Moisture Situation Update – January 31, 2016

Synopsis

Across most of the agricultural areas of the province, snow packs are currently well below normal. This is a result of several factors, including the late start to winter, below normal precipitation and above average temperatures. However, this fall, most areas did receive at least near normal rainfall, which helped to improve soil moisture reserves across the much of Alberta's agricultural areas.

Snowpack relative to long term normal as of January 31, 2016 (see map 1)

Generally south of Red Deer it is not uncommon to have snow free periods at times during the winter months and as such making comments on low snow conditions here can be complicated.

- Across the Peace region snowpack's are well below normal, with the direst areas found north of the town of Peace River. Here, snow packs are this low on average, less than once in 50-years.
- Through the Northern Region, in the west, snow packs range from one in three to six year lows and grading down to one in 12 to 25 year lows across a large area southeast of Edmonton that stretches all the way to the Saskatchewan border.

Soil moisture reserves relative to long term normal January 31, 2016 (see map 2)

- Generally south of Edmonton soil moisture reserves are at least near normal, with many areas seeing well above normal reserves. Of particular note is a large area across much of the central region were some lands have reserves this high on average less than once in 25 years. This was largely due to extremely wet conditions that persisted through much of August and into early September.
- North of Edmonton, reserves are generally below normal with some isolated areas grading to less than one in twelve year lows. Currently the driest areas reside north of the town of Peace River.

Perspective

- Through the winter season (November- March) precipitation accumulations typically account for less than 25% of the average annual totals, and deficits through this time of year, typically have far less of an impact on agriculture than they do during the growing season.
- While winter snowpack's are unusually low, the total water deficits across the direst areas are typically ranging between 50 to 60 mm. This is equivalent to a good soaking spring rain and can be made up with above average spring rains, and/or a few late winter snow storms.
- Across most of Alberta's agricultural areas, historically February is the driest month of the year, followed closely by March. On average precipitation totals through February to April, range only range from 40-60 mm, so for the next several weeks it's likely to seem dry, even if conditions do return to near normal.

Additional maps can be found at www.agriculture.alberta.ca/maps

Near-real-time hourly station data can be viewed/downloaded at www.agriculture.alberta.ca/stations

Note: Data has about a two hour lag and is displayed in MST.

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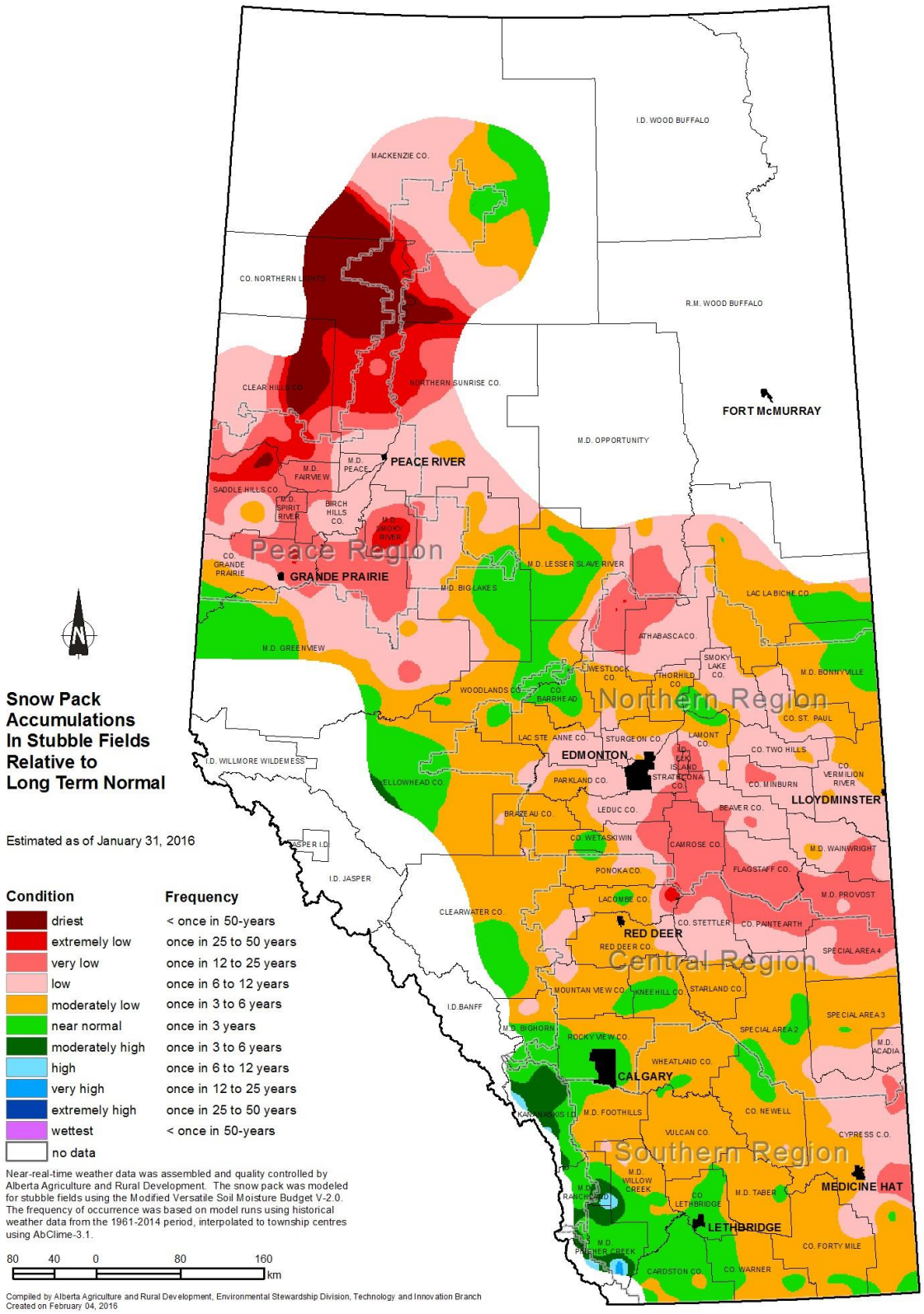
Map 1



