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EDITORIAL

Suffering in the Parched South

Published: July 12, 2011

Right now, the [official drought map](#) of the United States looks as if it has been set on fire and scorched at the bottom edge. Scorched is how much of the Southeast and Southwest feel, in the midst of a drought that is the most extreme since the 1950s and possibly since the Dust Bowl of the 1930s. The government has classified much of this drought as D4, which means exceptional. The outlook through late September shows possible improvement in some places, but in most of Texas, Oklahoma, southern Arkansas, and northern Louisiana and Mississippi the drought is expected to worsen.

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underground sources of water as streams and lakes dry up. The drought is produced by a pattern of cooling in the Pacific called La Niña. A cooler ocean means less moisture in the atmosphere, which shuts down the storms shuttling east across the region.

Droughts are measured in dollars as well as degrees. The prospects for cattle and wheat, corn and cotton crops across the South are dire. There is no way yet to estimate the ultimate cost of this drought because there is no realistic estimate of when it will end. Farmers have been using crop insurance payments, and federal relief is available in disaster areas, including much of Texas. But the only real relief will be the end of the dry, hot winds and the beginning of long, settled rains.

A version of this editorial appeared in print on July 13, 2011, on page A26 of the New York edition with the headline: Suffering in the Parched South.

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Dry conditions began last year and have only intensified as temperatures rose above 100 in many areas. Rain gauges have been empty for months, causing a region-wide search for new

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