



Severe Drought in the United States

A short report, rendered to both HTML and PDF

2026-08-10

This report accompanies [Why HTML?](#). One source file produces both outputs. Each exhibit has two versions: a static figure for PDF, and an interactive figure for HTML.

Where the data comes from

The [U.S. Drought Monitor](#) dataset comes from the National Drought Mitigation Center, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration via [TidyTuesday](#).¹

The dataset contains 325,728 rows across 1044 weeks from July 2001 to July 2021 across 52 states and territories.

Drought severity ranges from D0 (dry) to D4 (exceptional drought). The `area_pct` column records state area share per level. The primary metric is D2+, the sum of levels D2, D3, and D4.

Note

The Monitor covers the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico.

The national picture

State land area weights produce national drought shares (Figure 1). The record shows key drought episodes: the West in the early 2000s, a decline in 2010, the 2012 drought, and an increase in 2020.

¹National Drought Mitigation Center, U.S. Department of Agriculture and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, U.S. Drought Monitor. TidyTuesday dataset, week of 2021-07-20: <https://github.com/rfordatascience/tidytuesday/tree/main/data/2021/2021-07-20>.



Figure 1: Share of US land area in severe drought (D2+), by week.

The PDF presents one static view. The HTML version includes hover values and time sliders.

The worst week on record

The peak week occurred on August 7, 2012, with 38.5% of national land area affected. Figure 2 displays state drought levels during this period.

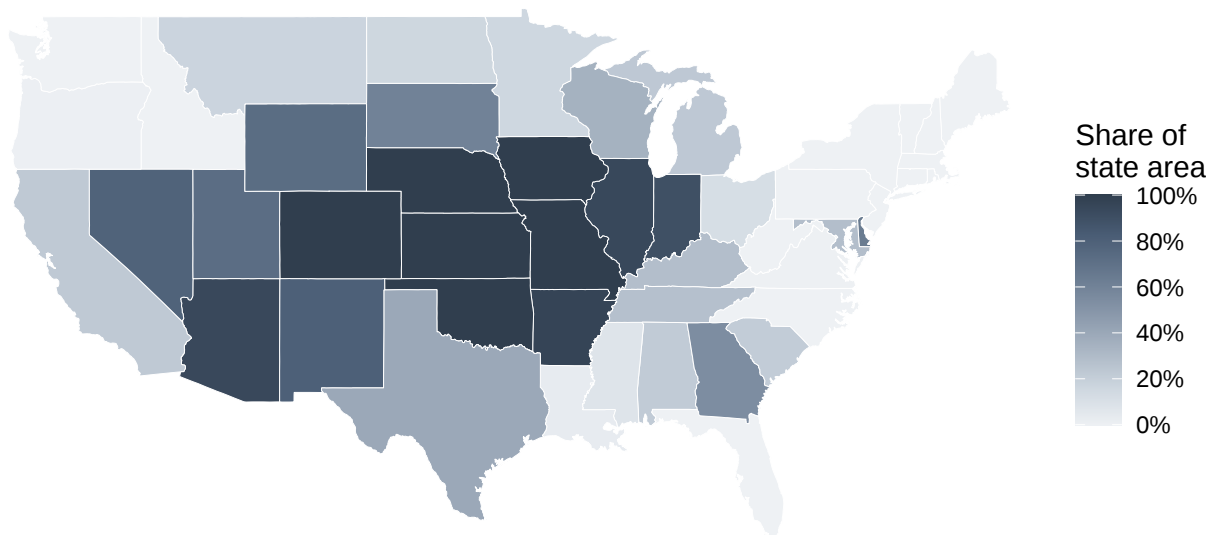


Figure 2: Share of state area in severe drought (D2+), week of August 7, 2012

The static PDF map shows one week. The HTML version animates through quarters over time and includes Alaska and Hawaii.

The states that stay dry

Persisting drought centers in western states (Table 1). Nevada and Arizona spent over one third of the record in D2 to D4 drought.

Table 1: Ten states with the highest average share of area in severe drought, 2001 to 2021.

State	Average D2+	Peak D2+	Week of peak
NV	37.6%	100%	Jul 2007
AZ	37.1%	100%	Jun 2002
NM	33.9%	100%	Dec 2003
UT	30.9%	100%	Mar 2003
CA	30.4%	100%	May 2014
WY	29.2%	100%	Sep 2002
CO	26.6%	100%	Jul 2012
OR	22.7%	100%	Jul 2015
TX	22.1%	99%	Sep 2011
ID	21.4%	100%	Jul 2001

The static table displays ten top-ranked states due to page limits. The HTML table contains all 52 states with sorting and search capabilities.