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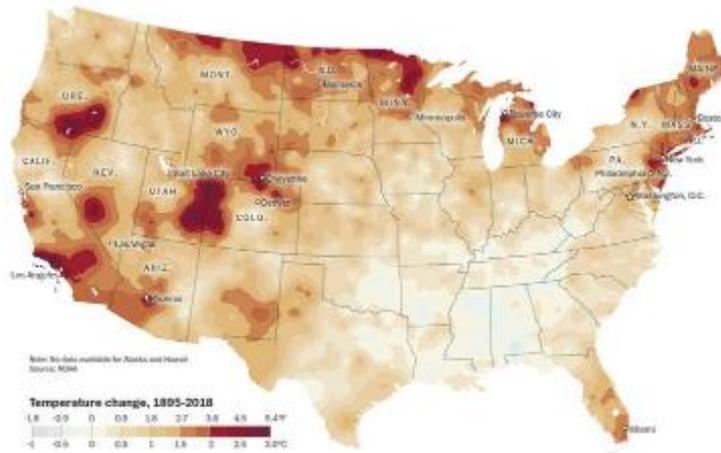
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FEATURED

Harbinger of big heat

Washington Post map shows Western Slope, eastern Utah among 'America's fastest-warming places'

By Leslie Vreeland, Contributing Editor 14 hrs ago



Hot states: A new map reveals the places in the U.S. where temperatures have risen fastest. The graphic is based on a Washington Post analysis of NOAA data from over the past century and across 3,107 counties in the Lower 48 states of the U.S. (Graphic courtesy of the Washington Post)

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New Jersey made the lineup, and so did Los Angeles. Parts of Maine, Montana, Oregon and Minnesota are in there, as well.

But the biggest “hot spot” is of them all is right here on the Western Slope (and in eastern Utah).

According to a new report by a team of Washington Post reporters who surveyed decades of climate data, “extreme climate change” has already come to all of these spots. The report was published earlier this week, and drew on statistics from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s Climate Divisional Database between the years 1895 and 2018 to create a map of this country’s fastest-warming places (see it at [tinyurl.com/y3gmro2r](https://www.tinyurl.com/y3gmro2r)).

Among its ominous findings: The country’s hottest spots have already climbed more than 2 degrees Celsius — double the average for the rest of the Lower 48.

The 2-degree limit is an important benchmark. “Over the past two decades, the 2 degrees Celsius number has emerged as a critical threshold for global warming,” the story, titled “Extreme Climate Change Has Reached the U.S.,” pointed out. “In the 2015 Paris (climate) accord, international leaders agreed that the world should act urgently to keep the Earth’s average temperature increases ‘well below’ 2 degrees Celsius by the year 2100 to avoid a host of catastrophic changes.”

Scientists agree that the Earth is warming. The heating-up is occurring at different rates, in different places. What the hot spots reveal is what all the world’s temperatures might look like, eventually.

“Basically,” the esteemed University of British Columbia marine scientist Daniel Pauly told the Post’s reporters, “these (global) hot spots are chunks of the future in the present.”

What is still not understood is why some places are heating so quickly.

Temperatures are rising rapidly not only in the cement sprawl of New York City, for example, but close by in dissimilar topography, like the beachy Hamptons and arboreal Westchester County.

The report found it is getting hotter, faster at high altitude: in the mountains of Western Colorado and Utah, and in the high deserts of Oregon.

Russ Schumacher, an associate professor in the Department of Atmospheric Science at CSU, is the state's climatologist. At the Daily Planet's request, he took a look at the Washington Post's report.

"I'm not sure we have a great answer for why western Colorado and eastern Utah are warming more up more than areas east of the Continental Divide," Schumacher said.

"The warming trend in your part of the state, as well as statewide, has been pretty consistently upward however you look at it — whether it's from season to season, or based on average temperatures, or high/low temperatures. And the warming is greater in western Colorado than in some other parts of this state and the country."

What is different, he added, is how the Post portrayed these facts graphically.

"The data they're using is the same data we're looking at all the time," he said. "But what was effective about their analysis was, it made the data easier to understand. The way they put it together was a very effective way of looking at it."

What's concerning is scientists don't have a reason for why there should be such intense fluctuations of temperatures.

"We're always trying to understand these regional variations," Schumacher said. "What's driving the global trend, or rising temperatures over the U.S., is fairly clear. Globally, we've had a sharp increase in CO₂ emissions and other greenhouse gases, which trap heat down here near the Earth's surface. That makes temperatures rise. This 'forcing' is quite well understood; the physics of it have been known for over a century. How it plays out in, say, Telluride can be trickier. It involves local factors — land-use changes and the terrain in general."

What is clear, Schumacher added, is that whatever is driving the temperature up in western Colorado, "the big issue that we always think of is the effects on the water.

In the grand scheme, this is not that hot of a place,” which means elevated temperatures are less likely to directly impact human health than they would in, say, urban places (where people can easily die of heat stroke).

“The big effect of rising temperatures is on the snowpack, and stream flows,” he emphasized.

“The warmer it gets, the bigger the stress on water resources.”

Link: https://www.telluridenews.com/news/article_d6bf2064-bfb2-11e9-ab7b-e7bccae5268d.html