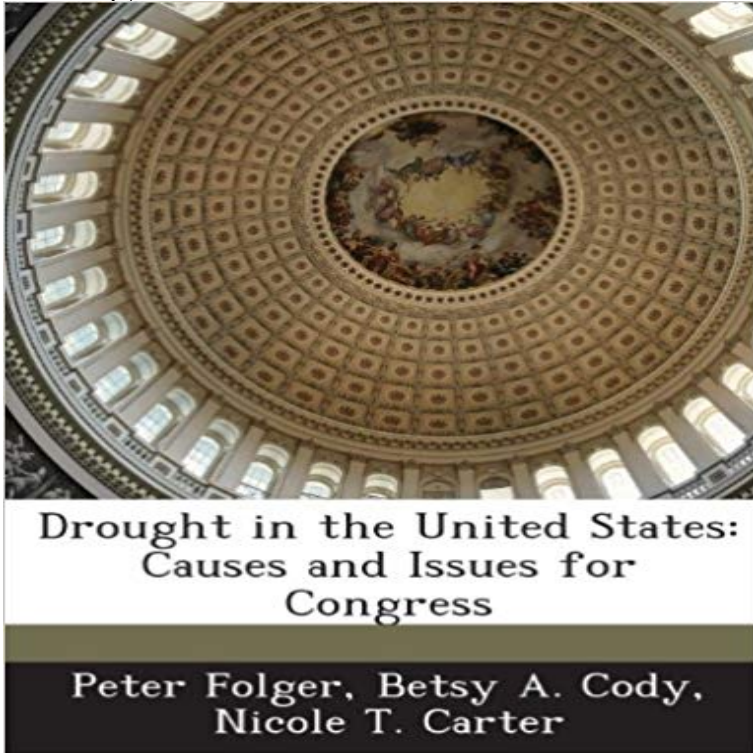


## Drought in the United States: Causes and Issues for Congress



Drought is commonly defined as a deficiency of precipitation over an extended period of time, usually a season or more, relative to some long-term average condition. Droughts have affected the United States, particularly the American West, for centuries. Drought affects societies because of the combination of reduced supply (e.g., less precipitation, reduced reservoir levels, a lower groundwater table) and competing demand (e.g., for irrigation, municipal and industrial supply, energy production, species protection). This report focuses on the physical causes of drought, its history in the United States, and what may be expected in the near future. Although currently drought can be predicted for a particular region for at best a few months in advance, past history suggests that severe and extended droughts are inevitable and part of natural climate cycles, particularly in the West.

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