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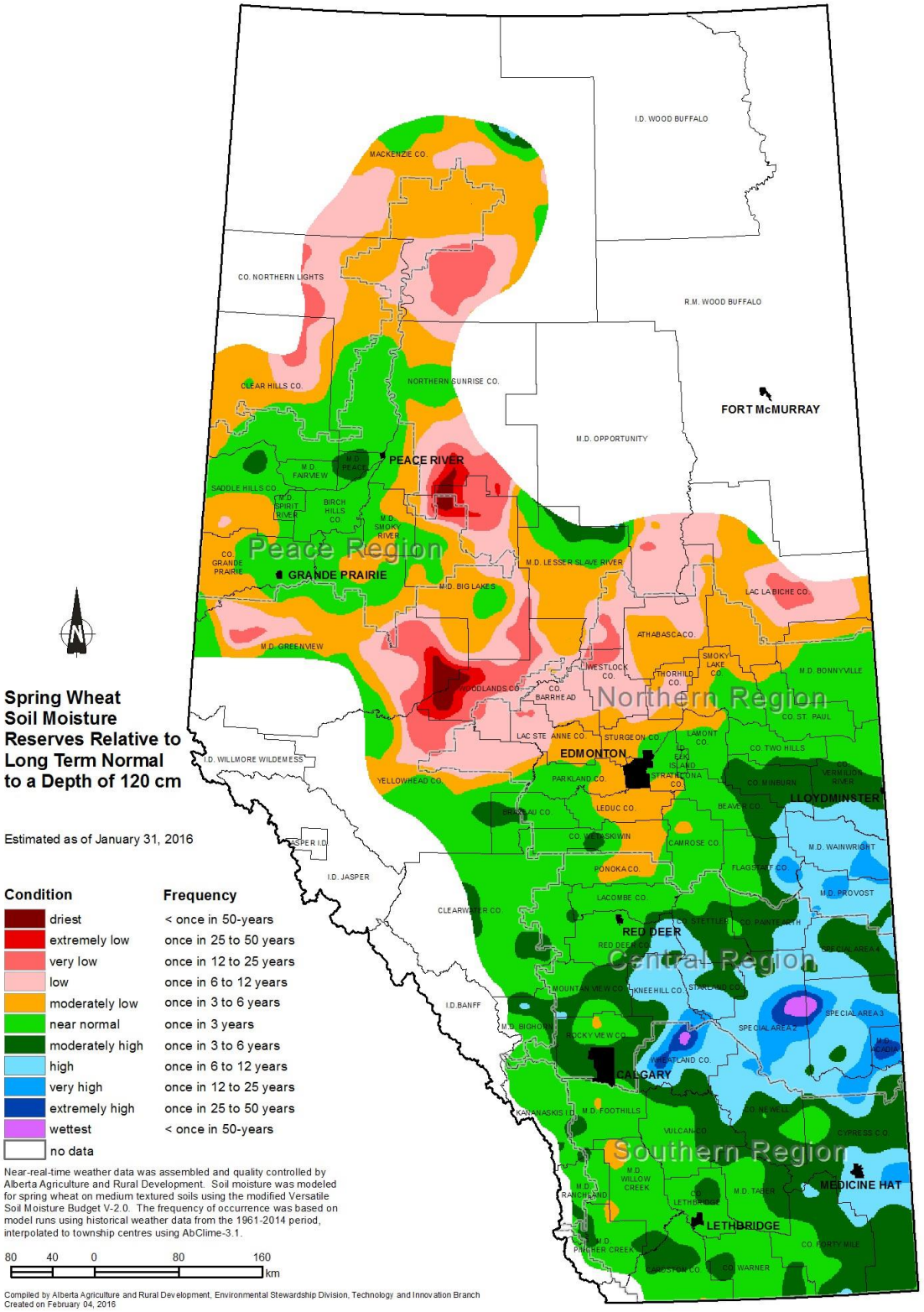
Map 2



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