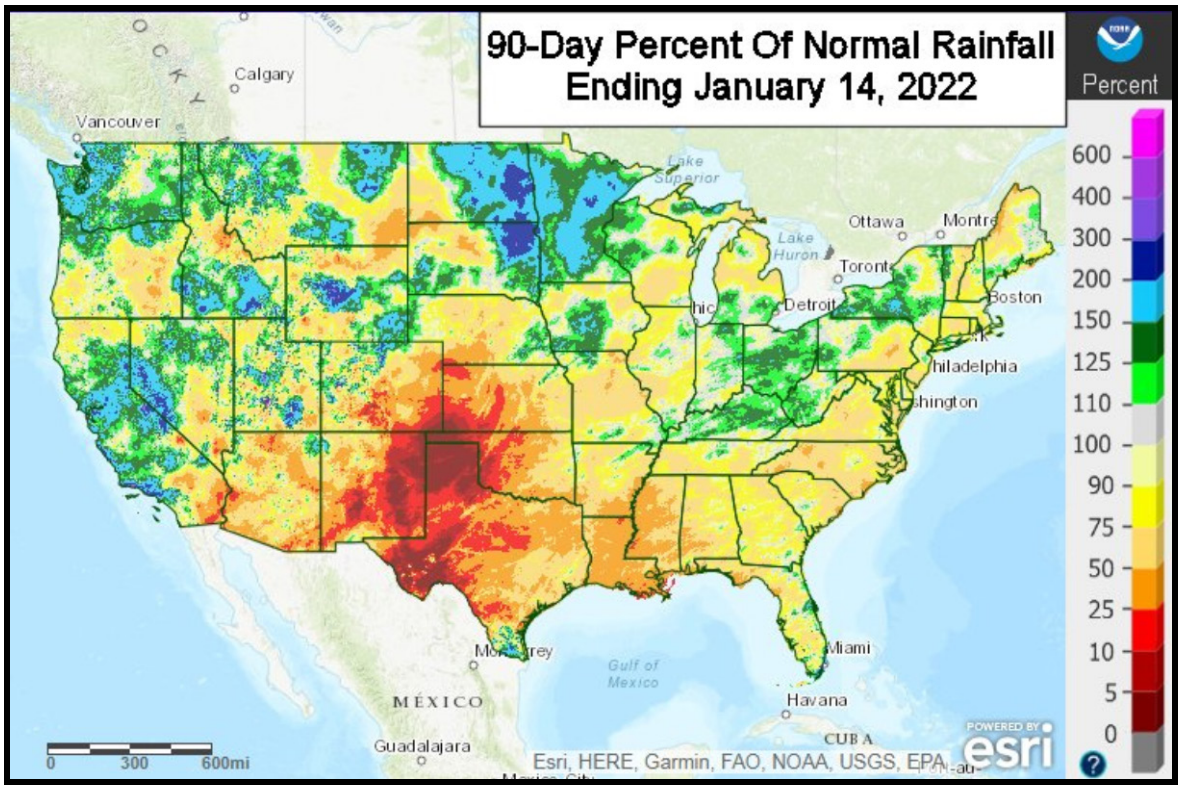
U.S. Plains Drought Not Likely To Budge

By Andrew Owen

Kansas City, January 14 (World Weather Inc.) – Eastern sections of the Dakotas into Minnesota have seen drought eased or erased in recent months due to above normal precipitation. The remaining portions of the U.S. Plains are otherwise suffering from varying levels of drought. Some of the driest conditions were noted in the southern and west-central Plains, along with Montana and western North Dakota. Winter wheat in both the west-central high Plains and Montana was planted under less than favorable to poor conditions last autumn and abundant precipitation is needed to improve the outlook. Precipitation will be limited in the coming weeks for much of the Plains and drought will persist. ***There will be potential for light snow later next week that will help blanket the ground in portions of the central and southern Plains. The snow may help protect some wheat from the trailing arctic airmass, although winterkill may still be a concern and moisture from the snow will not be enough to change drought status.***

The central and southern Plains have been drier or much drier than normal during the past three months. These areas received less than 50% of normal precipitation for the 90-day period ending January 13. The Texas Panhandle and portions of western Oklahoma, southwestern Kansas and southeastern Colorado reported less than 10% of normal precipitation heaving topsoil has become an issue resulting in periodic bouts of blowing dust. Eastern sections of the Dakotas and much of Minnesota were otherwise wetter than normal during this time, receiving 125-300% of normal precipitation, mainly due to unusually great precipitation in October. Several pockets in Montana also received above normal precipitation while most other locations in the Plains were drier than usual.



