

This animation shows how awful the California drought is this year



By **Niraj Chokshi** July 25 [Follow @NirajC](#)

For the first time since 2000, air pollution is not the top environmental concern among Californians, according to a Public Policy Institute of California survey. It's water.

A full 35 percent of the survey's respondents cited drought or water supply as their top environmental concern in response to an open-ended question, PPIC reported this week. That's up from 8 percent just three years ago. (The share citing air pollution as a top concern fell from 27 percent to 14 percent.) If you want to get a sense of how bad things have gotten, check out the animation below of drought conditions in the state since the end of 2013, created using [U.S. Drought Monitor](#) maps.

Drought in California through July 22, 2014. (U.S. Drought Monitor/Washington Post screengrab)

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Or, if you prefer charts, here's one our colleague [Philip Bump made last month](#) showing drought conditions there since 2000:

Drought in California since 2000. (Philip Bump)

Things have gotten so bad, that the state enlisted Lady Gaga to produce [this public service announcement](#):



Just over half of Californians surveyed said water supply was a big problem in their region, while a fourth said it was “somewhat of a problem.” About one in five said it was “not much of a problem.” Three out of four residents—and a slightly smaller share of voters—said they support their local water districts requiring reduced water use. Half of Californians—51 percent—blame natural weather patterns, while 38 percent say the severe drought is caused by global warming.

Despite the drought and their apparent concern about it, Californians [increased their water use](#) by 1 percent in May compared with previous years, according to a state survey

of water providers. This week, Gov. Jerry Brown (D) [signed a bill](#) intended to nudge the state's conservation efforts by barring homeowner's associations from enforcing requirements that lawns be kept green during a drought-related state of emergency.

To make matters worse, scientists at NASA and the University of California, Irvine, said things might be even worse than previously thought. The study is the first to measure groundwater use in the West and its main author, Stephanie Castle, a UC water specialist, said the findings were "shocking."

"We didn't realize the magnitude of how much water we actually depleted" in the West, Castle said.

"What happens if it isn't there?" she said in [an interview with the Associated Press](#). "That's the scary part of this analysis."

Niraj Chokshi reports for GovBeat, The Post's state and local policy blog.
