

Feds develop program to better cope with drought

By John Flesher, AP

TRAVERSE CITY, Mich. – Federal agencies will provide better and more accessible information about matters such as long-term weather prospects and soil moisture levels under a program designed to help communities prepare for future droughts and respond more effectively when they happen, Obama administration officials said Thursday.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration will lead the initiative, which grew out of a series of regional forums held in response to the 2012 drought, the most severe and widespread in more than 70 years. It covered more than two-thirds of the continental U.S. and caused more than \$30 billion in losses from crop failures, wildfires and other ripple effects.



Regan Beach in South Lake Tahoe in late October.
Photo/LTN

“We were very aggressive in responding to the drought but all of it was after the fact,” Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack said in an interview with The Associated Press. “We made money available for technical assistance after the fact. We provided

disaster loan assistance and extended grazing aid after the fact. We purchased surplus product after the fact.”

With droughts likely to become more frequent and widespread as the climate warms, “we have to adjust to this new normal and we have to understand what it means to be proactive instead of just reacting,” he said.

Vilsack announced Friday the creation of the National Drought Resilience Partnership, which also will involve the Department of Interior, the Department of Energy, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Army Corps of Engineers and the Federal Emergency Management Administration. The goal is to help communities and individual farmers, ranchers and others whose livelihoods are particularly vulnerable during low-water periods to be ready and cope.

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