

DROUGHT MONITORING TASK FORCE
Drought Status Report
April 24, 2006

Average to above average precipitation between April 1 and April 24 has provided short term relief from many drought impacts throughout the Commonwealth. While statewide precipitation for the current water year (beginning October 1, 2005) is in the normal range, statewide participation since January 1, 2006 is only 63% of normal. Appendix A contains precipitation tables for periods going back to the beginning of the current water year. The long-range climatological outlook calls for equal chances of below average, average, and above average precipitation and temperatures through July of 2006.

The latest NOAA drought monitor indicates the occurrence of moderate and severe drought conditions in the south central portion of the Commonwealth and is included as Appendix B. Appendix C contains information from the national drought monitor with only Virginia displayed. It is anticipated that the precipitation received between the release of the drought monitor on April 18 and April 24 will result in some improvements of these conditions. The NOAA seasonal drought outlook through July 2006 shows the potential for drought impacts to diminish in all areas currently identified as being impacted by drought in Virginia. The seasonal drought outlook is included as Appendix D.

Seven day average streamflows in the south central portion of the Commonwealth are less than the 10th percentile when compared to average flows for April 24. It should be noted that streamflows have reacted very quickly to precipitation events between April 1 and April 24. Streamflows will likely decline rapidly without periodic precipitation and this decline will be compounded by the onset of evapo-transpiration demands of actively growing vegetation. Ground water levels are below normal in 12 of the 19 real-time drought monitoring wells across the Commonwealth and the remaining 7 wells are in the lower portion of the normal range. Levels of large reservoirs such as Lake Moomaw, Smith Mountain Lake, Kerr Reservoir, and Philpott Reservoir are near full but inflows are much below normal and reservoir levels are likely to decline very early during the spring-summer season.

No reports of impacts to public water supplies have been received at this time.

The Department of Game and Inland Fisheries reports that access has not been affected at any of the public boat ramps in the Commonwealth but the stocking of trout in certain western portions of the Commonwealth are being curtailed due to very low stream flows. The Department also is concerned that continuing low flow conditions will adversely impact spawning and recruitment of important recreational and commercial species of fish.

Detailed reports on agricultural and forestry drought impacts follow.

AGRICULTURAL DROUGHT IMPACTS
Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services

Overview

Some observers of rainfall conditions over the past 30 years compare what is happening and would could happen in 2006 with the major agricultural drought of 1977. Streams and rivers are noticeably lower than normal in many areas of the state. Two-thirds of Virginia is considered to be in a moderate drought condition. With its lighter, sandy soils, we suspect that the eastern farming areas of the state will be having more problems with short rainfall. For the week ending April 16, 2006, topsoil moisture was very short to short in 79% of fields, which was an improvement from 87% for the week ending April 2, 2006..

Impact on Crops

Regarding crops in the ground and pasture, FSA reports that winter wheat is hanging on waiting for rain and that pastures have not begun to green out because of dry conditions.

For Virginia agriculture the month of April is a critical time for preparing for the new crop year. That includes field preparation and planting. Having adequate soil moisture now is essential to seed germination and plant growth.

Under the present conditions, farmers are delaying their plans to plant. They can only wait so long before the window of opportunity closes.

Some farmers had to make their decisions about how much they would plant months ago. For example, two months ago, tobacco farmers had to place their orders for plants for this year's crop. (The great majority of the plants they ordered are coming from greenhouses in North Carolina.) They have to pay a good part of the cost of the plants up-front when they place their orders. If conditions do not improve, tobacco farmers could be getting their plants but have no place to put them. That would be a loss of money.

Based on previous dry seasons, we know that tobacco farmers have used irrigation on a major portion of their flue-cured tobacco acreage, but irrigating fields to prepare the ground for transplants is not an option. The plants have got to go in the ground before the center pivots (irrigation equipment) are set up in the fields.

The dry weather is a problem for Virginia corn and small grains growers. Surface and subsurface moisture are well below normal. Small grains growers have had only about ½ inch of rain on the crop since they applied nitrogen last winter. This means that the crop has been slow in up taking the nitrogen and plant growth is behind schedule.

Due to the dry weather, corn planting is moving along faster than normal. However, there is very little moisture to facilitate the germination of the seed. With normal rainfall the rest of the growing season, this could turn into a positive. Without normal rainfall, yields will be seriously reduced.

Ponds for irrigation are already below normal which may mean a shortage of irrigation water if conditions turn hot and dry during June, July, and August.

