

DECEMBER 2020

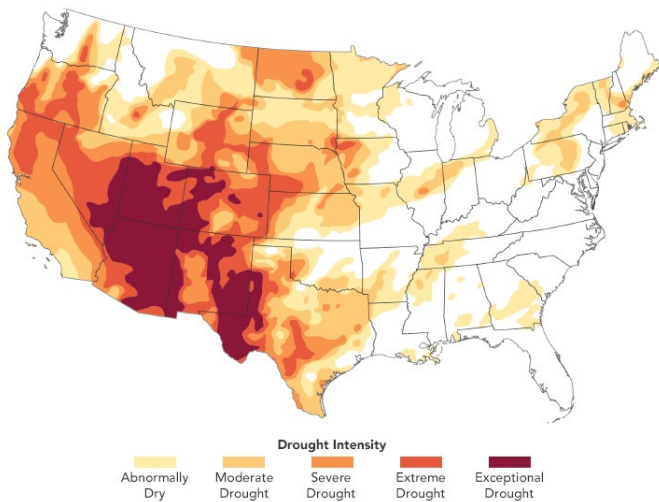


# WestFAST News

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Chair – Patrick Lambert; Federal Liaison Officer – Heather Hofman

## Pick of the Pics - The Drying U.S. West



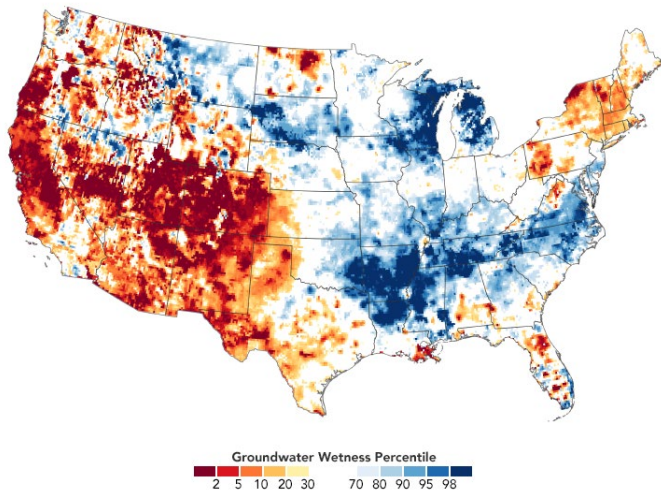
NASA 12/14/20. A drought that flared up in the western United States in spring 2020 has expanded and intensified across the summer and fall. In August, a [third of the United States](#) was experiencing at least a moderate level of drought. By December, roughly half of that area was, with about 33 percent facing what the [U.S. National Drought Monitor](#) classifies as “extreme” or “exceptional drought.” Initially, Colorado, Utah, Nevada, and northern California faced the most severe conditions. Over the summer and fall, the drought intensified in Arizona and New Mexico and spread onto the Great Plains and Texas.

The map above, built with data from the Drought Monitor, depicts areas of drought in progressive shades of orange to red on December 8, 2020. It is

based on measurements of climate, soil, and water conditions from more than 350 federal, state, and local observers around the country. NASA provides [experimental measurements and models](#) to this drought monitoring effort.

“Compared to late 2019 and early 2020, when there was very little drought in the continental United States, this is quite an extreme single-year event that developed rapidly over the course of 2020,” said Benjamin Cook, a climate scientist at NASA’s Goddard Institute for Space Studies. “But if you look over longer time scales, I would argue this is really a continuation of [a multi-decadal event](#) that began around 2000. There have been some breaks, but the Southwest has been in more-or-less continuous drought conditions since then.”

The consequences of the unusually dry and warm temperatures in 2020 have shown up in a variety of ways. Several states, particularly California, have endured [unusually active](#) and destructive fire seasons. Some farmers have already seen—or anticipate—[poor yields](#) as they [struggle with a lack of water](#) for crops and livestock. Reservoirs, lakes, and streams in several areas are [reaching unusually low levels](#).



This map depicts shallow groundwater storage in the continental U.S. as of December 7, 2020, as measured by the [Gravity Recovery and Climate Experiment Follow On](#) (GRACE-FO) satellites. The colors depict the wetness percentile; that is, how the levels of groundwater compare to long-term records for the month. Blue areas have more abundant water than usual, and orange and red areas have less. The darkest reds represent dry conditions that should occur only 2 percent of the time (about once every 50 years).

“The Southwest monsoon was [underwhelming this year](#), and many places in that region rely on that precipitation as part of their water budgets,” said Christopher Hain, a research meteorologist at NASA’s Marshall Space Flight Center. “Given the La Niña happening now, there is a higher-than-normal chance that winter rains will not help much and below-average precipitation will further exacerbate the drought. That could set the stage for even worse conditions next spring, summer, and fall.”

[La Niña](#)—cooler than normal sea-surface temperatures in the central and eastern tropical Pacific Ocean—tends to cause dry weather in the Southwest U.S. The associated weather patterns [push the jet stream north](#) and cause it to curve, driving storms to the Pacific Northwest and the Great Plains instead.

