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Final

BOATING PROGRAM HELPS STUDENTS SAIL SEA OF LIFE



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Boating program helps high schoolers navigate through life's tough waters



A program that teaches boating skills is helping high school students plot a course through life.

The program, Rocking the Boat, helps the youngsters develop discipline, and at the same time learn about environmental issues some may use to launch careers.

"Being in high school is a critical age," said Jaye Pockriss, the program's development officer. "What we do is help them grow and feel confident about setting ambitious goals for themselves."

Rocking the Boat has been a steady influence in youngsters' lives for the 10 years it's been in existence. Throughout a high school semester, the students build rowboats or sailboats that they use to study environmental science on the Bronx River near the program's headquarters in the Hunts Point section of the Bronx.

Already there are 36 boats in the fleet and a new semester starts Monday.

Among recent elements the program has explored is biofiltration, the relationship between mussels (a kind of shellfish), seaweed and the waste that's in the Bronx River.

"It's a kind of water-quality monitoring," said Pockriss. "In addition to helping the mussels and seaweed grow, they also test the water for chemical content and observe life along the river. If the birds are doing well, that means they're able to eat the fish and that's a good indication of clean water."

Youngsters in the program generally come from high schools nearby. They join the program after completing applications and having interviews with their parents along. "They need to demonstrate that they will



stick with the program," Pockriss said.

To help keep the program afloat, Rocking the Boat is sponsoring one of its biggest fundraising events, a 27-

mile row around Manhattan that takes place Sept. 29.

For more information on Rocking the Boat, visit rockingtheboat.org or call (718) 466-5799.

Drought area expands in U.S., now most extensive this summer

By CAREY GILLAM

KANSAS CITY, Missouri — Hot and dry conditions continued to plague large parts of the U.S. Plains and southern states as the worst U.S. drought in over five decades expanded its grip on some key farming states.

At least "moderate" levels of drought have now enveloped more than 64 percent of the contiguous United States, up from 63.39 percent the week before, according to the Drought Monitor, a weekly compilation of data gathered by federal and academic scientists.

"This is the greatest extent of drought we've seen all summer," said Brian Fuchs, a climatologist at the National Drought Mitigation Center at the University of Nebraska-Lin-

coln. "The drought is easing in the east, but we're seeing more of it expand in the Central Plains, Rockies and Dakotas."

The Drought Monitor's measurement of the worst level of drought, "exceptional", expanded to 6.23 percent of the land area in the contiguous U.S. for the week ended September 11, up from 6.14 percent in the prior week.

The drought has been exacerbated by long stretches of high temperatures.

"That has been the kicker all summer, how hot it has been," said Fuchs.

Conditions in Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska, Colorado, and Iowa grew more dire, according to the Drought Monitor.

Kansas, in particular, remained almost entirely parched, with more

than 60 percent of the state in exceptional drought and more than 88 percent in extreme drought.

The climatologists noted "widespread expansion" of severe drought in western North Dakota and said the percent of normal precipitation has held below 50 percent throughout most of the Northern Plains over the last month.

On a bright note, the levels of drought considered "severe" and "extreme" did ease in the most recent week across the nation. The portion of the contiguous United States suffering from at least "severe" drought fell to 41.81 percent from 42.48 percent.

The area experiencing "extreme" levels of drought dropped to 21.09 percent from 21.45 percent.

Arkansas, one of the hardest hit states, saw drought start to recede as

the percentage of the state in severe or worse drought dropped to 75.72 percent from 78 percent. Missouri, likewise, saw improvement, as did Illinois.

This year's persistent high heat and lack of soil moisture have decimated the U.S. corn crop, and threaten the same to the soybean crop. Dry soils are also worrying wheat farmers who now must seed a new winter wheat crop.

The U.S. Agriculture Department on Wednesday estimated that the U.S. corn crop will be the lowest in six years and soybeans the lowest in nine years due to drought losses.

Some rainfall relief may be coming, particularly to areas of Texas and Oklahoma. Portions of drought stricken Colorado, Kansas and Iowa are expected to receive some modest relief, forecasters said.

New York OKs nation's first ban on supersized sugary drinks

By JONATHAN ALLEN

New York City passed the first U.S. ban of oversized sugary drinks on Thursday in its latest controversial step to reduce obesity and its deadly complications in a nation that is fatter than ever.

By a vote of eight members in favor, with one abstaining, the mayor-appointed city health board outlawed sugary drinks larger than 16 ounces nearly everywhere they are sold, except groceries and convenience stores. Violators of the ban,

which does not include diet sodas, face a \$200 fine.

Opponents, who cast the issue as an infringement on personal freedom and called Mayor Michael Bloomberg an overbearing nanny, vowed to continue their fight, possibly by going to court in the hopes of blocking or overturning the measure before it takes effect in March.

"It's sad that the board wants to limit our choices. We are smart enough to make our own decisions about what to eat and drink," Liz Berman, a business owner and chairwoman of New Yorkers for Beverage

Choices, said in a statement.

Health Commissioner Thomas Farley heralded the measure's passage as a major step toward making New Yorkers healthier and said it was likely to be copied elsewhere in the nation - and even the world - as were the city's bans on trans fats and smoking.

"This is a historic step to address a major health problem of our time," Farley said at the meeting immediately after the vote.

Farley recently said that if the law results in "shrinking only one sugary drink per person every two weeks from 20 ounces to 16 ounces, New

Yorkers could collectively prevent 2.3 million pounds gained per year. This would slow the obesity epidemic and prevent much needless illness."

About one-third of Americans are obese, and about 10 percent of the nation's healthcare bill is tied to obesity-related diseases, such as Type 2 diabetes, heart disease and hypertension, according to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development.

The OECD projects more than two out of three people will be overweight or obese in some developed countries by 2020.