



Lesson 7 - What is Drought?

What is Drought?

Estimated Lesson Time: 40 minutes

Introduction

What is drought? Drought is a dry period with little to no rainfall in an area. It can last for months or even years. Drought creates problems among communities because water is difficult to find. Water is important in many aspects in our lives, from drinking water, to watering crops, to producing the food we eat.

Meteorological drought is a departure from “normal” precipitation. Agricultural drought impacts crops, pastures and grasslands.

Hydro means water. Hydrologic drought is the condition that occurs when water resources cannot meet water needs. That means drought is defined by its impacts on our environment and the people living within that region. Hydrologic drought impacts water supply in rivers, groundwater, reservoirs, lakes and ponds. It often occurs after agricultural drought impacts because the crops are taking moisture from the ground and nearby water sources.

Socio-economic drought is a shortage of some item (water, food, fish) that affects the balance of supply and demand.

A drought is considered short-term if the weather pattern resulting in a drought lasts a short time, such as a few weeks or a couple months. However, if precipitation shortages last for several months or years, it is considered to be a long-term drought. Flash drought is used to describe extreme dry periods that develop rapidly.

Many social activities compete for our water resources. Think of all the ways water is used every day. Consumption, agriculture, recreation (lakes, rivers, etc.), hydropower, and our ecosystems' (organisms and their environments) health all require water!

Monitoring Water Activity

How much water do you use?

1. Use the chart below to track your daily water use over two days. Put a check in the second column each time you do a listed activity. Calculate each activity's total water use by multiplying the number of checks by the number in the third column. (*For showers, multiply the number of minutes spent in the shower by 5.)

ACTIVITY	NUMBER OF TIMES OVER 2 DAYS	AMOUNT OF WATER (GALLONS)	TOTAL AMOUNT OF WATER USED (GAL)
Washing hands		0.5	
Taking a shower (number of minutes*)	*	5 gal per minute	
Taking a bath		40	
Flushing a toilet		5	
Brushing teeth (water running)		1	
Brushing teeth (water off)		0.25	
Food and drink		0.5 per day	
Total			

2. How much water did you use over the past two days? _____

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