5 acre feet per acre, only 35 percent of their normal allocation of 4 acre feet (http://www.owyheeirrigation.org/home).

Bear River Basin

The NRCS Idaho Water Supply Outlook Report shows that water year to date precipitation ranges from 65-85 percent of average. Overall, the Bear River basin snowpack is 56 percent of median and based on a 15 station snow index that starts in 1961, the snowpack is the lowest since 1992 and the same as in 1977. Bear Lake is storing 583,800 acre-feet for those with reservoir water rights. Others that rely on natural streamflow will see low runoff volumes this season. According to NRCS, Because of the varying conditions in the basin, water users should review conditions closely in their basin of interest, and may consider lowering their expectations of the runoff volumes from this year's snowpack unless there is a major change in the weather patterns.

Drought Declaration

As of April 9, Governor Otter has declared a drought state of emergency for Lincoln and Blaine Counties. Both counties are included within the Big Wood and Little Wood River drainages, and irrigation water supplies in Lincoln County are also dependent on water supply conditions in the Upper Snake River Basin.
https://www.idwr.idaho.gov/news/drought/drought.htm

Oregon

NRCS's monthly Oregon Basin Outlook Reports and other resources are available at:
http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/or/snow/?cid=nrcs142p2_048083

Summary

According to NRCS's April 1, 2015, Oregon Basin Outlook Report, the snowpack in the mountains of Oregon is at record low levels and limited water supplies are expected this summer. As of April 1, record low snowpack levels were measured at 76 percent of Oregon's snow monitoring sites, and only 52 out of 147 sites across the state recorded any snow at all. Most of the basins across the rest of Oregon are 15 percent of normal or less.

NCRS SNOTEL data shows that winter brought enough moisture to boost most of the major irrigation reservoirs in northern, central and southwestern Oregon up to near average levels for this time of year. However, there are several reservoirs across the state, such as Drews and Cottonwood reservoirs in the Harney basin and Lake Owyhee that are still well below average for this time of year. While many reservoirs are currently storing near normal amounts of water, the record low snowpack in the mountains will greatly reduce the amount of snowmelt runoff that reservoir operators typically depend on to maintain reservoir storage during the summer months.

Given that most of Oregon's snowpack has melted or begun to melt earlier than normal, many snowmelt-driven streamflow peaks have already come and gone during February and March. The NRCS Oregon Basin Outlook Report advises that water users depending on unregulated streamflow for irrigation will likely experience shortages this summer, especially if spring brings warm and dry weather. According to NRCS, water managers should expect water shortages this summer and plan accordingly.

Owyhee and Malheur Basins

As of April 1, NRCS SNOTEL reports show basin snowpack was 10 percent of normal. Precipitation for the water year has been 87 percent of average. Reservoir storage is well below average, ranging from 39 percent to 88 percent of average. Summer streamflow forecasts range from 18 percent to 38 percent of average.

Klamath Basin

According to NRCS, as of April 1, basin snowpack was 13 percent of normal. Precipitation for the water year has been 96 percent of average. Reservoir storage ranges from 19 percent to 114 percent of average. Summer streamflow forecasts range from 32 percent to 46 percent of average. The Bureau of Reclamation estimates that 254,500 acre-feet (AF) of water will be available from Upper Klamath Lake and the Klamath River (65 percent of full supply, which is 390,000 AF). This amount equates to a gap of approximately 135,500 AF between the available supply and estimated demands for the 185,000 acres of irrigated lands within the Project that receive water from Upper Klamath Lake and the Klamath River.

The Bureau of Reclamation is drafting the RMA Administrator a letter, outlining Klamath Project Drought issues. This letter will be forwarded to approved insurance providers.

Lake County and Goose Lake Basins

According to NRCS, as of April 1, basin snowpack was 9 percent of normal. Precipitation for the water year has been 86 percent of average. Reservoir storage is well below average, ranging from 30 percent to 66 percent of average. Summer streamflow forecasts range from 26 percent to 43 percent of average.

Drought Declaration

As of April 8, Governor Brown has declared a drought state of emergency for Klamath, Malheur and Lake Counties. The U.S. Drought Monitor has designated most of Oregon in a drought condition, with the southeastern third of the state listed in extreme drought condition: http://droughtmonitor.unl.edu/. NOAA's Climate Prediction Center is calling for warm and dry conditions over the next 3 months. With such an unusual year on hand, Oregon NRCS has compiled drought assistance information on the following website: http://1.usa.gov/1IDqKut.

Washington

NRCS's monthly Washington Water Supply Outlook Reports and other resources are available at: http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/wa/snow/waterproducts/?cid=stelprdb1265591

Summary

The NRCS Washington Water Supply Outlook Report shows that 74 percent of the long-term snow monitoring sites have set new record low snow amounts. Many of them reporting in with zero snow for the first time in their history. As expected streamflow forecasts have also plummeted in many areas and are also setting new record low flows. April-September forecasts for some Western Washington streams include the Cedar River near Cedar Falls, 53 percent; White River, 74 percent; and Skagit River, 81 percent. Some Eastern Washington streams include the Yakima River near Parker, 36 percent; Wenatchee River at Plain, 52 percent; and Spokane River near Post Falls, 46 percent.

According to Scott Pattee, Water Supply Specialist with NRCS in Mt. Vernon, WA, water users relying on unregulated flow could see insufficient supply very early in the season due to early snow melt. Water users accessing water from reservoirs should have sufficient supply early, but may see curtailments later in the growing season

Yakima Basin

NRCS data shows that reservoirs in the Upper and Lower Yakima Basins are completely full. The Bureau of Reclamation's April 2015 Total Water Supply Available forecast for the Yakima Basin indicates a full water supply for senior water rights during the 2015 irrigation season, but an estimated 60 percent supply for junior water rights. http://www.usbr.gov/newsroom/newsrelease/detail.cfm?RecordID=49151

Drought Declaration

As of April 17, Gov. Inslee declared a state of drought in 24 of the state's 62 watersheds.
http://www.ecy.wa.gov/drought/index.html

The above is for informational purposes only and may be helpful to insurance providers when considering any claims that may be submitted. We encourage insurance providers to notify the Spokane Regional Office immediately of any other areas of suspected irrigation water shortages.