

Drought returns to huge swath of U.S.

By David Montgomery, *Governing*

Less than eight months after Hurricane Harvey pelted the Texas Gulf Coast with torrential rainfall, drought has returned to Texas and other parts of the West, Southwest and Southeast, rekindling old worries for residents who dealt with earlier waves of dry spells and once again forcing state governments to reckon with how to keep the water flowing.

Nearly a third of the continental United States was in drought as of April 10, more than three times the coverage of a year ago. And the specter of a drought-ridden summer has focused renewed urgency on state and local conservation efforts, some of which would fundamentally alter Americans' behavior in how they use water.

In California, for example, officials are considering rules to permanently ban water-wasting actions such as hosing off sidewalks and driveways, washing a vehicle with a hose that doesn't have a shut-off valve, and irrigating ornamental turf on public street medians. The regulations, awaiting a final decision by the California State Water Resources Control Board, were in force as temporary emergency measures during part of a devastating five-year drought but were lifted in 2017 after the drought subsided.

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