

## Experts Come to Tackle the Drought at DRI

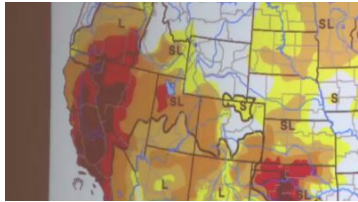
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As the Desert Research Institute's regional climatologist Kelly Redmond told us, "Our droughts here are winter droughts. If we don't get winter precipitation, we have to wait a whole year." And we are still playing the waiting game in the Sierra Nevada.

There was hope that an El Niño in winter would bring much needed rain and snow here and beat the drought that's been going for 4 years. But El Niño weakened last fall...and that brought problems. As NOAA meteorologist Richard Heim told us, "It's, it's really a difficult situation."

Once every 2 years, climatology experts from across the country come here to Reno to meet over the ever-changing, lately-worsening drought monitor map. First devised in 1999, it paints a stark and dramatic picture of just how bad off we are. At today's forum, climate data was studied and theories examined. And now that the wet season's in the rear view mirror, the writing is on the wall. But...it's been there before. Climatologist Kelly Redmond told us, "It's just a natural thing. It happens in the West. Our biggest question, probably to ourselves right now is...how long is this going to last?"

Redmond says droughts usually last a year or 2 here. This one is different, and not just in how long it is. He told us, "The major factor about this drought, compared with the previous droughts...it's been far warmer than the ones we've seen in the past."

We had storms in December, but January was the driest on record. And because it was so dry, people turned their sprinklers back on early. Making it worse, people living in the West and the amount of water they need increased rapidly over recent decades, and should continue for years to come. But our state climatologist cautions against reading too much into that. Douglas Boyle told us, "The good news is, we are a dry state, and we are prepared to deal with long periods of drought in this state."

And this is a long drought...longer than many realize. Some here see a climate trend that has passed 100 years already. Meteorologist Richard Heim says we're already in the worst drought in over 100 years. As he told us, "The drought in the West has been going on since about 1999. This is the longest, worst drought for the western U.S. in 122 years in records of climate data."

And just last month, NASA scientists said the Southwest is likely to be scorched by a decades-long "megadrought". By megadrought, they mean the driest since medieval times...an extended drought which reaches all the way from 2050 to 2099. State Climatologist Boyle told us, "We do know that there have been at least 2 megadroughts in the last 800 to 1200 years."

But Kelly Redmond isn't ready to throw in...what is now a very dry towel. He says the best thing about our drought...is making Nevadans take notice. As he put it, "It's forcing us to take close looks at how we use water in the West."

And you can check out the drought monitor map yourself, which is updated every week. Just click the link below:

<http://droughtmonitor.unl.edu/>