



**United States Department of Agriculture**  
Farm and Foreign Agricultural Services  
**Risk Management Agency**

April 16, 2003

TO: Ross J. Davidson, Jr., Administrator

FROM: Doug Hagel, Regional Director /s/ *Doug Hagel*

SUBJECT: Regional Irrigation Assessment for the Billings Region

The Billings Regional Office has completed our Regional Irrigation Assessment of surface irrigation supplies for Montana and Wyoming (as specified in the Loss Adjustment Manual, FCIC-25010). In summary, while on average the current snowpack levels are significantly improved from last year, the ongoing drought over the last several years has left many reservoirs in the region significantly below their normal average. While more encouraging 2003 streamflow prospects may aid in the replenishment of these reservoirs, it will likely take several years of increased streamflow for many of these reservoirs to get back to their historical average capacity. Consequently, many watershed basins will most likely see reduced streamflows this irrigation season, possibly reducing the available irrigation water for producers in these states.

Based on the most recent Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) information, Montana has a snow water equivalent (SWE) of about 93 percent of average, and Wyoming has a SWE of about 96 percent of average. Similarly, NRCS projects that in Montana streamflows will range from 53 to 81 percent of average, and in Wyoming that streamflows will range from 51 to 89 percent of average. Given this information, it is suspected that there could again be a lack of irrigation water throughout all counties in Montana and Wyoming that rely on surface water runoff for their irrigation sources. Insured crops grown in Montana and Wyoming that may be affected by the suspected lack of irrigation water include: canola, corn, safflower, dry peas, dry beans, barley, oats, forage, sugar beets, and spring wheat.

Unless conditions change, based on the current snowpack totals and streamflow forecasts, much of Montana and Wyoming are still in the throes of an ongoing drought. Therefore, it is reasonable to anticipate that reduced streamflows could result in reduced irrigation allotments across both states. This assessment is a snap shot in time and does not reflect continuously changing conditions. For more information on current conditions we recommend accessing the following NRCS websites:

<http://www.wcc.nrcs.usda.gov/wsf/wsf-strmflow-forecasts.html>

[http://nris.state.mt.us/Nrcs/apr03/swsi4\\_03.pdf](http://nris.state.mt.us/Nrcs/apr03/swsi4_03.pdf)

<http://www.wrds.uwyo.edu/wrds/nrcs/swsimap/swsimap.html>

<http://www.wcc.nrcs.usda.gov/water/snow/bor.pl>



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