

“National Integrated Drought Information System Act of 2006”

NIDIS Vision

A dynamic and accessible drought information system that provides users with the ability to determine the potential impacts of drought and the associated risks they bring, and the decision support tools needed to better prepare for and mitigate the effects of drought.

NIDIS Goals

NIDIS is intended to accomplish the following goals:

- Develop the leadership and partnerships to ensure successful implementation of an integrated national drought monitoring and forecasting system;
- Foster, and support, a research environment that focuses on impact mitigation and improved predictive capabilities;
- Create a drought "early warning system" capable of providing accurate, timely and integrated information on drought conditions at the relevant spatial scale to facilitate proactive decisions aimed at minimizing the economic, social and ecosystem losses associated with drought;
- Provide interactive delivery systems, including an Internet portal, of easily comprehensible and standardized products (databases, forecasts, GIS-based products, maps, etc.); and
- Provide a framework for interacting with and educating those affected by drought on how and why droughts occur, and how they impact human and natural systems.

Droughts are as much a part of the weather and climate extremes as floods, hurricanes and tornadoes. Yet, unlike these other natural disasters, droughts are much more difficult to identify. It is hard to miss an oncoming flood, hurricane or tornado – or their immediate aftermath. Droughts, on the other hand, are a creeping phenomenon, which develop slowly over large areas and an extended period of time. This slow nature of drought hinders the recognition of the true impacts, thus diminishing the urgency that would otherwise trigger a timely and comprehensive response.

Recognition of droughts in a timely manner is dependent on our ability to monitor and forecast the diverse physical indicators of drought, as well as relevant economic, social and environmental impacts. Unfortunately, due to the lack of a national drought policy, there has been no development to date of a coordinated, integrated drought monitoring and forecasting system.

The U.S. Drought Monitor, created in 1999 to better integrate data on current conditions, is an important new tool in monitoring drought. *The U.S. Seasonal Drought Outlook*, created in 2000, strives to better forecast drought. However, these two information sources, while very helpful, still have significant limitations. NIDIS will build on these and other tools by effecting fuller integration of relevant and available data to improve monitoring, provide a better understanding of how and why droughts occur, enhance dissemination of information at the relevant spatial and temporal scales, and, ultimately, improve the forecasting of droughts.