

New England drought means bolder bears, stressed fish

August 21 2016, by Holly Ramer



In this Wednesday Aug. 1, 2007 file photo black bear cubs are seen in Lyme, N.H. Beyond hurting crops and helping the tourism industry, New England's hot, dry summer also is affecting the region's wildlife. Bears are getting bolder,

mosquitoes are multiplying and stream-dwelling fish are stressed. (AP Photo/Cheryl Senter/FILE)

Bears are bolder, mosquitoes are multiplying and stream-dwelling fish are stressed. Beyond hurting crops and helping the tourism industry, New England's hot, dry summer also is affecting the region's wildlife.

All six New England states are experiencing at least moderate drought, according to the National Drought Mitigation Center, with severe patches in all but Vermont and pockets of extreme drought in Massachusetts and New Hampshire.

Low rainfall also means low stream flow levels across the region. The U.S. Geological Survey says all six states have areas exhibiting moderate hydrologic drought, with severe spots in Massachusetts and one extreme area in Maine.

Low and warm water stresses fish, such as trout and salmon, forcing them to seek out deeper pools or spring holes. On Friday, the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection closed portions of the West Branch Farmington River and the Farmington River to fishing through Sept. 15 after several fish kills.

"This is the first time in memory that we have found it necessary to take action like this to protect our fisheries on these rivers, and it is not a step we are taking lightly," said Deputy Commissioner Susan Whalen.

In Maine, officials are recommending that people fish earlier or later in the day when temperatures are cooler. The same goes for southern New Hampshire, said Scott Decker, inland fisheries program director at New Hampshire Fish and Game.

Given that mosquitoes breed in standing water, you might expect fewer instead of more during a drought, said Pete Pekins, wildlife professor at the University of New Hampshire. But the opposite happens because as water levels drop, river banks and the edges of ponds widen, he said.

Thanks to a mild winter and the current drought, water is warmer and more stagnant, which encourages growth of cyanobacteria, also known as blue-green algae, said Jeff Schloss, natural resources program leader at UNH Cooperative Extension. The resulting toxic blooms can hurt everything from microscopic organisms eaten by fish, to waterfowl that feed on those fish.

In Vermont, the drought has lowered water at the Bennington Fish Culture Station to about 30 percent below normal. As a result, biologists reduced the number of times they feed the fish destined for stocking next spring from three times to one, said hatchery manager Monty Walker. He expects [fish](#) that usually would measure about 7 inches by September to fall nearly two inches short.

The drought has implications on land as well as water, with bears, snakes and ants among those species venturing further afield in search of food or [water](#). In Quincy, Massachusetts, a timber rattlesnake showed up on someone's front steps. In New Hampshire, bears have been foraging for food at campgrounds and neighborhood trash cans because [drought](#)-stricken berry bushes didn't produce as much as usual.

Pekin, the UNH professor, keeps it all in perspective. He notes that herons and other birds are feasting on frogs that have become more visible in ponds, and he himself has been enjoying listening to osprey in his backyard.

"In all of this, there are winners and losers," he said. "I have great faith in wildlife to adapt. Next year could be the opposite."

© 2016 The Associated Press. All rights reserved.

Citation: New England drought means bolder bears, stressed fish (2016, August 21) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2016-08-england-drought-bolder-stressed-fish.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.