



THE ATMOSPHERIC RESERVOIR

Examining the Atmosphere and Atmospheric Resource Management

“Timing is Almost Everything”

By Mark D. Schneider

Flood forecasters and producers alike know the value of timely precipitation versus receiving too much moisture all at once. Looking at the 2014 and 2015 percent-of-normal growing season rainfall maps of North Dakota, many areas of the state received near normal precipitation over the period from April through September. Record rainfalls fell over the west-central and southwest part of the state in 2014. Some of these areas benefited from all the extra rainfall, but for others, the timing of the rains wasn't optimal for crops. This growing season, many producers received welcome rains in June and July, coinciding with drier conditions in August that led to an early harvest. That wasn't the case back in 2014, when unusually wet conditions in August delayed harvest.

The North Dakota Wheat Commission's last crop progress report in mid-September placed hard red spring wheat and durum at 90% or higher completion, weeks ahead of the 2014 harvest. This season, hard red spring wheat yields were above average and quality was excellent. At the beginning of November when this article was written, corn and sunflower harvests were well ahead of last year and the five-year average. Conditions were also improving for winter wheat because of recent rains which provided much needed moisture after a dry start to Fall.

It's impossible for conditions to be “perfect” for producers because of the varied planting times, diversity of crop types, and individual growing seasons that are inherent to farming. Add highly variable rainfalls, both in areal coverage and quantity to the equation, and it's easy to see why growing conditions are always in question.

With El Niño's weather-changing potential this winter and drought conditions already developing in the east-central and southeastern parts of North Dakota, producers could be wishing for timely moisture next spring before the growing season gets underway again.