If the dry conditions do not change, then growers will find it very difficult to plant soybeans in June and July.

It would take a rainfall event of an inch or more throughout the state to avoid serious problems with germination for field crops and with pasture production. Under the current situation, timely rains will be needed over the next several months if Virginia is to have a normal production year.

The activation of crop herbicides has been reduced or minimized by the lack of moisture. Fertilizer activation has also been minimized with low moisture in hay crops and pastures. Some producers are waiting to apply inputs such as fertilizer and crop protectants.

Impact on Livestock

Because of dry conditions in 2005, farmers lost at least two hay cuttings near the end of the growing season and had to start early putting their livestock on feed and to use up what hay they had in storage for the winter. As of the week ending April 16, 2006, 46 percent of pastures were very poor to poor and 36 percent were in fair condition. Only 18% were good to excellent.

Unless rain comes soon to promote pasture production, farmers are going to have to consider culling their herds earlier and selling off while cattle prices are still favorable. Being forced to sell cattle at lower weights, could force prices downward. Feeder market prices have not yet been influenced downward by dry conditions.

Water is still flowing in streams but at lower levels than normal.

Impact on Dairy Industry

Probably the biggest impact has been on Rockingham and Augusta county dairies. They rely on small grain silage, particularly rye, and typically begin chopping on April 20. There is a shortage of spring silage, meaning that those dairymen will have to rely on hay and stored silage.

At this point, there has not been any planning for an extended drought. Since it is still early, it has been everyone's past experience that it is going to rain. The dairy industry is certainly concerned, but they are not alarmed. They believe that there will be no serious problems if it rains within the next two to three weeks.

Condition of Wells

The Farm Service Agency has not received any reports of farmers having well problems (wells running dry) associated with dry weather; but it is suspected that Virginia has yet to recover fully from the significant drought periods that have occurred over the past seven to eight years and that continued dry weather this spring could lead to well failures especially for shallower wells.

FSA has a program for helping farmers re-establish water sources for their livestock. Localities can go to FSA-Richmond with requests for such funding if there is a documented need for farmers in that locality. In other words, it does not require that the Governor to request disaster designation from the Secretary of Agriculture.

Virginia Cooperative Extension's Efforts to Help Farmers

Virginia Cooperative Extension specialists and agents are notifying producers of best management practices including:

1. maximizing the value of inputs (fertilizer and crop protectants)
2. strategies for feeding livestock using alternative feeds and forages and stretching pasture and resources.
3. evaluating small grain crops for additional inputs (nitrogen)
4. evaluating corn and other crops for additional input (nitrogen, crop protectants)
5. agents and specialists responding to direct requests and needs identified by producers in localities (107 units)
6. water conservation and water management in landscape situations and with ornamental and turf plants

Impact of Continued Drought Conditions

A continued drought along with higher interest rates, fuel costs, etc., is expected to place significant financial stress on individual farmers and they, as usual, will be forced to absorb the increased cost of doing business. We know that electric costs are expected to rise. Fuel prices are rising as supplies are getting tighter.

If drought conditions continue, the Governor can expect that localities--with input from Virginia Cooperative Extension personnel--will begin seeking the Governor's help in obtaining federal disaster designation. By state law, Cooperative Extension personnel have the lead role in assessing natural disasters impacting agriculture.

Due to drought conditions in 2005, fifty-three (53) Virginia localities requested the Governor's assistance in obtaining federal disaster designation, 49 of which have been granted a primary disaster designation. In addition 69 localities have been designated contiguous disaster areas due to drought.

VDACS' Efforts to Assist Farmers Experiencing Drought

VDACS, in its on-going effort to serve Virginia agriculture, supports farmers and their operations in times of drought and other natural disasters. Here is a list of examples of what we are doing to help farmers:

1. Marketing staff around the state are monitoring conditions and reporting to agency management on the situation in order to keep the agency apprised of local conditions.
2. Livestock marketing provides assistance through regular and special sales as well as advising producers on getting the best prices for the livestock they sell.
3. VDACS' work through the agency USDA RMA grants over the last three years to educate producers on risk management through crop insurance, forwarding contracting and hedging on prices and crop and farm diversification.
4. VDACS completed the application and work to gain approval for Adjusted Gross Revenue Lite (AGR Lite) whole farm revenue assurance insurance through USDA RMA. It is being offered in VA in 2006.

