

# Weather Shift Ahead

La Niña is poised to bring drier conditions to some areas.

by **Katie Maupin Miller**

Cautious optimism continues for the current growing season, according to Brad Rippey, USDA meteorologist. Toward the end of June, nearly half of U.S. pastures and rangeland were rated good to excellent, a welcome reprieve from the long-term, widespread drought that plagued cattle producers the last few years. In fact, the first week of June brought the most optimistic report, with 51% of pastures and rangeland being reported as good or excellent.

However, not all American cattlemen and women see a marked improvement in their forages. “Currently, there are still a few areas, notably in parts of Texas and New Mexico, where rangeland and pastures are not in very good shape due to a combination of factors, including long-term drought and this summer’s heat,” Rippey says.

And the U.S. forecast for the rest of the summer leading into fall is a mixed bag.

“This summer will likely bring mixed returns, with some areas being too hot, some areas too dry, and some areas too wet. An active Atlantic tropical basin could bring moisture — as well as wind and water damage — to various areas along the Gulf and Atlantic Coasts, with any impacts impossible to predict

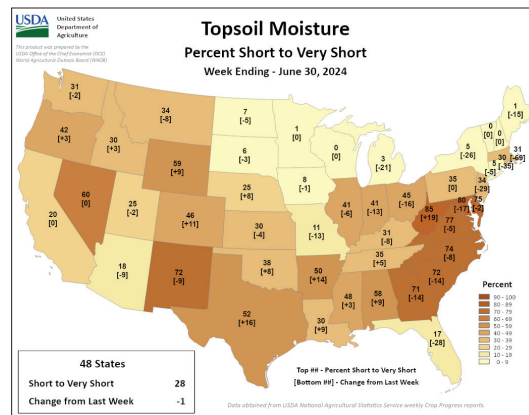
more than a few days in advance. However, tropical moisture could also ease or eliminate emerging drought concerns in the southeastern and eastern U.S.,” Rippey notes.

## La Niña delayed

El Niño and its impacts on U.S. climate are officially gone, according to the El Niño-Southern Oscillation (ENSO) report released by the National Weather Service’s Climate Prediction Center (CPC) on June 13. Rippey notes El Niño’s parting gift was an active spring weather pattern that spun up a near-record number of tornadoes in April and May.

“Now, we wait. Signs of La Niña are bubbling up (in the form of cool water) in the eastern equatorial Pacific Ocean. While we wait for La Niña to officially form and start governing global weather patterns, there is a lull while other factors are in play,” he says. “Notably, we saw an impressive ridge of high pressure forming over parts of North America during June, leading to a hot month, especially from California to the central and southern Great Plains. During a period when that ridge shifted eastward, tropical moisture — including the remnants of Tropical Storm Alberto — wrapped around the west side of the ridge, leading to the ring-of-fire thunderstorms that sparked upper Midwestern flooding starting around June 20. The upper Midwestern rain was further enhanced by cold fronts pushing into the upper Midwest — and stalling after encountering the powerful ridge.”

Any impacts of the developing La Niña will likely appear during the cool/cold season, according to Rippey. This is due in part to



Hot summer days in June dried out topsoil, making certain regions prone to rapid onset of drought. Short to very short topsoil moisture from Illinois to Ohio and through the Southeast points to a higher risk of emerging drought.

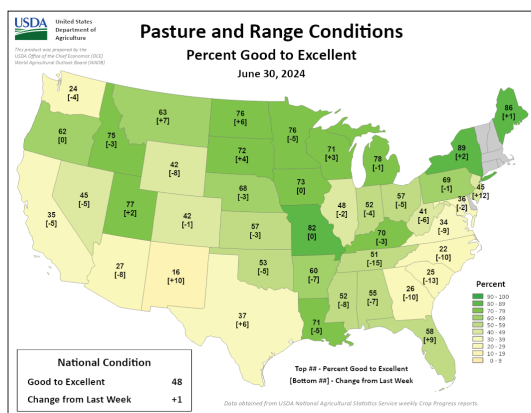
La Niña’s influence on the U.S. climate usually peaking from October to April, but also because the latest forecasts predict La Niña developing slightly later than expected.