“The long-term, multi-decadal drought is largely driven by precipitation deficits connected to persistently cold sea surface temperatures in the eastern tropical Pacific—in essence a string of years with [long-lasting and intense La Niñas](#),” said Cook. “However, there is [strong evidence](#) from climate models and centuries of tree ring data that suggest about one-third to one-half of the severity of the current drought can be attributed to climate change.”

*NASA Earth Observatory images by Lauren Dauphin, using GRACE data from the [National Drought Mitigation Center](#) and data from the [United States Drought Monitor](#) at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Story by [Adam Voiland](#).*

## [Trump Administration advances western water storage projects](#)



BOR 12/30/20. **WASHINGTON** - President Trump’s signature on the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021 is the culmination of four years of the Trump Administration’s commitment to improve the reliability of water delivery for the American West by investing in infrastructure. Over the past four years, the Bureau of Reclamation has implemented provisions of the Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation Act to modernize existing water infrastructure, enhance storage capacity and protect species and habitats in the

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western United States. For fiscal years 2017-2020, Congress supported over \$300 million for study and construction of storage projects requested by the Trump Administration.

“President Trump has taken numerous actions to support increased, reliable water deliveries to Americans in need throughout the West, and in collaboration with our partners, we have executed on these directives with dispatch, supporting farmers and water users and strengthening rural communities,” **said Secretary of the Interior David L. Bernhardt.**

“President Trump directed Reclamation to focus on water infrastructure in the western United States, and we have done just that,” **said Commissioner Brenda Burman.** “This is the most significant investment in new water storage infrastructure in decades. We are very proud to have delivered on our promise to make water deliveries more reliable for farms, families, communities and the environment.”

This comes after an already long list of water actions from the Trump Administration benefiting the western United States, including:

- Issuing a [Presidential Memorandum on Promoting the Reliable Supply and Delivery of Water in the West](#) on Oct. 19, 2018;
- Issuing a [Presidential Memorandum on Developing and Delivering More Water Supplies in California](#) while visiting [Bakersfield, California](#), on Feb. 19, 2020; and
- Issuing an [Executive Order on Modernizing America’s Water Resource Management and Water Infrastructure](#), creating an interagency Water Subcabinet that will coordinate and streamline the Federal government’s actions on water on Oct. 13, 2020.

In California, even as the population has nearly doubled, there has not been any major federal water

storage infrastructure built since 1979. However, Reclamation made huge strides under the Trump Administration to move federal water storage projects forward from Northern California to the San Joaquin Valley.

A raise at **Shasta Dam** has been studied since the 1980s. Today, Reclamation is looking to add 630,000 additional acre-feet of water storage at the head of California’s water system with a modest 18½-foot raise of Shasta Dam. Reclamation shared a Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement with the public in August 2020, and in November 2020 finalized the Supplemental EIS. Despite previously approving \$20 million, Democratic leaders in Congress blocked \$115 million in additional requested funding for this project, one of the smartest and most cost-effective opportunities California has to create additional water storage.

In the rural counties of Glenn and Colusa in northern California, Reclamation is working with the Sites Project Authority to investigate the new off-stream **Sites Reservoir** that could take advantage of excess stormwater flows in the Sacramento River to store for later release when needed. This legislation provides an additional \$13.7 million on top of the \$8.3 million already invested in the multi-beneficial project, and this month, Reclamation delivered a report to Congress showing that this innovative project is feasible.

In the Sacramento area, Reclamation is working with Regional Water Authority on an untapped regional asset—the development of a **Sacramento Regional Water Bank**. The water bank is an innovative groundwater storage proposal that would improve regional water supply reliability in the near term and into the future. This legislation provides \$870,000 to further development of this project.

In the Bay Area, Reclamation is partnering with Contra Costa Water District to pursue the **Los Vaqueros Reservoir Expansion** project, which would increase water storage capacity in an existing

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footprint from 160,000 acre-feet to 275,000 acre-feet and add new conveyance facilities. This legislation invests an additional \$11.95 million on top of the previously approved \$2.16 million in federal funds. Reclamation finalized the Supplemental EIS for the project in February 2020 and delivered the final feasibility report to Congress in August 2020.

President Trump visited Bakersfield in early 2020 and said repairing capacity loss in the **Friant-Kern Canal** is a top priority, and Reclamation has delivered. Previous WIIN Act funding of \$4.55 million contributed to the November 2020 greenlighting of the repair of a 33-mile stretch of the canal that has lost over half of its original capacity to convey water due to subsidence—a sinking of the earth from groundwater extraction. Reclamation also delivered the final feasibility report for the project to Congress in July 2020. The federal commitment in this legislation of \$206 million will allow construction to begin in early 2021.