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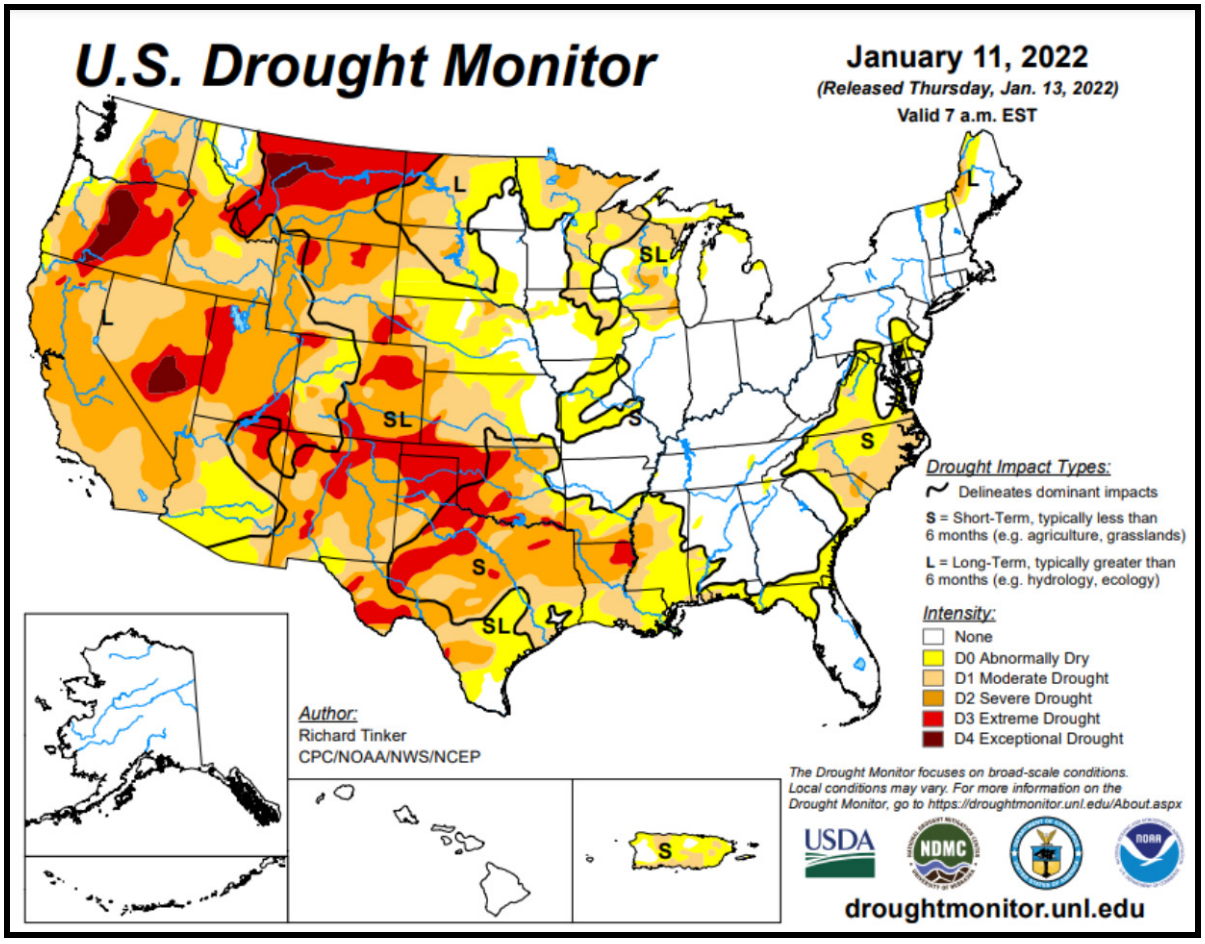
Moderate to extreme drought was noted in much of the central and southern Plains as of January 11. However, many areas in eastern and north-central Kansas into southern Nebraska were drought-free or only abnormally dry. Eastern sections of the Dakotas into much of Minnesota were also abnormally dry to drought-free due to the above normal precipitation in recent months. Montana and western North Dakota were otherwise suffering from severe to extreme drought.