“With the return of La Niña later this year, odds of drought development will increase across the southern tier of the U.S. Drought across the southern Great Plains often goes hand-in-hand with La Niña, starting late in the year of development (e.g., autumn 2024) and extending into the following growing season (e.g., spring 2025),” Rippey says.

## Drying out

June 11 likely stands as the four-year low in U.S. drought coverage. That minimum value of 11.77% of the Lower 48 States marked the lowest coverage since March 3, 2020, per the *U.S. Drought Monitor*. But the odds of drought returning to more areas will likely increase.

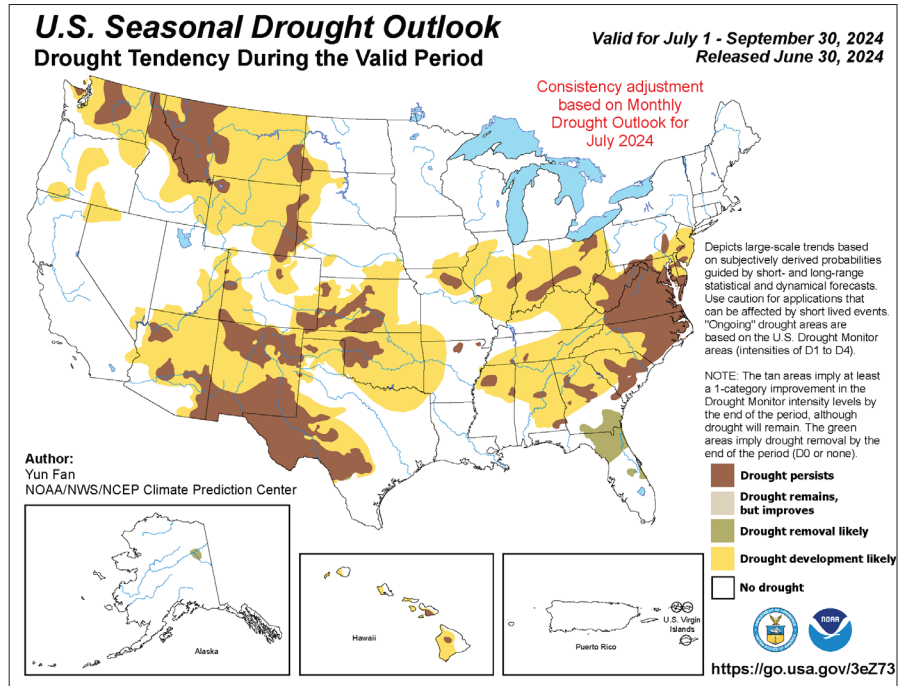
“In spite of the heavier-than-normal June rainfall in places like southern Texas, the Four Corners region and the upper Midwest, many areas were unfavorably dry. June dryness was particularly pronounced in the Southeast (excluding southern Florida), as well as



Nearly half of U.S. rangeland and pastures were rated from good to excellent near the end of June. Area impacted by drought was the least in four years.

portions of the central and eastern Corn Belt and the northern High Plains,” Rippey says.

Additionally, the CPC cautioned that hot, dry weather can cause the rapid onset of drought. They spoke specifically about the risk in the Mid-Atlantic, Southeast and Southern plains at the beginning of July, but as Rippey explains, topsoil moisture can be quickly depleted when temperatures are elevated and plant/crop moisture use is high. Nearing the end of June, topsoil moisture rated short to very short increased rapidly from Illinois to Ohio and in much of the Southeast, which goes hand-in-hand with the CPC’s seasonal drought prediction forecast. Through the end of September drought is expected to emerge from Illinois to Ohio and throughout the Southwest and into Oklahoma and the Northern and Middle Rockies. **BA**



While early summer brought the lowest percentage of drought coverage in the last four years, summer leading into fall brings a mixed bag to cattle producers around the country, with chances of drought emerging from Illinois to Ohio and throughout the Southeast while expanding through the Southwest and into Oklahoma and the Northern and Middle Rockies.

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