

# A plea for solutions in new year

I witnessed it firsthand at my home: 30-year-old trees dropping their leaves and beginning to either go dormant or die in July and August, cracked dry ground everywhere, and plants and shrubs withering in the scorching drought. I incurred months of very high utility bills to survive this heat, although I had raised the thermostats significantly.

It shouldn't shock you to know that the National Climatic Data Center recently announced that 2012 was the warmest and second-most-extreme year on record for the contiguous United States. All in all, the spring of 2012 was a record warm, followed by the second-warmest summer, fourth-warmest winter, and warmer-than-average autumn.

Consider this: Every state in the Lower 48 had an above-average annual temperature for 2012. Nineteen states had a record warm year and an additional 26 states had one of their 10 warmest. And, to no surprise of us in Oklahoma, summer precipitation was 88 percent of normal with extremely dry conditions in the central part of the U.S.

Plus, tropical cyclone activity across the North Atlantic in 2012 was above average with 19 named storms, 10 hurricanes, and one major hurricane above a Category 3. Both Hurricanes Isaac and Sandy came to America's shores causing extreme and significant effects along the coast. We are still paying for that cleanup and loss of lives. Of course, Sandy got the label superstorm for a reason, with more than 8 million homes losing power.

You might also recall major wildfire activity with more than 9.2 million acres burned. The one near Wald Canyon close to Colorado burned up 250 homes, and was the most destructive

fire on record for the state.

So, what do we make of all of this? It is important to note that scientists are calling the data of extreme weather events from 2012 compelling evidence that climate change is affecting the weather in the U.S. Even the Weather Channel acknowledges the role climate change is playing, and has warned its viewers that 2013 can expect even more dangerous weather in the future.

Over the course of my life, I remember building snow igloos during typical snowy winters as a child, only to now experience erratic weather with 65-degree January days. If it's likely to snow, it's most certainly a dangerous blizzard that melts away within days. Despite the highly politicized debate about cause, the reality is that something is happening to our climate and its effects are real. You and I are already paying for these dangers, in storm response, higher insurance rates, rising costs of groceries from failed crops, and sadly, in too many instances, lives lost from historic numbers of natural disasters.

My hope for the new year is that although our elected leaders seem unwilling or unable to intelligently address this issue, we citizens will become engaged in a way that moves the debate past inaction and denial, toward solutions that safeguard the coming generations. That's not too much to ask for, is it?