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EARTH: Return of the Dust Bowl: Geoscientists Predict a Dry, Dusty Future for the American West

Alexandria, VA – Haboobs, giant dust storms, walloped Arizona last summer — some close to 2 kilometers high and 160 kilometers wide — knocking out electricity, creating traffic jams and grounding airplanes. Even old-timers say they can't remember anything quite like this year's aerial assaults. Meanwhile Texas is experiencing one of the most extreme droughts in recent history, with almost 90 percent of the state in the most extreme level of drought. Arizona, California, Colorado, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Utah and other states are also experiencing drought conditions. The worry is that this might just be the start of a trend, as EARTH reports in the November issue: Over the next couple of decades, researchers say, the American West will transition to an environment that may make the 1930s Dust Bowl seem mild and brief.

The problem, researchers told EARTH in "Return of the Dust Bowl," is that rising temperatures will contribute directly and indirectly to there being more dust in the air. Then, persistent droughts, increasingly violent and variable weather patterns, urban and suburban development and even off-road recreational vehicle usage compound the problem. So, is the West doomed? Or is there any reason to believe that this forecast may not come true?

Read more about the havoc that dust has been wreaking in the West in the November issue of EARTH now available digitally (<http://www.earthmagazine.org/digital>). Also featured are other stories, such as how one geoscientist took a road trip to find out if the U.S. is ready for vehicles running on natural gas; how subducting seamounts are not to blame for producing megathrust earthquakes like the Japan quake last March; and, you won't want to miss the news story about La Niña formation, as NOAA just announced that the pattern has formed again in the Pacific and will affect us this winter.

For more information on the November featured article, go to <http://www.earthmagazine.org/earth/article/4aa-7db-a-1c>

Keep up to date with the latest happenings in earth, energy and environment news with EARTH magazine online at <http://www.earthmagazine.org/>. Published by the American Geosciences Institute, EARTH is your source for the science behind the headlines.

The American Geosciences Institute is a nonprofit federation of 50 geoscientific and professional associations that represents more than 250,000 geologists, geophysicists and other earth scientists. Founded in 1948, AGI provides information services to geoscientists, serves as a voice of shared interests in the profession, plays a major role in strengthening geoscience education, and strives to increase public awareness of the vital role the geosciences play in society's use of resources, resiliency to natural hazards, and interaction with the environment.

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