



Northeast News Update

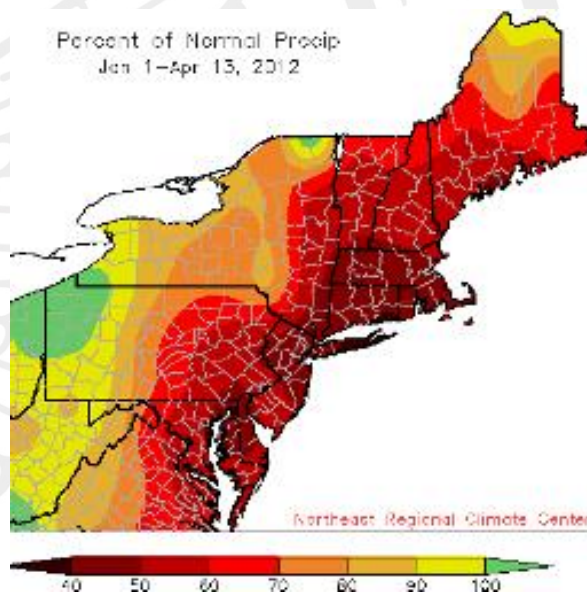
By Jim Skorulski, agronomist, Northeast Region

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And the extremes keep coming...

Few in the golf industry will complain about the weather we have experienced this past winter and early spring. We appear to be about four weeks ahead of where we normally are in mid-April. The mild winter and warm and dry spring have created some unusual management challenges with timing insecticide and herbicide sprays, but, for the most part, the spring season is off to an excellent start.

With all good must come some bad, or so they say. The dry weather pattern has created moderate-severe drought or abnormally dry conditions across most the Region. The Northeast Regional Climate Center (NRCC), reports areas that have received 30-40% their normal precipitation since January 1. That equates to rain deficits of 3-7 inches in the more eastern parts of the region. The signs of the drought are now becoming apparent with reduced flow rates in smaller streams and rivers, and lower water levels in ponds. Fortunately, we are still dealing with relatively moderate air temperatures so the impacts of the dry weather are not nearly as bad as we would expect to see in the warmer summer months.



The weather can change rapidly, and we may see a return to more normal precipitation patterns as we move further into spring. However, it's never too early to get the word out about current conditions and more serious implications should the precipitation anomaly continue into summer. Here are some things to consider and implement to work successfully through an extended drought.

- Take all actions possible to promote a deep and vigorous root system now. That includes following through with spring cultivation practices, especially in fairways and roughs where irrigation practices are likely to be impacted most should the drought become extreme.
- Assume the worst case scenario for an extended drought and possible water use restrictions. Work closely with your course officials or owners to determine options to deal with reduced or severe deficit irrigation. Make sure everyone understands that irrigation programs may have to be altered, and, in doing so, the appearance of those areas will likely be impacted. Keep the golfers updated on the conditions, and voluntary or involuntary water use reductions.
- Develop a cart use policy for drought stressed fairways. That may include restricting carts to paths or roughs. Entry and exit points to cart paths will also have to be managed closely and traffic patterns shifted more frequently to minimize traffic damage.
- Be aware of your water use permit and total annual water allocation. Early irrigation may impact the water that is available for use later in the season. Conserve water by limiting or avoiding irrigation in roughs and nonessential areas. Keep playing surfaces dry and firm. A little drought stress in April and May is more tolerable than running out of water when it is really needed in the heat of summer. Fast and firm should be the objective, especially when cooler temperatures permit.
- How efficient is your irrigation system? Even new irrigation systems can benefit from an irrigation audit and system tune-up. The audit will determine the distribution uniformity (DU) of water applications over a measured area and will identify weaknesses that may be corrected by

leveling sprinkler heads, modifying nozzles or repositioning sprinkler heads.

- Purchase a moisture meter. The data provided from frequent use will also help identify potential problem areas and improve your ability to irrigate the golf course under any condition and especially during periods of drought.
- Although there may be pressure to exceed water use allocations or disregard imposed water regulations, *do not* do so. Golf courses will be under the watchful eye of regulators and the public. The golf course industry has developed a good reputation for its water conservation efforts. That reputation will be severely damaged by even one or two bad players.
- Water quality is likely to deteriorate if drought conditions persist long into summer. It is a good idea to have your irrigation water tested periodically for sodium and bicarbonate levels and then to monitor its quality should the drought continue. This is especially true for coastal golf courses where there are always concerns with saltwater intrusion into fresh water wells. Golf courses that have dealt with salt problems should consider a granular gypsum application this spring to help move accumulated salts through the surface soils.

This is no time to panic, but we must be aware of where we currently stand and consider the implications a more serious drought is likely to have. More information regarding the drought can be obtained at the NRCC website http://www.nrcc.cornell.edu/page_northeast.html. The Northeast Green Section offices will also provide updates and specific management information should the precipitation impacts continue.

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