Forestry Drought Impacts Virginia Department of Forestry

The dry conditions of the late winter/early spring have result in favorable conditions for wildfire activity. The Virginia Department of Forestry has experienced an above average spring wildfire season punctuated by high fire occurrence throughout the Commonwealth and an above average number of lightning caused fires as a result of the dry fuel conditions.

The few frontal systems that have moved through the state over the last month have just not provided enough precipitation to provide much of a break in the activity and in a couple of cases, these storms actually led to an outbreak of new fires as a result of the lightning associated with the storms.

Since January 1st, The VDOF responded to more 1000 wildfires which have burned more than 11,000 acres as well as damaging or destroying 13 homes and 37 other structures. On a positive note, the VDOF has saved or protected 423 homes and 256 other structures during this same period. These numbers are all well above our 5 and 10 year averages for the period.

Rainfall received April 21 and 22 will go a long way to help bring a close to Virginia's spring wildfire season.

APPENDIX A

Precipitation departures by Drought Evaluation Region.

PRELIMINARY PRECIPITATION SUMMARY

Prepared:
4/20/06

DROUGHT REGION	OBSERVED	APR 1, 2006 NORMAL	- APR 18, 2006 DEPARTURE	% OF NORM.
1 Big Sandy	3.90	2.25	1.64	173%
2 New River	2.08	2.13	-0.05	98%
3 Roanoke	1.48	2.28	-0.81	65%
4 Upper James	2.49	2.04	0.45	122%
5 Middle James	1.55	2.01	-0.46	77%
6 Shenandoah	1.61	1.75	-0.15	92%
7 Northern Virginia	2.41	1.98	0.42	121%
8 Northern Piedmont	2.18	1.97	0.21	111%
9 Chowan	1.58	2.06	-0.48	77%
10 Northern Coastal Plain	2.43	1.85	0.58	131%
11 York-James	1.68	1.98	-0.30	85%
12 Southeast Virginia	1.93	1.95	-0.02	99%
13 Eastern Shore	2.67	1.75	0.92	153%
Statewide	2.15	2.05	0.10	105%

DROUGHT REGION	OBSERVED	MAR 1, 2006 NORMAL	- APR 18, 2006 DEPARTURE	% OF NORM.
1 Big Sandy	6.13	6.50	-0.37	94%
2 New River	3.00	5.80	-2.81	52%
3 Roanoke	2.09	6.55	-4.45	32%
4 Upper James	3.35	5.83	-2.47	58%
5 Middle James	1.95	6.06	-4.12	32%
6 Shenandoah	2.01	4.95	-2.94	41%
7 Northern Virginia	2.87	5.64	-2.77	51%
8 Northern Piedmont	2.56	5.78	-3.22	44%
9 Chowan	1.95	6.43	-4.48	30%
10 Northern Coastal Plain	2.95	6.13	-3.18	48%
11 York-James	2.13	6.66	-4.53	32%
12 Southeast Virginia	2.38	6.15	-3.77	39%
13 Eastern Shore	3.10	6.06	-2.96	51%
Statewide	2.89	6.09	-3.20	47%

DROUGHT REGION		FEB 1, 2006 - APR 18, 2006			
	OBSERVED	NORMAL	DEPARTURE	% OF NORM.	
1	Big Sandy	8.02	10.08	-2.06	80%
2	New River	4.30	8.73	-4.44	49%
3	Roanoke	3.66	9.86	-6.20	37%
4	Upper James	4.57	8.68	-4.11	53%
5	Middle James	3.65	9.19	-5.54	40%
6	Shenandoah	4.60	7.36	-2.76	62%
7	Northern Virginia	5.34	8.31	-2.97	64%
8	Northern Piedmont	4.42	8.75	-4.33	51%
9	Chowan	3.27	9.59	-6.32	34%
10	Northern Coastal Plain	4.77	9.27	-4.50	51%
11	York-James	3.08	10.19	-7.11	30%
12	Southeast Virginia	3.48	9.65	-6.18	36%
13	Eastern Shore	4.08	9.25	-5.18	44%
	Statewide	4.53	9.22	-4.69	49%

