

MAKING A DIFFERENCE High risk of drought issues continue



Students, teachers and parents from St. Agnes School participated in Make A Difference Day on the afternoon of Friday, Oct. 26. They provided a service to their community by raking leaves for elderly people in their neighborhood.

After spending the summer months reporting on the devastating drought, State Climatologist Dennis Todey was ready to provide some good news to South Dakotans this fall.

Unfortunately, the change in seasons, while bringing cooler temperatures, hasn't brought the much needed moisture South Dakota soils need. "As we transitioned from summer to fall, I fully expected there to be at least a couple systems coming through that would drop 1 to 2-inches of widespread rainfall. At this point all the systems have missed most of South Dakota except for one system which hit the northeastern portion of the state in late October," Todey said.

The storm systems Todey refers to are large low pressure areas which occur with the change in seasons. Differing from summer's higher intensity, thunderstorms which tend not to produce widespread rainfall, fall's rainstorms are often lighter intensity, but provide moisture to a larger coverage area.

Typically these fall rainstorms average about 5 inches of moisture in western South Dakota to about 7 inches of moisture to the eastern portion of the state between September and November. This added moisture before the soil freezes is integral to restoring soil moisture levels heading into spring.

"Any moisture events that happen once the ground freezes is of limited benefit for soil moisture," Todey said.

Unless there are some dramatic weather changes, Todey says drought issues will continue into 2013.

"We are at higher risk for drought issues in 2013 because of the lack of soil moisture. If we get

average rainfall in the spring, it will still be difficult to rebuild the soil moisture profile in many places throughout South Dakota," he said. "We will be very dependent upon rainfall throughout the growing season next summer."

Laura Edwards agrees with him. The SDSU Extension Climate Field Specialist says the drought appears to be getting worse rather than better, based on the Oct. 18 Climate Prediction Center's long-range outlook.

"We have been hoping for improving our situation this fall, but the state is getting drier instead of wetter," Edwards said. "The long-range drought outlook depicts persisting drought into the winter season."

She adds that according to the outlooks, there is a higher probability of above average temperatures through January.

"This is combined with equal chances of above, below or near normal precipitation for November through January. One exception is the southeastern part of the state, which currently has higher probability of being drier than average through January," Edwards said.

Before they can offer an optimistic outlook for 2013 growing season, Todey says a few things need to happen. First there needs to be an extended weather pattern change which would allow moisture to move in from the Gulf of Mexico this fall. Then we need snow cover this winter and some large snow storms in early spring.

"Right now we don't have any strong indications one way or another of the amount of spring or summer moisture we'll receive in 2013," he said.

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Mockler said he would also be a voice for young, working families on the commission if elected. "It's important to understand the challenges facing our younger residents," he said, "and why their futures are leading them out of the county."

Passick, a long-time county resident, is married and raised his family in the county. He is retired, having served as Clay County sheriff for many years.

"For a long time in my life, I've been a very strong proponent for local government," he said, "and that's why I'm proud to have county sheriff here for virtually all of my law enforcement career."

"I think local government is probably one of the most effective governments that we have today," Passick said. "It handles day-to-day activities, it affects our livelihoods. It affects our lifestyles/ and it affects our incomes. It's a very important function," Passick said. "For all of those reasons, I take my position as county commissioner very, very seriously. I know that the decisions that we make will have an impact on people within the county."

He said he believes the commission has done a very good job of trying to do what is in the best interests of county citizens.

"I think that we have resolved a number of issues in the past four years," Passick said. "Several of them have been good for almost everyone involved; obviously it is impossible to please everyone. You have to make a decision, and someone is not going to be happy with the decisions you've made. We've resolved a lot of them and we're still working on some, and it would certainly be my hope to stay at least one more term and try to continue some in trying to resolve some of these more important issues."

Powell, the husband of County Treasurer Cathi Powell, has been a member of the county commission for nearly eight years.

His local government experience prior to that includes serving on the city planning commission, and a three-year stint as Central Ward alderman on the Vermillion City Council.

"At the same time, I was appointed to the county planning and zoning board, and in the course of those appointments, I helped with the writing of the city's comprehensive plan and the county's comprehensive plan," Powell said. He also gave input on both the city's and the county's zoning ordinances.

"I'm currently the chairman of the county commissioners," he said, "and I really enjoy the way everyone works so well together."

Tom Sorensen, the forum moderator, asked county commission candidates what they would input they would give to members of the state legislature on drainage issues and others matters that important on the county level.

Drainage has been a big issue, as there have been several wet years in the county before this year's drought, Powell said. "There are people who believe in drain tile, there are people who don't believe in drain tile, and in an effort to try to get a handle on

it, we put together a task force made up of farmers, one from each township, to try to help us determine if our drainage ordinance is adequate.

"We're keeping them on hold until we hear a little bit more about what the legislature is going to do," he said. "We need to have the laws redefined. The state, a number of years ago, put the responsibility of drainage in individual counties solely with the county commissioners. That pretty much took the problem away from the state and dumped it into our lap. We don't have the expertise to deal with all of that, so we need legislative help."

"Drainage is certainly a major issue facing us in Clay County now, simply because agriculture is our number one industry here in the county," Passick said. "Tiling does appear to have a

positive impact on production, but the thing that our state legislature is going to have to consider is that our current state laws are outdated. They do not address tiling and issues that arise out of tiling that come to us. We need more direction and more guidelines."

Passick said the county also must struggle to meet unfunded mandates from the state. The county is still dealing with providing the same level of service to local citizens, he said, after many of the county agencies providing those services received a 10 percent budget reduction from the state.

"In order to maintain these functions, we have to cut somewhere," he said, "because our funds are completely obligated. We don't have any excess funds that we can draw

from."

"Drainage is a huge issue in Clay County," Mockler said. "I,m for tiling; it's a great way to manage the water without sending nitrates down the river. Open ditches send silt down the river."

One reason he favors tiling, Mockler said, is the better drainage allows for increased crop production.

"With the increased production, our tax base goes up, so that's another way for the county to increase revenue," he said. "We need a plan, and it can't be painted with a wide brush. We need clear cut rules that aren't open for interpretation by different administrations. We need a plan, we need to stick with it, it needs to be flexible, but we need something we can work with."

Bremer said she work to have state lawmakers restore funding

levels to counties. "Many of our projects get putting back on the back burner, and when we have a five-year plan, I think the state should go along with what they set as a plan, and provide the money for what we need to do."

She said greater state involvement with counties is also needed for the development of drainage systems.

"It seems like everybody

drains from the top, and the poor guy down toward the bottom near the Vermillion River gets all of the water," Bremer said. "There should be some way, with this (state) committee that we are working with, to slow down the process of floodwater and to further work on that issue."

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