

Calif. drought has long-term implications

By Gloria Goodale, Christian Science Monitor

As California faces the worst drought in its 163-year history with no hint of relief in sight, some scientists are calling the event a red flag for the future of the nation.

Gov. Jerry Brown raised the issue in his State of the State address Wednesday, saying “we do not know how much our current problem derives from the build-up of heat-trapping gasses, but we can take this drought as a stark warning of things to come.”

Water shortages have widespread impacts. Agriculture and energy generation account for 80 percent of the nation’s clean water use, says David Dzombak, head of Carnegie Mellon University’s Civil and Environmental Engineering Department. And even when cities meet their water demands during a drought, the costs can leave them “exposed to significant risk of financial failures,” says Patrick Reed, a professor of civil and environmental engineering at Cornell University, in an email.

In that way, crises can led to new policies and new attitudes, and some say the California drought could be just such a catalyst.

“At the state, regional, and federal level, and across the country, people are just starting to come to grips with the fact that our climate is not stationary,” says Dzombak. “We are in a dynamic, changing climate situation that will affect all parts of the country in different ways,” he says, led by the West and Southwest so impacted by drought.

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