



NEWS RELEASE

April 16, 2013

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Climate Experts Discuss Drought in the Tropics *SFWMD hosts biennial U.S. Drought Monitor Forum*



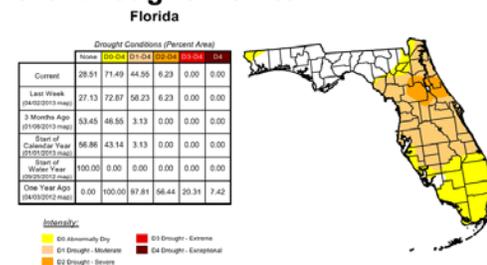
South Florida's weather extremes have included drought conditions in recent years. From left: Stormwater Treatment Area 1 East in May 2009, Loxahatchee Slough in June 2011. (Click on the photos for larger versions.)

West Palm Beach, FL — In a region where weather extremes in a single year can range from flooding to drought, a group of local, national and international climate experts are meeting this week in West Palm Beach for the biennial U.S. Drought Monitor Forum. This year's conference, being held at South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) headquarters, has a special focus on the impacts of drought in South Florida and how these impacts are represented in the official monitor report.

The U.S. Drought Monitor report is a synthesis of information from federal, state and academic scientists. These experts collaborate to provide a weekly, official analysis and assessment of current drought conditions across the United States.

Governments, researchers and agencies such as the South Florida Water Management District use the monitor as a key planning tool to help accomplish their varied missions. The monitor is also used to brief the president, Congress and other federal agencies on current national conditions.

U.S. Drought Monitor April 9, 2013
Valid 7 a.m. EST



(Click on the image for the latest report.)

“Here in South Florida, the potential for drought is always factored into our water management planning,” said SFWMD Executive Director Melissa L. Meeker, who provided opening remarks at the three-day event. “By hosting this year’s forum of drought experts, we’re able to both share and gain valuable knowledge for our flood control, water supply and environmental restoration missions.”

Two SFWMD meteorologists with more than 40 years of combined South Florida weather experience contribute to the U.S. Drought Monitor with input and data from the District’s network of 200 rain gauges and 26 weather stations. This data, along with other information from a network of more than 350 experts from across the country, helps the group provide a national drought picture along with a county-by-county report for Florida.

Answering the question “What is drought in a tropical environment?” is this year’s theme at the U.S. Drought Monitor Forum, organized by the National Drought Mitigation Center based at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. The university is one of the main partners in the group, along with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Department of Commerce and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

“This is us, going into [South Florida’s] backyard, to learn what drought means to them, and how do we depict that on a national map,” said Mark Svoboda, one of the monitor authors and leader of the National Drought Mitigation Center’s Monitoring Program Area.

By holding this year’s event in South Florida, U.S. Drought Monitor scientists say they hope to learn from local experiences with drought and its impacts, including:

- Why dry conditions have led to a meteorological drought but, at times, not to a subsequent water shortage.
- Why low water levels in aquifers can persist long after drought conditions are remedied by rainfall.
- Understanding historical data that suggests that during La Niña events (colder temperatures in the tropical region of the Pacific Ocean) South Florida’s dry season tends to have unusually drier conditions – and how this may help with forecasting drought in the SFWMD’s efforts to manage water supplies.

As of this week, a majority of the 16 counties in the SFWMD from Orlando to the Florida Keys were reported as being “abnormally dry,” which is the lowest designation on the U.S. Drought Monitor scale. Exceptional drought is the most severe condition on the scale. Water supplies are adequate for this time of year, however, because of a highly productive 2012 wet season and several large rainfall events.

The forum spans three days:

- Tuesday: The focus is on how the U.S. Drought Monitor operates. The program will include presentations by SFWMD scientists and engineers and segments on characterizing drought in the greater Everglades.
- Wednesday: The focus is on drought impacts and how they are monitored, including impacts experienced by agriculture, municipal water supplies and recreation and tourism.
- Thursday: The focus is on drought in the Caribbean, Central America and Pacific islands.

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About the South Florida Water Management District

The South Florida Water Management District is a regional, governmental agency that oversees the water resources in the southern half of the state – 16 counties from Orlando to the Keys. It is the oldest and largest of the state's five water management districts. The agency mission is to manage and protect water resources of the region by balancing and improving water quality, flood control, natural systems and water supply. A key initiative is cleanup and restoration of the Everglades.