

Rainmaker Taking Credit For Increase In Moisture

Great Falls Tribune
June 11, 2001

Billings (Associated Press)

The drought in eastern Montana is ending, says the rainmaker who has been touring the area for farmers and ranchers the last several weeks.

A new moisture pattern has developed that should carry Montana through the summer, and Matt Ryan said he and his wife, Gigi, will return to their home in California .

"It's starting to be visible," he said Saturday. "I'm optimistic. The atmosphere is more normal now and there are a lot of indications the drought in Montana is letting up."

In fact, it has been raining all over Montana lately, and Ryan is willing to take the credit.

"Nobody predicted we'd have a wet June," he said. "The National Weather Service was actually calling for the continuation of very dry conditions."

But Ryan said that with God's help and the faith of those who supported his efforts all across eastern and central Montana , moisture impulses were pulled into the state and should continue to come.

Rural Montanans from Opheim to Brady to the Musselshell Valley have contributed thousands of dollars in a desperate effort to end a drought that some are comparing to the Dust Bowl days of the Great Depression. Eastern Montana farm and ranch groups have hired him about a dozen times since the early 1990s.

This year, Ryan and Gigi first came in February at the urging of a rancher in the Brady area.

"It took us 37 days in February and March to produce the first good pulse of moisture," he said. Then April dawned wet and remained wet all month. But a gigantic dust storm in Mongolia that swept across the Pacific Ocean stopped waves of moisture from reaching the entire Northwest of the U.S. in May, according to Ryan.

"Still, over time, this area is getting healthier," he said. "It only took us 23 days this time."

The welcome June moisture won't end the drought, he warned, but it is putting good moisture on the ground, and moisture brings in more moisture, which he hopes will carry Montana back to more normal patterns of rain and snowfall.

"If you got enough rain right now to end the drought, you'd have flooding, which is how nature ends these things sometimes. But we don't want that," Ryan said. "But I think we can say the drought has been broken in the entire eastern part of the state."

In answer to the critics, Ryan's supporters are quick to point out that sustained rains of several days at a time have followed him everywhere on his trips across the vast plains of eastern Montana.

"Montana is the biggest weather lab on earth," he said. He can spot clouds a hundred miles away in any direction out on the Great Plains. And the people have moved him too during his many stays in towns across the state. Ryan says he's been amazed that even the most hard-bitten ranchers are willing to listen.

Ryan wants people to understand weather better, to think about it differently, and understand that they can influence it.