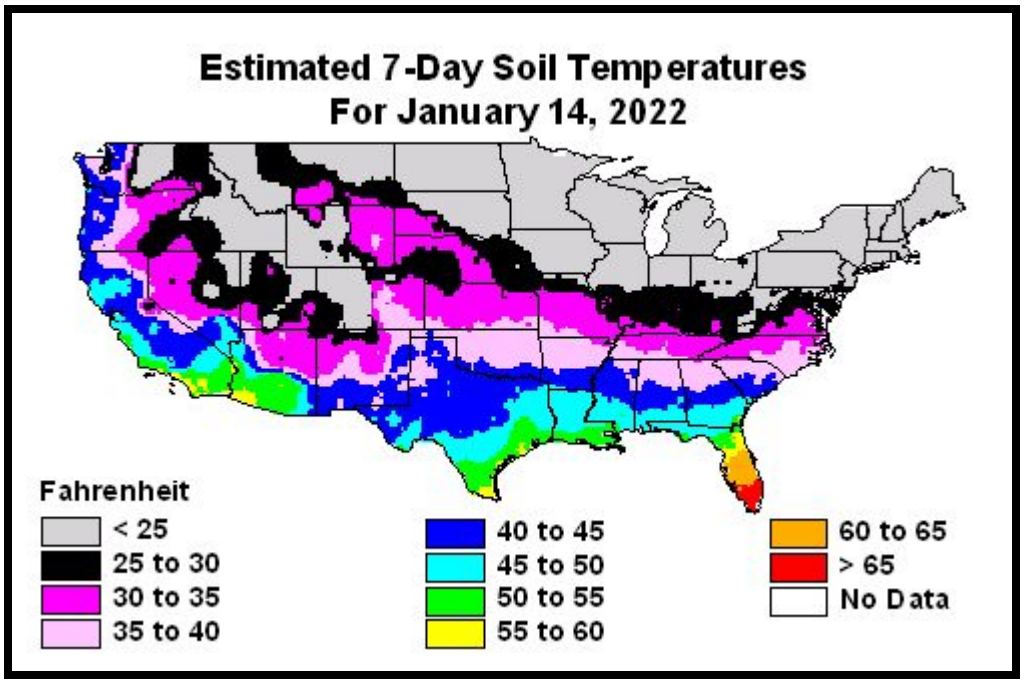
The severe moisture shortages promoted uneven or poor establishment for hard red winter wheat in the central and southern Plains last autumn. Many areas in the high Plains region were too dry to support the best possible emergence and establishment. Conditions further deteriorated before seasonal cooling forced crops into a dormant or semi-dormant state. Areas farther east in Kansas and Oklahoma into southern Nebraska received enough precipitation to support generally favorable planting and establishment. However, much of the central and southern Plains are in need of precipitation into early spring to improve the outlook for the wheat.



Winter wheat conditions in Montana are also extremely poor due to the drought. Abundant precipitation will be needed in the coming weeks to improve the outlook. Some of the crop never emerged because of dryness and other crops are now well established and vulnerable to winterkill. Many areas in South Dakota were also too dry this past autumn for ideal establishment, though precipitation in recent months has likely improved the outlook

for wheat in the previously dry fields. The northern Plains will still need precipitation later this winter and early this spring to not only improve winter wheat conditions, but to support good spring crop planting.

Winter crops are dormant through the northern and central plains, but a little minor development may be occurring in Texas. There has been some concern for winterkill so far this season in parts of Montana, South Dakota, southwestern Nebraska and northeastern Colorado. World Weather, Inc. does not believe that losses have been widespread, but some damage is certainly suspected.