DROUGHT REGION		JAN 1, 2006 - APR 18, 2006			
	OBSERVED	NORMAL	DEPARTURE	% OF NORM.	
1	Big Sandy	11.28	13.81	-2.53	82%
2	New River	7.37	11.94	-4.58	62%
3	Roanoke	6.64	13.77	-7.13	48%
4	Upper James	7.69	11.95	-4.27	64%
5	Middle James	6.56	12.85	-6.29	51%
6	Shenandoah	7.12	10.21	-3.09	70%
7	Northern Virginia	8.16	11.58	-3.42	70%
8	Northern Piedmont	7.00	12.27	-5.27	57%
9	Chowan	5.61	13.70	-8.10	41%
10	Northern Coastal Plain	7.93	13.02	-5.09	61%
11	York-James	7.16	14.32	-7.16	50%
12	Southeast Virginia	6.85	13.81	-6.97	50%
13	Eastern Shore	6.77	12.82	-6.05	53%
	Statewide	7.58	12.86	-5.28	59%

DROUGHT REGION		OBSERVED	DEC 1, 2005 NORMAL	- APR 18, 2006 DEPARTURE	% OF NORM.
1	Big Sandy	14.61	17.46	-2.85	84%
2	New River	9.77	14.65	-4.89	67%
3	Roanoke	10.21	17.03	-6.81	60%
4	Upper James	10.28	14.90	-4.62	69%
5	Middle James	10.69	16.02	-5.33	67%
6	Shenandoah	8.69	12.80	-4.11	68%
7	Northern Virginia	10.78	14.68	-3.90	73%
8	Northern Piedmont	10.14	15.55	-5.40	65%
9	Chowan	11.29	16.73	-5.44	67%
10	Northern Coastal Plain	12.30	16.30	-4.00	75%
11	York-James	11.25	17.71	-6.46	64%
12	Southeast Virginia	10.90	16.99	-6.09	64%
13	Eastern Shore	10.68	16.06	-5.38	66%
	Statewide	11.05	15.98	-4.93	69%

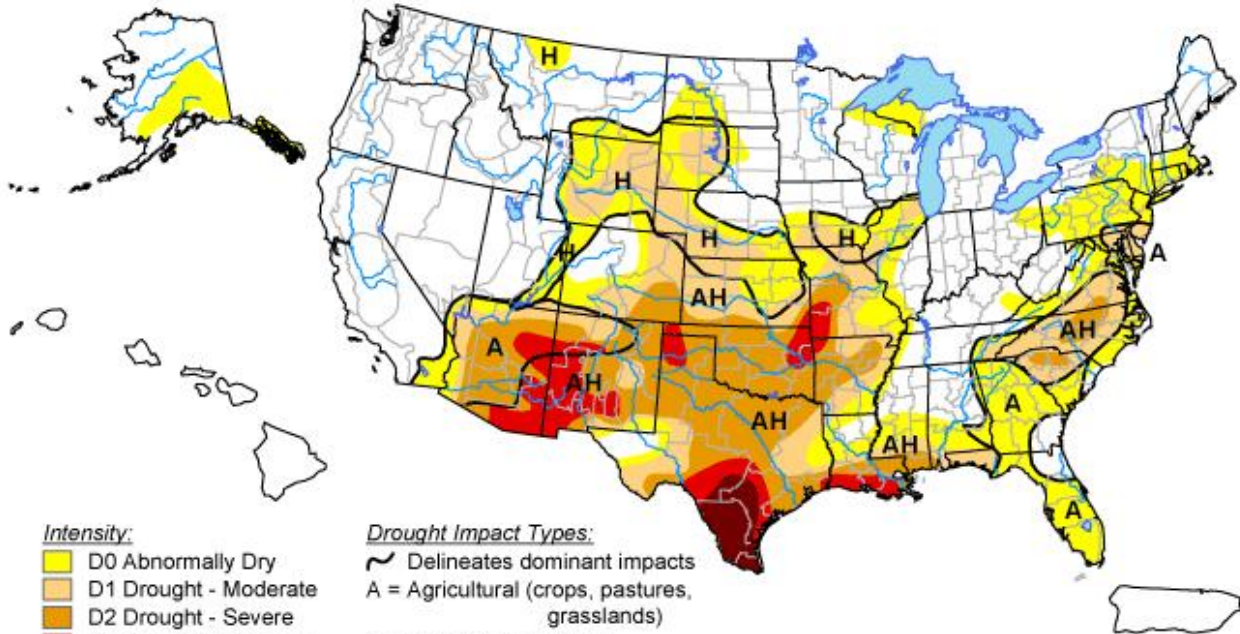
DROUGHT REGION		OBSERVED	NOV 1, 2005 NORMAL	- APR 18, 2006 DEPARTURE	% OF NORM.
1	Big Sandy	17.57	20.74	-3.17	85%
2	New River	13.50	17.69	-4.19	76%
3	Roanoke	14.15	20.39	-6.23	69%
4	Upper James	15.39	18.26	-2.87	84%
5	Middle James	14.15	19.53	-5.38	72%
6	Shenandoah	13.39	15.85	-2.46	84%
7	Northern Virginia	13.71	18.09	-4.38	76%
8	Northern Piedmont	13.82	19.34	-5.52	71%
9	Chowan	14.88	19.84	-4.96	75%
10	Northern Coastal Plain	15.83	19.44	-3.60	81%
11	York-James	14.40	21.08	-6.68	68%
12	Southeast Virginia	14.69	20.06	-5.37	73%
13	Eastern Shore	13.26	19.00	-5.74	70%
	Statewide	14.65	19.21	-4.56	76%

