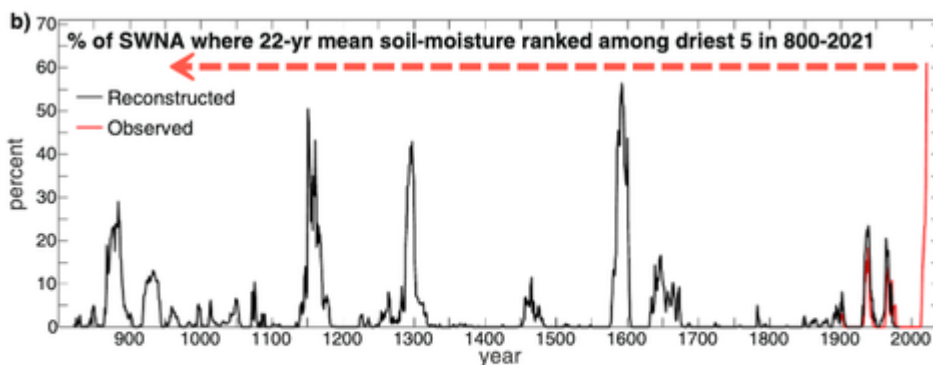


US Western Megadrought Worst In 1,200 Years, Scientist Warn

Description

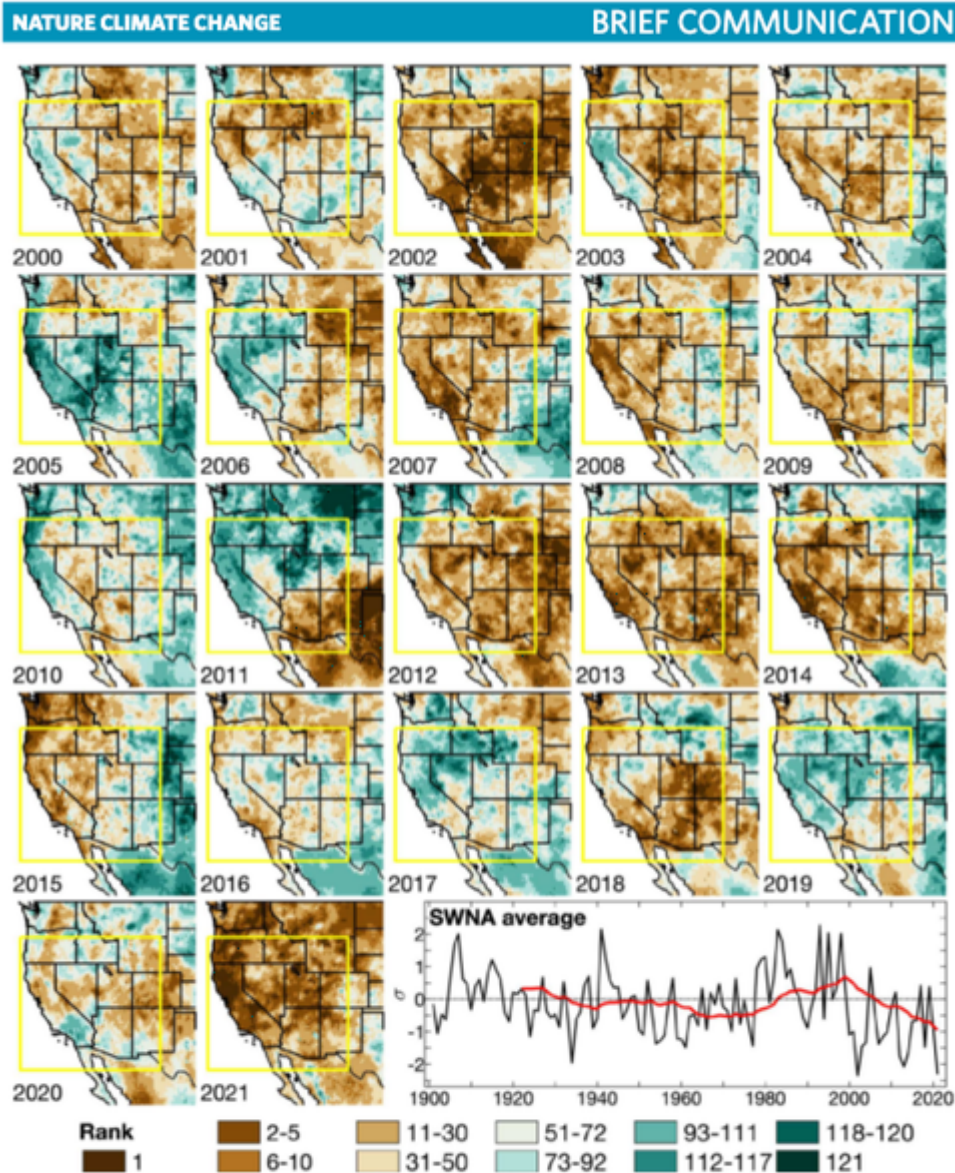
USA: Images of dry lake beds, scorched forests and charred buildings, and drought-stricken farmland from the American West have been published in newspapers worldwide as a megadrought intensifies. Many have wondered just how severe the current drought is, and perhaps, that question can be answered in a new study published in the journal *Nature Climate Change*.

