

2012 Drought Overview

As drought conditions worsen in Indiana, NRCS has developed a plan to communicate information and resources to keep you informed about programs and services that can benefit you.

As of today, Indiana is the worst hit of the major corn and soybean states. Reports from every corner of the state indicate moderate to severe conditions comparable to the 1988 drought. Combined with days of heat stress, crops are quickly showing signs of failure. Areas in the Northeast and Southwest are the hardest hit and are considered severe. A number of areas in the state have received spotty precipitation (mainly in the Northwest and Southeast), but not enough to significantly improve growing conditions. Some of these areas where rain has fallen have also received high wind and hail damage.

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[http://www.in.nrcs.usda.gov/
contact/index.html](http://www.in.nrcs.usda.gov/contact/index.html)

Long periods of dry weather reduce the availability of water that birds need for drinking and bathing. Birds, mammals and amphibians that depend on insects, worms and other macroinvertebrates also have difficulty finding food during these times.

Wildlife Around Your Home

- Make sure you provide bird baths or containers, both for birds to drink from and to use for bathing. The sides should be shallow sloping and the surface rough so that birds can easily get in and out. Clean them regularly.
- Create a few shallow hollows in your garden and keep them damp. These damp microclimates will provide refuges for frogs and toads, food sources for birds and small mammals, and will also provide damp mud for birds such as house martins and swallows that use mud to construct their nests.
- Adding some mulch such as leaves around your plants will help retain the moisture and also provide extra worms and insects for the birds.
- Cut your lawn less or let the grass in some areas grown longer. This will lock in the moisture, leaving your lawn greener and helping the birds to find food.

Tips for Helping Wildlife

- **Conserve Water.** Your help in conserving this increasingly limited resource will help maintain reservoir water levels and help more water reach our rivers, springs and wetlands. These resources are critical to wildlife survival and outdoor recreation. It will also save money on water bills.
- **Plant Native Plants.** As conditions improve for planting, choose native plants that provide food and shelter for birds, butterflies and other native wildlife. They provide colorful additions to your yard or balcony and, because they are drought resistant, require less water than non-native plants.
- **Provide Water and Cover.** Provide shallow water areas and cover in ornamental ponds which may help amphibians survive increased predation during dry periods. Frogs and toads will also be seeking small moist areas to avoid desiccation.

For more tips about how to help wildlife, visit the National Wildlife Federation's "Simple Tips for Helping Wildlife During Heat Waves and Drought" webpage at: <http://blog.nwf.org/2011/07/simple-tips-for-helping-wildlife-during-heat-waves-and-drought/>



Photo provided by IDNR/Indiana Outdoor Magazine

NRCS Drought Fact Sheets

Photo provided by IDNR/Indiana Outdoor Magazine

More Information

Indiana Natural Resources Conservation Service
<http://www.in.nrcs.usda.gov/drought.html>

National Natural Resources Conservation Service
<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/home>

Indiana Department of Natural Resources
<http://www.in.gov/dnr/7425.htm>

Indiana Wildlife Federation
<http://www.indianawildlife.org/>

United State Fish and Wildlife Service
<http://www.fws.gov/>



Photo provided by IDNR/Indiana Outdoor Magazine

The Indiana Department of Natural Resources has provided the following information regarding wildlife related issues during a drought.

Fish

- As water heats, its capacity to hold oxygen diminishes, and could result in fish kills.
- In the Wabash River, the drought is killing invasive Asian carp, which are a threat to native species. Asian carp prefer living in oxbows and backwater areas, which are drying up and leaving the fish stranded without adequate water. "At least Asian carp may not gain an additional competitive advantage over native species this year," said Bill James, chief of fisheries for Indiana DNR. "It might be a year where things kind of hold their own. Species like smallmouth bass tend to have higher reproductive success during low flow years."
- The drought has created favorable fishing conditions for many species. For example, low water in Indiana's streams and rivers has concentrated fish in pockets of deeper water, making them easier to find. In Lake Michigan, summer-run steelhead are hesitant to return to warmer-than-normal streams and are concentrating in near-shore water, resulting in excellent fishing.

Wildlife

- While wildlife will be stressed and there may be some lower survival of young and mortality of older, weaker animals, and increased predation as prey and predators congregate on limited resources, wildlife species have ways of adapting as they have in previous drought years. Wildlife will reduce their activities or change the timing of their activities, thus they may not be as visible to us. When the rains return we may be surprised by the wildlife that appear as conditions improve.

Insects

- If you like hearing the annual cicadas' singing, you may be hearing their tune sooner this year because of the early spring. Their singing period also may be longer because of the dry soil prolonging emergence.

Wildlife's Need for Fresh Water

A clean, fresh water source is as important to birds, bats, butterflies, and other wildlife as it is for people during the drought. Water in a saucer, bird bath, or backyard pond is adequate for most wildlife. Be sure to change the water every few days to keep it fresh and avoid mosquitoes. In hot weather, it may be necessary to refill the container daily. Logs, rocks, and water-holding structures provide drinking and basking habitat for turtles, butterflies, and songbirds. Stones with depressions that collect water will help attract butterflies.