DROUGHT REGION		OBSERVED	OCT 1, 2005 NORMAL	- APR 18, 2006 DEPARTURE	% OF NORM.
1	Big Sandy	19.63	23.62	-4.00	83%
2	New River	17.52	20.85	-3.34	84%
3	Roanoke	20.42	24.10	-3.68	85%
4	Upper James	20.38	21.51	-1.13	95%
5	Middle James	20.59	23.37	-2.78	88%
6	Shenandoah	18.44	19.04	-0.60	97%
7	Northern Virginia	22.35	21.56	0.78	104%
8	Northern Piedmont	22.17	23.34	-1.16	95%
9	Chowan	19.35	23.42	-4.07	83%
10	Northern Coastal Plain	22.64	22.94	-0.30	99%
11	York-James	20.90	24.61	-3.71	85%
12	Southeast Virginia	21.36	23.72	-2.36	90%
13	Eastern Shore	19.20	22.21	-3.02	86%
	Statewide	20.12	22.71	-2.59	89%

APPENDIX B

U.S. Drought Monitor

April 18, 2006
Valid 8 a.m. EDT



Intensity:

- D0 Abnormally Dry
- D1 Drought - Moderate
- D2 Drought - Severe
- D3 Drought - Extreme
- D4 Drought - Exceptional

Drought Impact Types:

- Delineates dominant impacts
- A = Agricultural (crops, pastures, grasslands)
- H = Hydrological (water)
- (No type = Both impacts)

The Drought Monitor focuses on broad-scale conditions. Local conditions may vary. See accompanying text summary for forecast statements.

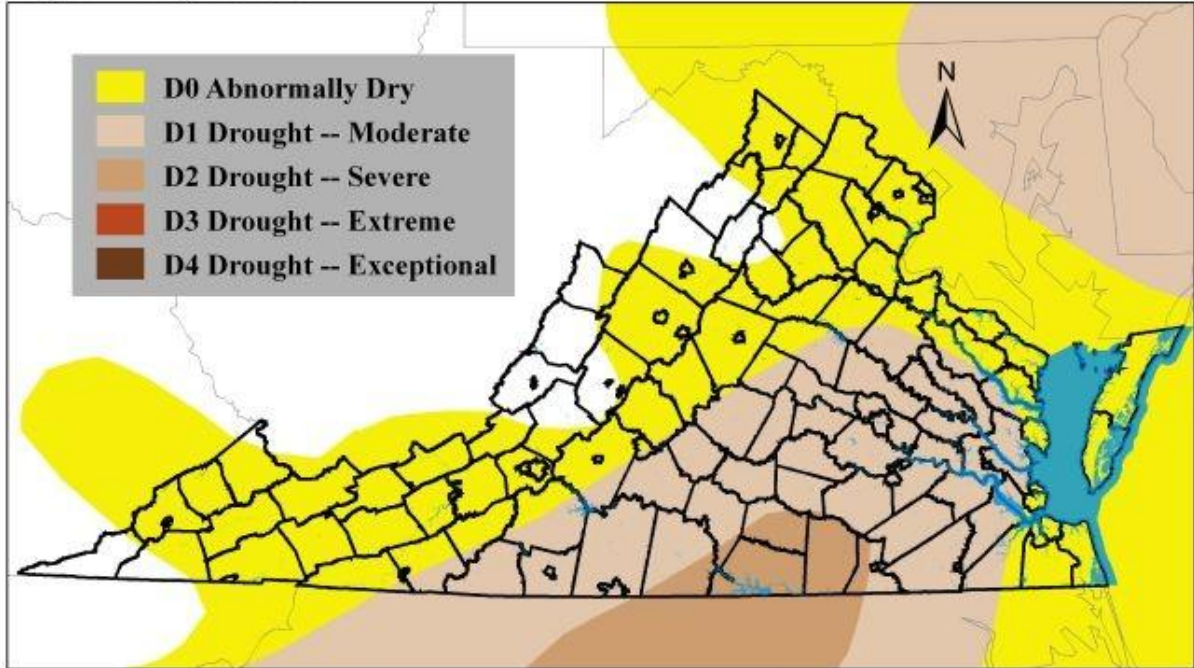
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Released Thursday, April 20, 2006
Author: Rich Tinker, CPC/NCEP/NWS/NOAA

