In early September, we welcomed guests to NWS Des Moines from the North Central River Forecast Center (NCRFC) while also simultaneously sending two forecasters to the NCRFC in Chanhassen, MN which is co-located with NWS Twin Cities, MN. While in the Twin Cities, the two forecasters from NWS Des Moines became more familiar with the day to day duties of the NCRFC hydrologists, met with fellow forecasters at NWS Twin Cities, including getting to participate in their evening upper air balloon launch, and also took a trip to the Center Weather Service Unit (CWSU) in Farmington, MN to learn about the forecast operations and duties of our fellow NWS meteorologists who support the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Air Route Traffic Control Centers. In addition to becoming more familiar with the day to day operations of the NCRFC and CWSU (ZMP), NWS Des Moines staff were able to discuss how our own day to day operations can best support the NCRFC and CWSU hydrologists and meteorologists and vice versa.

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The fall fire weather season has begun across Iowa as grasses and crops continue to dry out, which has occurred at a faster pace so far due to the ongoing drought. Despite the recent rain, little improvement has occurred. As seen from the graphic, severe drought is affecting over 65% of the state, with extreme drought conditions over much of eastern Iowa. With this persistent dryness, harvesting of the crops has begun earlier than generally expected. The United States Department of Agriculture National Agricultural Statistics Service produces weekly Crop Progress and Condition Reports that provide information on the overall condition of each type of crop as well as progress of harvest. We use this information to see the percentage of unharvested crops since they will have a higher fuel load and paired with favorable fire weather conditions can be quite dangerous for fire starts and spread.

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In terms of grasses, we rely on observers across Iowa to report the dryness of grasses to assess potential fire weather risks. With all this being said, ongoing drought with drying fuels (grasses and crop) paired with days of warm, breezy and low humidity conditions are most concerning for potential fires. With outdoor fall activities expected to continue over the next several weeks, practice fire prevention by avoiding burning of yard waste such as leaves and brush, keep grills clean and away from flammable materials, and always keep an eye on active campfires and properly extinguish them before leaving. Farmers can also practice fire prevention by keeping equipment clean and free of any debris that could potentially catch fire during an ongoing harvest.

General fire prevention tips that are important to keep in mind, especially during dry, warm and breezy days.

Drought Statement Updates

The National Weather Service recently started soliciting public comments on a modernized version of the drought (DGT) text products where the existing text-based DGT format is replaced by a graphical PDF version. NWS Des Moines has started producing these graphical drought statements on an experimental basis, found here.

Find Drought Information Statements for locations outside of the NWS Des Moines forecast area here: https://www.drought.gov/drought-information-statements.

Read more about this change in the NWS Public Information Statement.

On the Cover:
NWS DMX staff and NCRFC hydrologists met with U.S. Army Corp of Engineers staff at Saylorville Lake Dam during NCRFC’s visit in early September. Photo by NWS Des Moines staff.

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