

**28 & 30 July 2020**

## **Communication**

- Incentives can help start a conversation about the new reality of more variable weather and changes to water availability.
- **Target messaging for specific producers.**
  - Producers talk about water, extreme weather events, available water, and/or timing of water as irrigation being shut off earlier and earlier (and not 'drought').
  - Frame communication so it is specific to the end-user: dryland, vegetable, specialty crop, horse folks look to equine sources for information (not cattle or other livestock pasture information), etc.
- **Build trust and relationships**
  - Connect with stakeholders about what they value and make connections to their values when discussing conservation, adaptation or changes in land management and how those efforts can support what they value.
  - Facilitate on-site (farm, ranch, forest) discussion groups with trend-setting land owners. Gather folks who are already comfortable with each other together to have conversations with their peers.
    - Support small groups discussions among people comfortable talking with each other to develop early adopter networks
    - Start small and let momentum build
    - Important to have funds to pay a farmer/rancher/forester-educator to lead these discussions and host on-site events.
  - Increase collaboration among groups to have more similar messaging and brand it better.
  - Consistency in funding and leadership is key and important to trust-building, messaging, and information acceptance.
- **Engagement**
  - Inquire with stakeholders: When does it start to affect management? How can they be proactive instead of reactive?
  - A drought affecting available water may not impact forage as it all depends on the timing of water limitation.
  - Have conversations with producers on how to make their operation more sustainable through the next drought. Though be sensitive about timing as if current drought was a major disaster time may be needed to recover and be open to next steps to avoid impacts in future.
  - Inquire with producers there water storage needs for watering livestock during droughts.
  - Stakeholders want to know as early as possible what they can expect for the season so that they can start planting and account for climate conditions.

- Note: Washington makes drought declarations based on forecasts rather than waiting until the crisis is present.

- **Data and context**

- It helps to have science in-hand that can be viewed based on practitioners operation.
- Climate has been variable so placing current events into the context of previous wet or dry years is helpful.
- Practitioners want data though do not want to wait 3-5 years for statistics so provide current relevant information. So, have data on hand to support farmers in making decisions.

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- **Message / Messaging**

- Management needs to be before a drought and not in the middle of a drought. Be ready and prepared for a drought.
- New plans should consider climate change and impacts on available water.
- Consistent messaging and outreach is important. Helpful if groups can collaborate to give a similar message across organizations.
- Many users traditionally think in terms of years past to inform behavior. Using "similar year" approach to communicate actions needed can be useful.
- Trigger points or bench marks have been effective as local determinants of drought that signal a need for communication, funding, changes in practices/management and planning.
- When cutting off water allocations. It is important that property owners understand what drought means for how their water might get cut. Important to have an understanding of how water is being used – maintain lawns, ranching, etc.
  - Some of the irrigation districts have websites and fliers, but need to verify everyone is adequately reached.
- Have information about the drought and what you can do / actions (e.g., donate water, etc.).
- Messaging issue at multiple levels. Weather doesn't equate to climate so if it rains that doesn't mean that the drought is gone.
- Need to improve interagency communication to avoid loss of trust or physical losses due to conflicting information / messaging given.
- Existing groups pitch in to fund an individual who is tracking drought metrics and coordinating messaging and actions.
- User-friendly tools are important. For example, some tools are gravitating toward color-based indicators and avoiding a number-heavy model to attract/retain users.