APPENDIX C

U.S. Drought Monitor - Virginia April 18, 2006



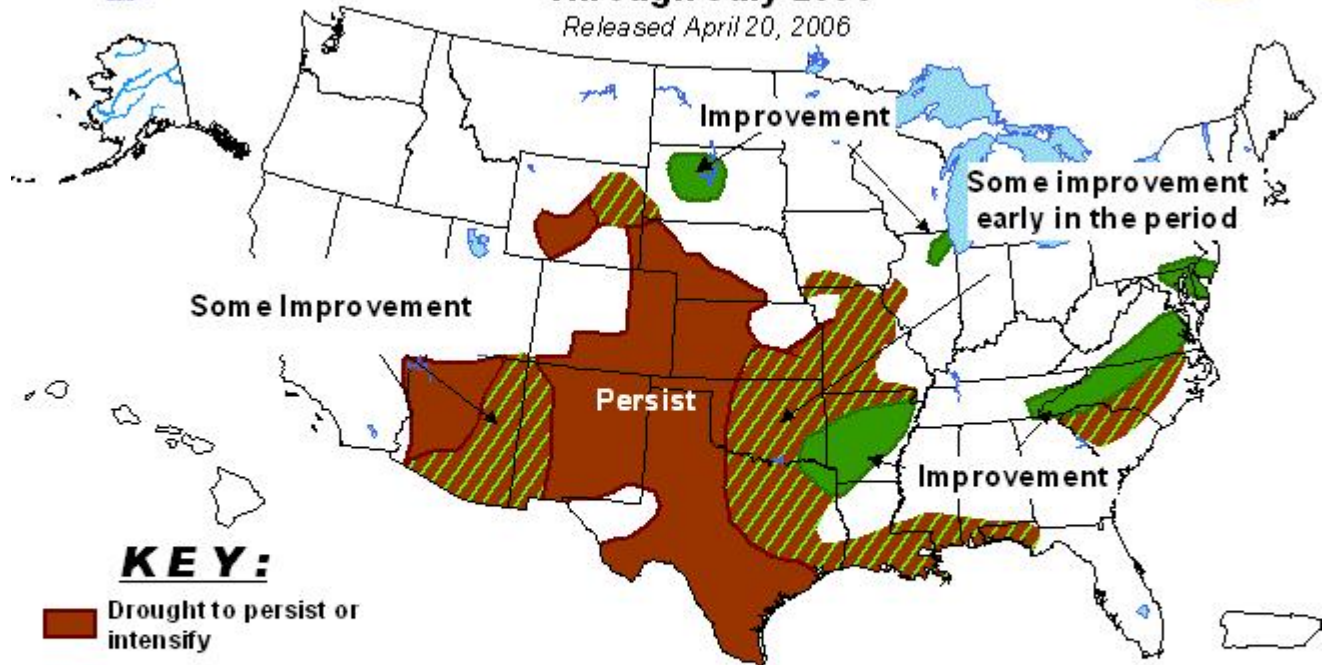
Note: The U.S. Drought Monitor focuses on broad-scale conditions. Local conditions may vary. Click on map to view complete U.S. Drought Monitor graphic.

APPENDIX D

U.S. Seasonal Drought Outlook

Through July 2006

Released April 20, 2006



KEY:

-  Drought to persist or intensify
-  Drought ongoing, some improvement
-  Drought likely to improve, impacts ease
-  Drought development likely

Depicts general, large-scale trends based on subjectively derived probabilities guided by numerous indicators, including short- and long-range statistical and dynamical forecasts. Short-term events -- such as individual storms -- cannot be accurately forecast more than a few days in advance, so use caution if using this outlook for applications -- such as crops -- that can be affected by such events. "Ongoing" drought areas are approximated from the Drought Monitor (D1 to D4). For weekly drought updates, see the latest Drought Monitor map and text. NOTE: the green improvement areas imply at least a 1-category improvement in the Drought Monitor intensity levels, but do not necessarily imply drought elimination.