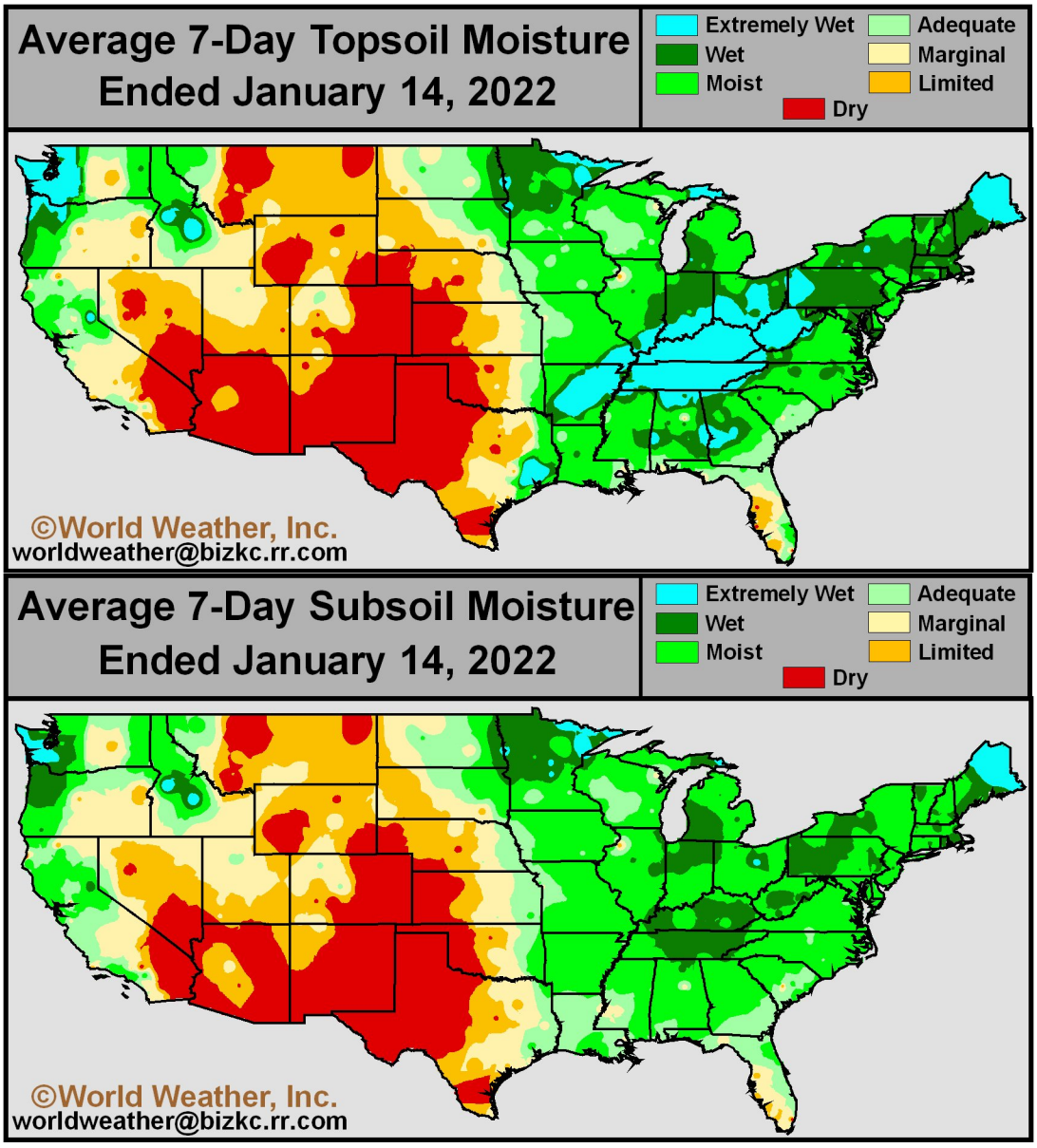


WEATHER OUTLOOK

Eastern sections of the Dakotas and Minnesota will see a mix of precipitation and sunshine through the end of next week. Moisture totals by next Friday morning will range from 0.20 to 1.00 inch with the largest portion of that moisture occurring from today's snowstorm. The snowpack will increase most significantly from central North Dakota into Iowa where 4 to 10 inches and local totals 12 inches either have occurred or will have occurred by tonight. Snowfall of a dusting to inches might occur in the remainder of the coming week. Soil moisture will remain near current levels. These areas will also have a few opportunities for spotty precipitation January 22 – 28.

Montana will also see a mix of precipitation and sunshine through the end of next week. The best chance for precipitation will occur next week as arctic air pushes into central Canada. Moisture totals by next Friday morning will only range from trace amounts to 0.50 inch in central and western Montana. Snowfall in the east will range from a dusting to 4 inches while central and western Montana receive 3 to 8 inches of snow and locally more. The moisture will be welcome across the state once the snow melts. However, precipitation totals will be too light to significantly impact long-term soil conditions. Additional rain and

snow will be needed later this winter into early spring to improve winter crop prospects. Concerns for significant wheat losses will otherwise persist.



The remaining portions of the Plains will be drier biased for at least the next two weeks. There will be a band of snow that advances into the central and southern Plains Wednesday and Thursday ahead of an arctic airmass. Snow totals by next Friday morning will range from a dusting to 2 inches and locally more, though there is still time for the forecast to change. Nighttime temperatures next Friday could drop to the positive single digits in portions of Kansas and Nebraska with sub-zero temperatures possible. Confidence is low for the exact temperatures that will occur and a close monitoring of the situation is warranted. The main concern will be whether there will be enough snow to blanket the ground and protect wheat from damage.

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In the meantime, hard red winter wheat country will see drought persist for the next two weeks. The precipitation that does occur will be too light to impact long-term soil conditions. Concern over possible wheat production cuts will continue, although much can change in the next few weeks.
