

Drought nothing compared to what may be coming

By Darryl Fears, Washington Post

The long and severe drought in the U.S. Southwest pales in comparison with what's coming: a "megadrought" that will grip that region and the central plains later this century and probably stay there for decades, a new study says.

Thirty-five years from now, if the current pace of climate change continues unabated, those areas of the country will experience a weather shift that will linger for as long as three decades, according to the study, released Thursday.

Researchers from NASA and Cornell and Columbia universities warned of major water shortages and conditions that dry out vegetation, which can lead to monster wildfires in southern Arizona and parts of California.

"We really need to start thinking in longer-term horizons about how we're going to manage it," said Toby R. Ault, an assistant professor in the department of Earth and atmospheric sciences at Cornell, one of the co-authors. "This is a slow-moving natural hazard that humans are used to dealing with and used to managing."

Megadroughts are sustained periods of sparse precipitation and significant loss of soil moisture that span generations, about 10 times as long as a normal three-year drought.

Read the whole story