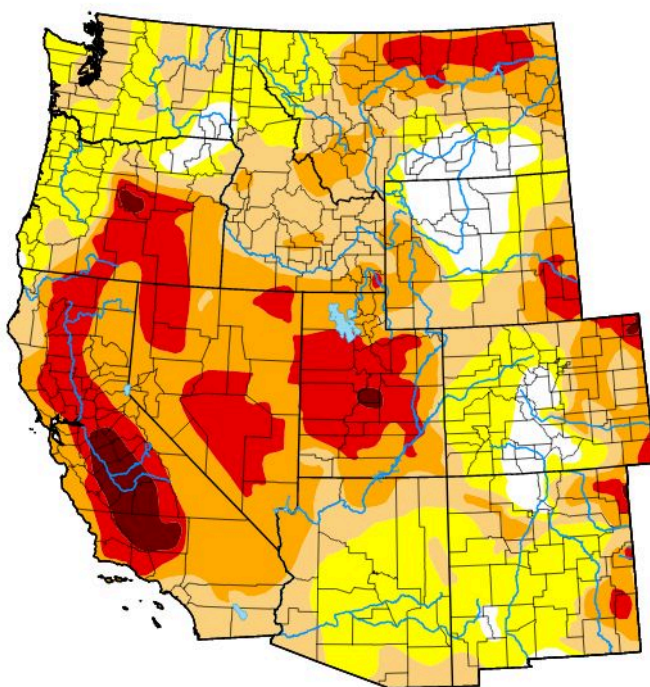


Drought Crisis: Congressional letter outlines priorities needed

December 13, 2022

West

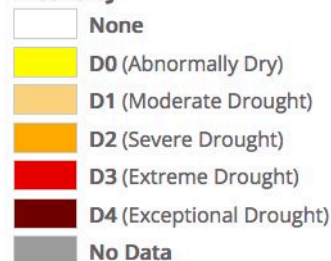
[Home](#) > [West](#)



Map released: Thurs. December 1, 2022

Data valid: November 29, 2022 at 7 a.m. EST

Intensity



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“The American West is in crisis,” a letter to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) reads.

Oregon U.S. Senators Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley and several other members of Congress have signed the letter urging the USDA to give parity to the priorities of growers and communities in Oregon and the West through existing authorities, new funding, and collaboration across government.

Across the major basins of the American West – including the Colorado River Basin, the Rio Grande Basin, the Great Basin, the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Basin, the Columbia River Basin, and the Arkansas-White-Red Basin – farm and ranch families hang in the balance as they grapple with a 22-year mega-drought,” the senators wrote in the letter. “The acute shortage of water for Western growers threatens productive farmland across our states, which are both a pillar of our rural economies and drivers of America’s food production.”

In the letter, the senators urge USDA to support Western farmers and ranchers to conserve water, improve water infrastructure and efficiency, protect lands at risk of erosion, and provide technical assistance for growers in regions affected by drought. The senators also urge USDA to better extend resources and develop tailored solutions through its existing programs to help Western growers address the dire drought conditions.

“American farmers and ranchers manage over 895 million acres of ground in the United States, giving them a vital role in combating climate change risks while continuing to feed America,” continued the senators. “Congress funded \$20 billion for USDA agriculture conservation programs. We believe USDA should allocate these funds for agriculture conservation equally across the country to reflect the contribution of every region, including the West.”

The senators conclude the letter by encouraging USDA to collaborate with states, local, and Tribal governments and address understaffing at field offices across the West.

The letter was led by Senators Michael Bennet, D-Colo., and Mitt Romney, R-Utah. Along with Wyden and Merkley, the letter is co-signed by Senators Kyrsten Sinema, D-Ariz., Mike Lee, R-Utah, Ben Ray Lujan, D-N.M., Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., John Hickenlooper, D-Colo., Mark Kelly, D-Ariz., Martin Heinrich, D-N.M., Jacky Rosen, D-Nev., Catherine Cortez Masto, D-Nev., Alex Padilla, D-Calif., and Patty Murray, D-Wash.