California's Drought: Seeing Red

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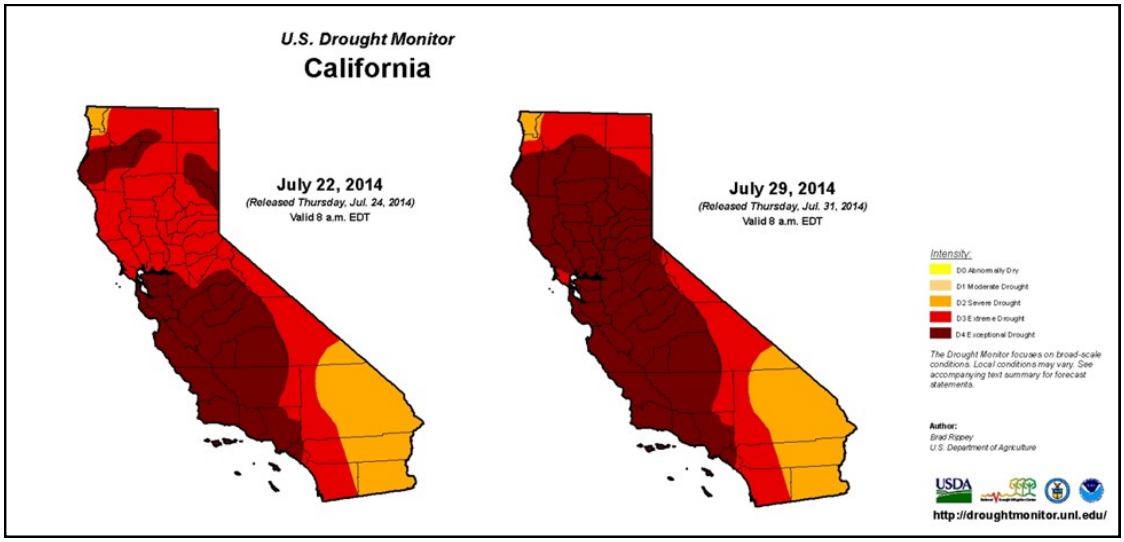
Just how much worse can the drought get?

According to the US Drought Monitor Index, 58 percent of California was in an "exceptional" drought, as of July 29, compared to just 36 percent the previous week (as shown by the growing dark red section of the graphic below.) Although the word "exceptional" usually carries a positive connotation, in this case, it is the **worst drought classification available**. The rest of the state continues to suffer from "severe" and "extreme" drought conditions, according to the Index's rating system – meaning the entire state in a serious drought.



California's reservoir system also reflects the deteriorating water supply situation with many reservoirs at less than half of normal levels for this time of year. The state's largest reservoirs, Lake Shasta and Lake Oroville, are both nearly two-thirds empty. Meanwhile, San Luis Reservoir, a key storage site for south of Delta water users, is at just 20 percent of capacity.

With no precipitation expected in the near future and little water in storage reserves, California is in dire straits. A recent analysis by UC Davis estimated that the drought would cost the state economy roughly $2.2 billion in 2014 and a loss of more than 17,000 jobs. Most of that burden will be borne by the agricultural industry in Central Valley communities already experiencing chronic double-digit unemployment and exceedingly high poverty rates.

The UC Davis analysis also predicted that the state faces more than a 60 percent chance of a continued drought in 2015.

As the current drought persists, it has become increasingly evident that California must do more to insulate itself from future droughts. To do so, the state must make serious investments in the necessary water conveyance and storage infrastructure that will shore up our existing supplies and create additional supplies for the future.

Only more precipitation can get California out of its current drought, but major investments in the state's water supply infrastructure will ensure the state is fully prepared for future droughts.