

Much of U.S. Southwest left parched after monsoon season

October 2 2020, by Felicia Fonseca

Cities across the U.S. Southwest recorded their driest monsoon season on record this year, some with only a trace or no rain.

The seasonal weather pattern that runs from mid-June and ended Wednesday brings high hopes for rain and cloud coverage to cool down places like Las Vegas and Phoenix. But like last year, it largely was a dud, leaving the region parched.

Flagstaff notched its driest season ever, down more than 6.5 inches (16.5 cm) of rain from its normal of 8.31 inches (21.1 cm). Las Vegas tied a record set in 1944 with the least amount of rain—just a trace. Las Vegas also shattered a record set in 1959 for consecutive days with no measurable rainfall. It stood at 164 days on Thursday.

Phoenix didn't have its driest monsoon season, but the city had its hottest one ever, with the average temperature recorded at 96 degrees Fahrenheit (35.6 celsius), 1 degree above the record set in 2011, according to the National Weather Service. Phoenix also was moving toward a record for most days at 100 degrees (37.8 celsius) or higher for the year. So far, it's at 132.

Yuma near the Arizona-California border had no rain. In New Mexico, Farmington and Roswell had one of their driest monsoon seasons on record. Albuquerque had less than half the normal amount of rain.

Residents around the Southwest bemoaned what seemed like a never-

ending summer. The heat and scarce rain mean people spend more time indoors, hiking trails are dusty, the risk for wildfires increases, reservoirs are less full and thirsty wildlife go in search of water.

The Arizona Game and Fish Department and volunteers have been filling about 1,000 water catchments around the state to help the animals.

"This is really helping our wildlife get through this 'nonsoon,' " said Amy Burnett, an Arizona Game and Fish Department spokeswoman.

Ranchers also have a harder time finding green pastures for livestock to graze. Some sold cattle earlier than usual or decided to get out of the business.

All of Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, Utah and most of Nevada are in some form of drought, according to the latest U.S. Drought Monitor [map](#) released Thursday that looks at rangeland conditions. Fire restrictions in the national forests still haven't been lifted in many places.

Paul Carpenter grew up in the Phoenix area and moved back in May with his wife and two children. He had been boasting about the earthy smell from creosote bushes that reminds him of rain, the walls of dust that move through the desert regions, lightning storms and rushes of rain.

"It rolls through and you get relief from the heat for 20 minutes, an hour maybe. It's a ball of energy, it's way cooler, there's actually moisture in the air," he said. "That's one thing I was trying to sell my Canadian wife on."

She's still a bit skeptical, Carpenter said.

Danielle Kosten looks forward to the monsoon season when she can open up the doors at her house northwest of Phoenix, let any breeze flow

through and cool down. The scarcity of rain during the monsoon season was disappointing, she said, but not unexpected.

"I pretty much feel like this is somewhat normal, somewhat climate change, a combination of the two," she said.

The monsoon season doesn't guarantee widespread [rain](#). High pressure has to be in the right place with wind to draw in moisture. That aligns most years, but it wasn't the case for 2020.

The upcoming winter likely won't make up for the precipitation deficit with an expected La Nina weather pattern that typically means drier conditions in the Southwest

"People certainly are asking the question, 'Is this what it is going to be like?' " said meteorologist Dan LeBlanc in Flagstaff. But, as the saying goes, "there's no such thing as a sure thing," he said.

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