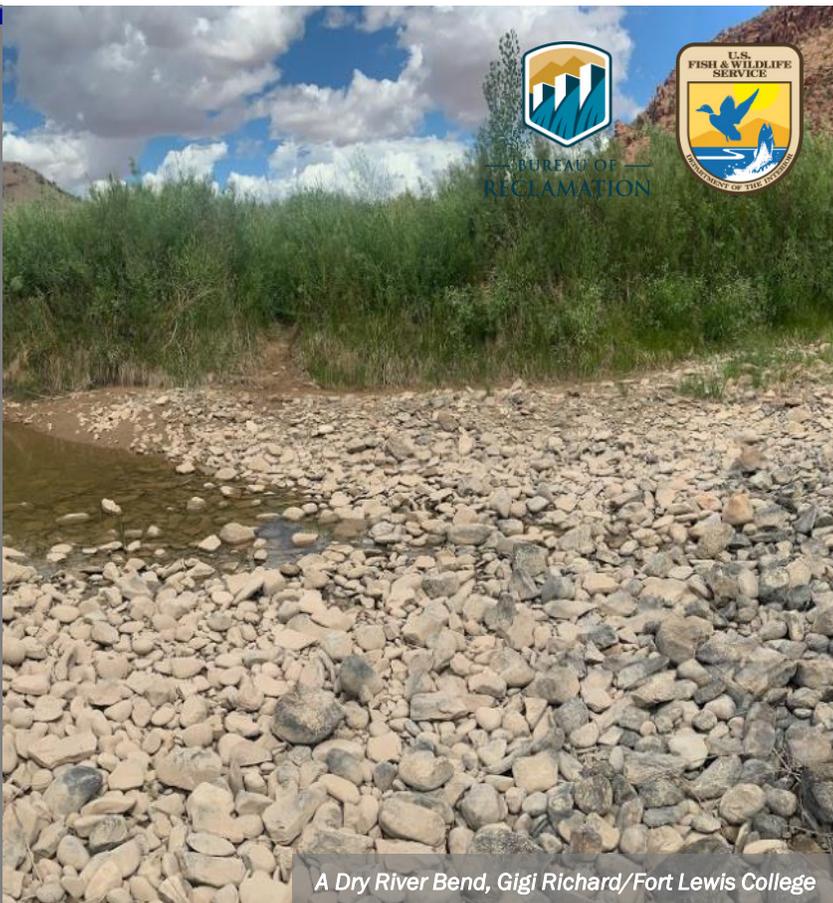
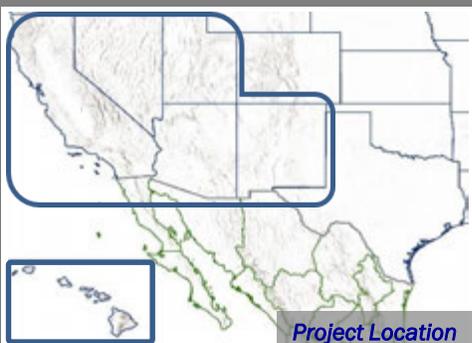


# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND EDUCATION

## Developing a Southwest Drought Learning Network



In 2018, the Colorado Plateau experienced an exceptional drought that impacted wildfire potential, agricultural production, water management, the economy, and human well-being. Though this drought mirrored previous drought experiences in the region, there was no way to document and communicate novel drought experiences and responses among service providers, federal and state officials, scientists, and stakeholders. As a result, scientists from the National Integrated Drought Information System (NIDIS), National Drought Mitigation Center (NDMC), and the USDA Southwest Climate Hub (SWCH) brought together climate service providers and resource managers from across the region to develop a Southwest Drought Learning Network (DLN).



### KEY ISSUES ADDRESSED

While drought has been a consistent issue in the southwestern US, scientists expect droughts to increase in intensity and duration. These changes threaten already stressed ecosystems, agriculture production, and human well-being. For instance, coping with drought can be a stressful experience that degrades mental health for agricultural producers. Further, drought impacts manifest in a variety of ways, often hitting communities unequally. Without a succinct way to communicate, document, and learn from these complex drought experiences, opportunities are missed to respond more effectively in the future.

### PROJECT GOALS

- Improve communication among resource managers and climate service providers
- Create a one-stop-shop of tools, resources, and contacts to help people learn from past drought and better prepare for current or future drought
- Foster peer-to-peer knowledge exchange and a sense of community that ensures resource managers are better supported when facing drought challenges

## FUNDS FOR FAIRNESS

The NRCS Racial Justice Cooperative Agreement enabled the DLN's Indigenous Collaboration team, NDMC, Santa Ana and Middle Rio Grande Pueblos to apply funds to climate-smart agriculture.



A Watering Hole During Drought, Cynthia Mendoza/USDA

## PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

**Team Work:** The DLN relies on self-directed teams formed around emerging aspects of drought. These teams include one to document lessons learned through case studies in partnership with the Collaborative Conservation and Adaptation Strategy Toolbox (CCAST), one ensuring drought data is digestible to users, one that focuses on drought planning with ranchers and farmers in the region, one that delivers drought impact information in real time, and one to amplify Indigenous drought needs and knowledge. Teams emerge, continue, and dissolve based upon regional drought needs and participant leadership.

**Maintained Momentum:** Despite its creation weeks before the COVID-19 pandemic, the DLN still met its objectives. Streamlined communication through a project management platform called Basecamp, quarterly meetings, team organization, and the increase in drought magnitude maintained network momentum.

**Digestible Outputs:** Recognizing the issue of pandemic-induced Zoom fatigue, the network designed webinars to accommodate busy schedules and weary members. For instance, the DLN shortened their monthly drought webinars from an hour to 30-minute briefings, maintaining consistent participation of more than 100 listeners.

## Collaborators

- National Integrated Drought Information System
- National Drought Mitigation Center
- See online for full list of collaborators

CCAST Authors: Viktorya Martinez, New Mexico State University, Maude Dinan, USDA Southwest Climate Hub, May 2022.

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Visit CCAST:



## LESSONS LEARNED

The DLN consists of multiple teams, each with its own leadership, to carry out the goals of the DLN without putting excessive burden on any one individual. Just as multiple leaders maintain momentum for each team, having multiple teams maintains momentum for the DLN.

The DLN leverages resources from all partner organizations to reduce redundancy and increase effectiveness. For example, the DLN uses CCAST's existing platform to develop and share case studies.

The use of technical language is a common barrier in drought conversations that impedes communication between climate service providers and resource managers. Further, establishing trusting relationships and the appropriate communication channels is a long-term process.

## NEXT STEPS

- Increase knowledge-sharing through existing and emerging teams, meetings, and webinars with the hope of in-person events as pandemic safety measures permit
- Create more avenues to reach and increase involvement among resource managers
- Continue connecting and creating relationships with Indigenous communities throughout the Southwest
- Maintain connection and momentum even in periods of drought relief to be prepared and ready for the next drought
- Serve as a model for other areas interested in developing a DLN, such as in the Caribbean

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Initial Meeting of the SW DLN in 2020, Ruth Sedillo/NMSU