



United States Department of Agriculture
Farm and Foreign Agricultural Services
Risk Management Agency

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TO: Phyllis W. Honor
Acting Administrator

FROM: Douglas M. Hagel /s/ *Douglas Hagel*
Director

SUBJECT: Regional Irrigation Assessment for Billings Region

This Regional Irrigation Assessment is provided in accordance with instructions in the Loss Adjustment Manual, FCIC-25010. The Regional Office Director is required to share information about areas suspected of having inadequate water for irrigation with regional insurance providers.

The Billings Regional Office completed an assessment of surface irrigation supplies for Montana and found significant snowpack shortfalls. Snowpack levels are significantly below average with very little probability that these basins will be able to recover to normal levels prior to the irrigation season. Drought in 2000 and low reservoir storage levels further exasperate the irrigation situation. Many watershed basins will most likely see reduced streamflows this irrigation season. Below are some of the current snowpack totals (as a percentage of average) for Montana's major watershed basins:

Flathead 58% (lowest on record)
Kootenai 51% (second lowest on record)
Bitterroot 54% (second lowest on record)
Madison 60% (second lowest on record)
Gallatin 64% (lowest on record)
Missouri Headwaters 69% (4th lowest on record)
Sun-Teton-Marias 56% (second lowest on record)
Smith-Judith-Musselshell 65% (second lowest on record)
Yellowstone 57% (lowest on record)

It is therefore suspected that there may be a lack of irrigation water throughout all counties in Montana that rely on surface water runoff for their irrigation sources. Insured crops grown in Montana that may be affected by the suspected lack of irrigation water include canola, corn, safflower, dry peas, dry beans barley, oats, forage, sugar beets and spring wheat.

Based on current snowpack totals combined with last year's drought, Montana may be facing one of the worst droughts in recent history. It is reasonable to anticipate reduced streamflows will result in reduced irrigation allotments across the state of Montana. For current information you may access the Natural Resource and Conservation Service website at: <http://www.nhq.nrcs.usda.gov/CCS/SnoServ.html>



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