

Texas Drought

The majority of Texas is currently experiencing a drought that started in October 2010. Most of the state has been under drought conditions for over three years.

State Climatologist John-Nielsen Gammon has warned that Texas could be in the midst of a drought worse than the drought of record in the 1950s. 2011 was the driest year ever for Texas, with an average of



only

14.8 inches of rain. 2011 also set new records for low rainfall from March through May, and again from June through August. The high summer temperatures increased evaporation, further lowering river and lake levels.

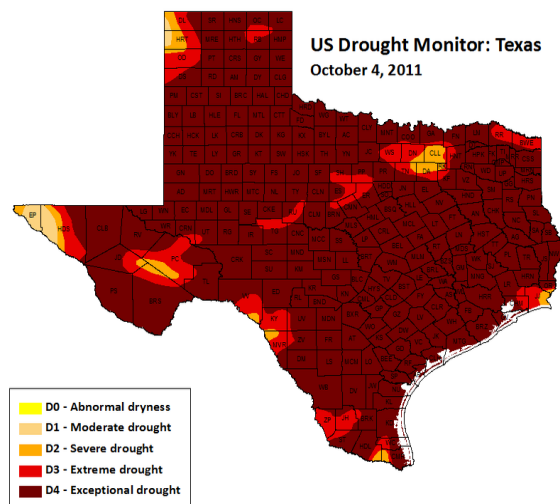
The state experienced a short and rainy respite in the winter and spring of 2012, but by the fall of 2012 dry conditions had returned to much of the state. Those persisted until late in the summer of 2013, when a sustained rainy period lowered the percentage of the state experiencing drought.

That doesn't mean that the drought is over. As of June, 2014, 70 percent of Texas is still in drought conditions, while 21 percent is in the worst two stages of drought, either extreme or exceptional drought. The state's reservoirs are 67 percent full.

The main culprit of the intense 2011 dryness was La Niña, a weather pattern where the surface temperatures are cooler in the Pacific. This in turn creates drier, warmer weather in the southern U.S. (You may also know her counterpart, El Niño, which generally has the opposite effect.) La Niña sticks around for a year, sometimes longer, and tends to return once every few years. (The last La Niña was in 2007, but it was a much lighter one.)

The drought has helped drain reservoirs, fuel wildfires, ruin crops, and put a real strain on the state's electric grid.

Dry conditions fueled a series of wildfires across the state in early September 2011. The most devastating, the Bastrop Complex Fire in Bastrop County, scorched over 34,000 acres and destroyed more than 1,300 homes.



The situation reached a new level of urgency in late January of 2012 when wells in the town of Spicewood Beach, Texas officially ran out of water. Some 1,100 residents now depend on tanker trucks to deliver water to the town's storage tank. The Lower Colorado River Authority (LCRA) owns the water system and is overseeing the emergency water operation.