A new peer-reviewed study titled [*“Rapid intensification of the emerging southwestern North American megadrought in 2020–2021”*](#) says the last 22-year dry period is the worst since the Vikings and Mayans ruled parts of the world, or about 1,200 years ago.



Extended Data Fig. 7 | Drought duration and extent. (a) Number of years in a running 22-year window when the 22-year mean summer soil moisture anomaly across southwestern North America (SWNA) was drier than the 800–2021 average. (b) The percentage of SWNA area where the 22-mean summer soil moisture was locally ranked in the top 5 driest 22-year periods in 800–2021.

“Anyone who has been paying attention knows that the west has been dry for most of the last couple decades,” Park Williams, a climate scientist at the University of California and the study’s lead author, told the [*Guardian*](#).



Extended Data Fig. 5 | Turn-of-the-21st-century drought in the western United States and northern Mexico. Ranking and time evolution of summer (June–August) drought severity as indicated by negative 0–200 cm soil moisture anomalies. Maps show how gridded summer drought severity in each year from 2000–2021 ranked among all years 1901–2021, where low (brown) means low soil moisture and therefore high drought severity. Yellow boxes bound the southwestern North America (SWNA) study region. Time series shows standardized anomalies (n) of the SWNA regionally averaged soil moisture record relative to a 1950–1999 baseline. Black time series shows annual values and the red time series shows the 22-year running mean, with values displayed on the final year of each 22-year window. Geographic boundaries in maps were accessed through Matlab 2020a.

Park used tree-ring records to reconstruct summer soil moisture content across centuries and allowed the researcher to believe the current low soil moisture is on par with moisture dating back to the year 800. He also said the conditions would likely persist through 2022.

“Rather than starting to die away after wet years in 2017 and 2019, the 2000s drought has ramped up with authority in 2020–2021, making clear that it’s now as strong as it ever was,” Park said, adding “there is evidence that the 2000s drought is starting to relent.”

We have published countless weather notes and the state of the drought in the western half of the US for years. One of the most damning pictures we’ve reported is [Great Salt Lake’s progression of dwindling](#)

water levels over the last 35 years.



The situation has been worsening over the last few years as several major reservoirs are quickly drying up, forcing people to [evacuate](#) their boats and causing [hydroelectric plants](#) to shutter due to not having enough water to spin turbines.

Here are some of those images of dried-up lake beds.

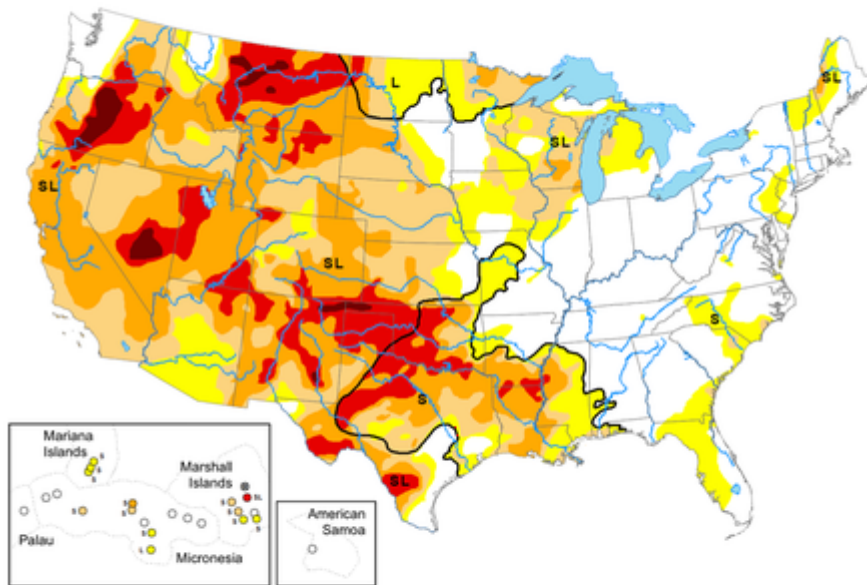




According to data from the US Drought Monitor, the current state of the western half of the US is under a severe drought.

Map released: February 17, 2022

Data valid: February 15, 2022



United States and Puerto Rico Author(s):
Brad Pugh, NOAA/CPC

Pacific Islands and Virgin Islands Author(s):
Richard Heim, NOAA/NCEI

An unrelenting megadrought that is drying up lakes should be a major concern to lakefront homeowners who still have water left — maybe now is the time to sell before your oasis transforms into a desert.

by Tyler Durden

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