

U.S. drought spreading in South and West

June 8 2007

Drought now covers more than a third of the continental United States and is spreading, it was reported Friday.

As summer begins, half of the country is unusually dry or officially in drought from lack of rain, USA Today reported.

It is the driest spring in the U.S. Southeast since record-keeping began in 1895 and California and Nevada recorded their driest June-to-May period since 1924, the National Climatic Data Center said.

In Southern California's Antelope Valley, the dry spring erased the annual bloom of California poppies and in South Florida, Lake Okeechobee, the second-largest body of fresh water in the country, last week fell to a record low level. So much of the lake bed is dry that vegetation covering 12,000 acres of the area caught fire last month.

Saltwater intrusion threatens to contaminate wells for Atlantic coastal towns as fresh groundwater levels drop and in Alabama more than half the corn and wheat crops are in poor condition.

This drought has been particularly harsh in the Southwest, the Southeast and northern Minnesota.

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