

Drought expands throughout the United States

By Doyle Rice, USA Today

The U.S. hasn't been this dry in five years.

Still reeling from devastating drought that led to at least \$10 billion in agricultural losses across Texas and the South in 2011, the nation is enduring more unusually parched weather.

A mostly dry, mild winter has put nearly 61% of the lower 48 states in "abnormally dry" or drought conditions, according to the U.S. Drought Monitor, a weekly federal tracking of drought. That's the highest percentage of dry or drought conditions since September 2007, when 61.5% of the country was listed in those categories.

Only two states – Ohio and Alaska – are entirely free of abnormally dry or drought conditions, according to the Drought Monitor.

The drought is expanding into some areas where dryness is rare, such as New England.

"Conditions are starting to worry us now," said Keith Eggleston, a climatologist with the Northeast Regional Climate Center in Ithaca, N.Y.

According to the U.S. Geological Survey, stream flow levels are at record or near-record lows in much of New England. The Drought Monitor lists all of Vermont as "abnormally dry," just six months after the state's wettest August on record that stemmed mainly from disastrous flooding by the remnants of Hurricane Irene.

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