

Winter taking a rain check?

Despite new rainfall, Stockton on pace for driest year on record

By Alex Breitler, staff writer

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STOCKTON - Rain. At last.

Up to half an inch could fall today and Wednesday, probably our wettest storm since last March.

But when it's all over, Stockton will still be on pace for its driest calendar year on record. Coming into today, the city had mustered only a little more rain in all of 2013 than it received one very wet weekend last fall.

It helps, but...

The National Weather Service expects it to rain almost half an inch in Stockton today and Wednesday, ending a dry streak of nearly two months.

It will help — but how much?

Consider this: If it rained a half-inch every day for three straight weeks, Stockton's rainfall total for 2013 would be only about normal.

Not a drop fell in October, for the first time since 2002.

We could use a nice, cleansing rain, and California needs the water. But there are both upsides and downsides to this strange, potentially historic season.

Upside: Where's the fog? This year Stockton has yet to experience a single day with dense fog. In recent years the city has always had at least one foggy day by mid-November.

It takes rain to put moisture in the ground, allowing fog to form. No rain, no fog.

That could well change by week's end, once this storm has passed. While drivers won't appreciate seeing fog for the first time this year, it's actually good news for farmers whose crops require cold temperatures during the winter.

Downside: Instead of fog, we're plagued with dust.

A wind-whipped dust storm on Oct. 27 reduced visibility on Interstate 5, creating a traffic hazard. And just this past weekend, air quality officials issued a health warning for blowing dust.

Storms help wash out dust and other forms of pollution that would otherwise cause fireplace burning prohibitions on stagnant winter days. San Joaquin County has had two no-burn days this month.

Upside: Can this really be November? It was 77 degrees Wednesday, 1 degree shy of a record high.

Summer flowers are still blooming. San Joaquin master gardener Lee Miller was picking a couple of bouquets of dahlias each day, until a frost at his home east of Stockton finally put a stop to that.

Last week Miller saw purple coneflowers blooming at the Robert J. Cabral Agricultural Center in south Stockton. "Seems late in the year for them to be blooming so profusely," he said.

Maybe you could find fresh flowers for your Thanksgiving table.

Downside: Mild temperatures and summer flowers mean people are watering their lawns as if it's still August.

"I'm seeing water waste issues around town," San Joaquin Delta College horticulture instructor Mike Toscano said.

We should be applying only about 50 to 75 percent of the water we'd be using to irrigate during the summer, he said. While there's been little rain, temperatures have started to fall and plants will need less water.

"If they continue to over-water, not only are they wasting water and wasting money, but they are encouraging weeds to grow which are going to be a pain to take care of down the road one way or another, and they could potentially encourage disease," Toscano said.

Today, at least, turn those sprinklers off.

Upside: Fall is one of the most interesting times to check out the Valley's natural environment, and with clear skies for adventurers, this has been a "wonderful" season to go outdoors.

"It's been great - cool in the morning, warmer as the days go on," said Joan Sykes, who leads organized walks through Stockton as a member of the Delta Tule Trekkers club.

She recommends checking out fall colors in neighborhoods around University of the Pacific or visiting the junglelike environs at Caswell Memorial State Park near Ripon.

Downside: All those critters you might see on your outdoor excursions need rain.

Salmon require water if they are to swim up the Calaveras River through Stockton. So far this year they've been unable to do so.

And the millions of migratory birds that visit the Central Valley each winter need wetlands. Some fields are flooded intentionally to provide that habitat, but a dry year means more birds are crowded into smaller areas, increasing the possibility of disease, Stockton birder David Yee said.

Birds have been known to congregate on irrigated lawns as a result. "Any little puddle of water, the birds are in it like crazy - drinking, bathing, because it's so dry," Yee said.

Upside: Get 'er done. No rain means charging forward on construction projects that otherwise might have been delayed.

Like the widening of Interstate 5. "We've been able to work basically like we're in the middle of summer right now," said Chantel Miller, a spokeswoman for Caltrans. She cautioned, however, that it's too soon to tell if this very dry 2013 will speed up completion of the work, expected in 2015.

"It can't hurt," she said.

Smaller projects also benefit. Crews started to reconstruct Inman Avenue in the Country Club area of unincorporated Stockton on Oct. 1. "That would have probably been iffy (in other years)," said San Joaquin County Public Works Deputy Director Mike Selling. "We don't usually take that risk so late in the year."

Downside: Even as we continue to build infrastructure for a growing population, experts say the possibility of extended droughts in the future and snow falling as rain as a result of climate change could diminish the state's water supply more frequently in the decades to come.

New public safety building closer to reality

By Kelli Ballard, staff writer

Porterville Recorder, Monday, Nov. 18, 2013

While the new public safety building is on the agenda for Tuesday's city council meeting for approval to move forward, it may also be delayed due to San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District's request for a review.

The public safety building, a long anticipated project that will combine police and fire departments in the same building south of the Tule River, will provide more readily available resources and equipment for the city. However, as the city gets ready for construction, a blip in the progress may cause a delay, as the community development department needs to send an application for review to the Air District.

The SJVAPCD requested an indirect source review and air impact assessment, which must be submitted before construction can begin.

The project area will also need a zone change to allow the roads and construction planned for the safety building. The council will discuss these issues at Tuesday's meeting.

In other business:

The council will approve advertising for bids for the Morton Avenue and Indiana Street shoulder stabilization projects

The Wall of Fame Placement procedure is up for discussion.

A request to award a contract for Chase Park in the amount just over \$1 million to Forcum Mackey of Ivanhoe will come before the council.