Similar to the Friant-Kern Canal, the 117-mile-long **Delta-Mendota Canal** has lost 10% of water conveyance capacity due to subsidence resulting in reductions to San Luis Reservoir storage. Reclamation completed a study in October 2020 to examine the restoration of more than 70 miles of the Delta-Mendota Canal and upgrade many canal crossings. The additional \$3 million of funding in this legislation will further the project.

Reclamation made major strides towards finalizing the **Del Puerto Canyon Reservoir** proposed project, which would create a new, off-stream 82,000-acre-foot reservoir to provide water to the service areas of Del Puerto Water District and San Joaquin River Exchange Contractors Water Authority. WIIN Act funding of \$3 million, including \$1.5 million in this legislation, has been provided to continue federal work on the proposal. The reservoir would be locally owned and

managed; water supplies would be conveyed to and from the Delta-Mendota Canal.

Consistent with the president’s memorandum regarding water delivery in the West, the Columbia–Pacific Northwest Region and its partners have taken steps to advance two projects in the Boise River system and the Yakima basin.

The **Boise River Basin Feasibility Study** focuses on a six-foot raise of Anderson Ranch Dam in Idaho to result in approximately 29,000 acre-feet of new storage space. Federal funding of \$2.5 million was previously provided, and in December 2020 the study was found feasible and Reclamation transmitted the Final Feasibility Report to Congress.

The State of Idaho, through the Idaho Water Resource Board, has been seeking new water storage opportunities to meet existing and future demand and is the non-federal cost-share partner in this effort. This legislation provides \$12.88 million to finalize studies and initiate construction activities. Environmental studies are expected to be finalized in summer 2021 so construction can begin before the end of 2021.

The **Cle Elum Reservoir Pool Raise** project, which is first significant new storage in the Yakima basin since Cle Elum Dam was built in 1933, is actively under construction in Washington State. In 2015 Reclamation and the Washington Department of Ecology began construction on the project to increase the reservoir’s capacity by 14,600 acre-feet for instream flows for fish and to improve aquatic resources for fish habitat, rearing, and migration. To date, Reclamation has used \$6 million in WIIN Act funding and this legislation provides the final \$3 million in federal dollars to finish construction.

### **Background**

Signed into law in 2016, the bipartisan WIIN Act, championed by Leader Kevin McCarthy, Senator Dianne Feinstein, and Congressman Devin Nunes created a process by which water infrastructure projects can be authorized by Congress and

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provided federal funds of up to 50% of total project costs.

Reclamation has focused efforts on finalizing feasibility studies for additional storage in the West, some of which have been awaiting completion for over 15 years.

## Upcoming Meetings

[Western States Water Council Spring 2021 \(195<sup>th</sup>\) Meetings](#)

TBD: El Paso, TX, or Virtually via Zoom  
March 23-26, 2021

## Upcoming Events

[WestFAST Webinar: M4: Next Generation AI-Based NRCS Water Supply Forecasting System](#)  
Wednesday, January 20, 2021, at 10:00 AM MST

## Other Federal News

NRCS 12/1/20. [USDA Engages Public for Input on Water Quantity in the West](#)

ACOE 12/4/20. [Army Corps of Engineers rescinds guidance letter on easements to support water supply storage agreements](#)

NOAA 12/8/20. [Sea ice loss and extreme wildfires mark another year of Arctic change](#)

BOR 12/10/20. [Reclamation moves five ideas forward in prize competition to help improve sediment removal in reservoirs](#)

EPA 12/10/20. [EPA Launches New Clearinghouse for Environmental Finance](#)

EPA 12/10/20. [EPA Announces \\$17.7 Million in Grants to Support Water Systems Rural and Small Communities](#)

USFWS 12/12/20. [U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and NOAA Fisheries Finalize Regulatory Definition of Habitat Under Endangered Species Act](#)

NASA 12/13/20. [NASA Passes the Baton to the Navajo - NASA-Navajo Drought Tool User Guide Now Live](#)

EPA 12/14/20. [EPA Highlights Enhanced Efficiencies to Improve Management of America's Water Resources](#)

NOAA 12/14/20. [November and 2020 year to date rank 2nd hottest on record for globe](#)

NRCS 12/16/20 [Conservation Efforts Continue on America's Farms, Ranches Amid Challenging Year](#)

BOR 12/18/20. [Reclamation announces public comment period for six draft interim renewal water service contracts](#)

ACOE 12/28/20. [Corps Water Infrastructure Financing Program Receives Funding in Appropriations Bill](#)

EPA 12/31/20. [EPA Issues Rivers and Streams Assessment, Seeks Comment on Modernizing Survey Methods](#)

## People

NPS 12/10/12. [Mike Tranel selected as Yellowstone National Park's deputy superintendent](#)

ACOE 12/16/20. [U.S. Army Corps of Engineers awards Rep. Napolitano Gold de Fleury Medal](#)

BOR 12/17/20. [Reclamation selects regional liaison team for California-Great Basin Region](#)

BLM 12/17/20. [BLM names Michael Holt as manager of King Range National Conservation Area](#)

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