**For Release Wednesday, September 21, 2022**

**Capitol View**

**Commentary by J.L. Schmidt**

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**The Drought: Just How Dry Is It In Nebraska?**

“I wanna know, have you ever seen the rain?

I wanna know, have you ever seen the rain?

Coming down on a sunny day.”

*Have You Ever Seen the Rain?*   
Credence Clearwater Revival  
John C. Fogerty

Fitting words from a 1970s hit and very appropriate to a worsening problem statewide.

To date, 66 of Nebraska’s 93 counties have received a US Department of Agriculture Disaster Declaration. Nebraska is no stranger to drought, which is a naturally occurring condition resulting from less than normal precipitation. While droughts are normal, they can affect people, communities, and the environment, especially when water use exceeds supply.

The National Drought Mitigation Center said moderate drought has already stunted pasture and crop growth in 86.3 percent of the state. Severe drought with low crop yields and a broader economic impact, including production at ethanol plants impacts 62.7 percent of the state.

The center says that 1.6 million Nebraskans are affected by the drought. July was the 57th wettest month since record keeping began 128 years ago. This has been the 15th driest year to date. Hay is scarce and expensive, and producers are selling cattle early as extreme drought grips 27.7 percent of the state. The worst, exceptional drought, has hit 10.5 percent of the state where crop germination has been stunted and high levels of nitrate are found in corn.

Have you ever seen the rain?

Dodge County farmer Grant Hansen told Omaha’s KETV that he has seen about a half-inch of rain since June. The lack of rain will affect how and when he harvests. "I'll probably get started at the end of September or first part of October," Hansen said. "Corn will probably dry down quicker than it normally would in weather like this."

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“Long as I remember, the rain been coming down. Clouds of mystery pouring confusion on the ground.” That’s another Fogerty line from *Who’ll Stop the Rain.*

There’s no confusion here, Nate Dorsey with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's Extension Office told KETV. Nebraska hasn't seen a drought such as this year's in nearly a decade. "The last time Nebraska really struggled with drought was 2012. It's been a while and even then, I don't know if was as bad as it is now, Dorsey said.

Even though this is not the first time they have faced a similar natural event, this one is more challenging according to Nebraska Cattlemen President Brenda Masek.

“It wasn’t that long ago that we went through the 2012 drought, and that was pretty bad,” she said. “When we went through that drought, we didn’t have this inflation and the supply chain shutdown that we have now.” Liquidation is the option for many farmers and ranchers who don’t have enough to feed their cattle.

Governor Pete Ricketts seized the opportunity to make a pitch for the $500 million resurrection of the long-dormant Perkins County Canal.

In an unannounced visit to the area, Ricketts said drought conditions in Nebraska make it even more essential that the controversial project be built. “This visit reinforced the need for us to protect every drop of South Platte River water we can,” Ricketts said in a press release.  “The Perkins County Canal is essential for this purpose.”

He added it’s the only way Nebraska could claim non-irrigation period flows from the South Platte River guaranteed in a river compact with Colorado. Opponents of the canal say the $500 million will likely just cover legal fees.

While that ditch could someday replenish the flow in the Platte River, which now features several totally dry spots downstream, it would do nothing to help Lake McConaughy near Ogallala which is at 38.5 percent of capacity.

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Of all the droughts that have occurred in the United States, the drought events of the 1930s are widely considered to be the “drought of record” for the nation. The 1930s drought is often referred to as if it were one episode, but it was actually several distinct events occurring in such rapid succession that affected regions were not able to recover adequately before another drought began, according to educational materials at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

The term Dust Bowl was coined in 1935 when an AP reporter, Robert Geiger, used it to describe the drought-affected south central United States in the aftermath of horrific dust storms. Although it technically refers to a limited regional area, the Dust Bowl has come to symbolize the hardships of the entire nation during the 1930s.

I grew up with parents who lived through the experience. My late father taught me how a crescent moon tipped in one direction meant rain while another symbolized drought. I don’t know about the science, but it made for a nice story to share with my children.

Let’s hope the moon tips to the “wet” side soon.

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*J.L. Schmidt has been covering Nebraska government and politics since 1979. He has been a registered Independent for more than 20 years*.