

Interactive comment on “Impacts of European drought events: insights from an international database of text-based reports” by K. Stahl et al.

K. H. Smith (Referee)

ksmith2@unl.edu

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General Comments

As someone who is involved with the U.S. Drought Impact Reporter effort, I find this paper to be quite valuable. The term “drought impact” is an abstraction that can lead to misinterpretation or confusion. This paper makes some key distinctions and explains the rationale behind data collection methodologies, both of which are highly useful. Although, as another reviewer noted, this paper leans somewhat toward description rather than research, the fact is, many decisions and judgments go into defining protocol for a comprehensive database of drought impacts, so this detailed account of the rationale and results of a large-scale systematic drought impact collection effort is a

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real contribution to the field.

Specific Comments

This paper’s distinction between statistics related to elements affected by drought – such as crop yield, hydropower production, wildfires, or water supplies – and the assignment of cause (drought) is particularly valuable. The authors observe that to discern a drought impact in data, it requires combining the statistics with an assessment as to whether a particular trend is due to drought, and that assessment often exists in text form, via agency reports, newsletters of stakeholder organizations, media reports, or personal observations. The complexity of matching data with textual attribution is a substantial challenge in assembling a comprehensive drought impact database and describing the problem is a first step in finding a solution.

The paper notes that the researchers opted for directly observable sector-based impact categorization, rather than more abstract typologies such as economic, environmental and social; or direct, indirect and intangible. This more specific definition of drought impacts helps move the discussion out of the theoretical realm and into the actionable.

The authors provide useful descriptions of what sources are most fruitful for different decades and countries. For example, scholarly research describes impacts for some countries, especially in the past, but for others, particularly in Eastern Europe, accounts from international media are a more important source.

The authors also demonstrated that the data they have gathered can be analyzed to provide useful overviews of what kind of drought impacts have been reported in various countries, including during specific drought events. This first inventory of what information is available and what questions it does and doesn’t help answer is necessary to identify and begin filling gaps in the data.

Technical Comments

This reviewer did not find any technical errors.

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