

Return of the dust bowl: Geoscientists predict a dry, dusty future for the American West

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Haboobs, giant dust storms, walloped Arizona last summer — some close to 2 kilometers high and 160 kilometers wide — knocking out electricity, creating traffic jams and grounding airplanes. Even old-timers say they can't remember anything quite like this year's aerial assaults.

Meanwhile Texas is experiencing one of the most extreme droughts in recent history, with almost 90 percent of the state in the most extreme level of drought. Arizona, California, Colorado, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Utah and other states are also experiencing drought conditions. The worry is that this might just be the start of a trend, as [EARTH](#) reports in the November issue: Over the next couple of decades, researchers say, the American West will transition to an environment that may make the 1930s Dust Bowl seem mild and brief.

The problem, researchers told EARTH in "Return of the Dust Bowl," is that rising temperatures will contribute directly and indirectly to there being more dust in the air. Then, persistent droughts, increasingly violent and variable weather patterns, urban and suburban development and even off-road recreational vehicle usage compound the problem. So, is the West doomed? Or is there any reason to believe that this forecast may not come true?

More information: www.earthmagazine.org/earth/article/4aa-7db-

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Provided by American Geological Institute

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