

READING THE WEST

read-ing [from ME reden, to explain, hence to read] – vt. 1 to get the meaning of; 2 to understand the nature, significance, or thinking of; 3 to interpret or understand; 4 to apply oneself to; study.

DEFINING THE SOUTHWEST

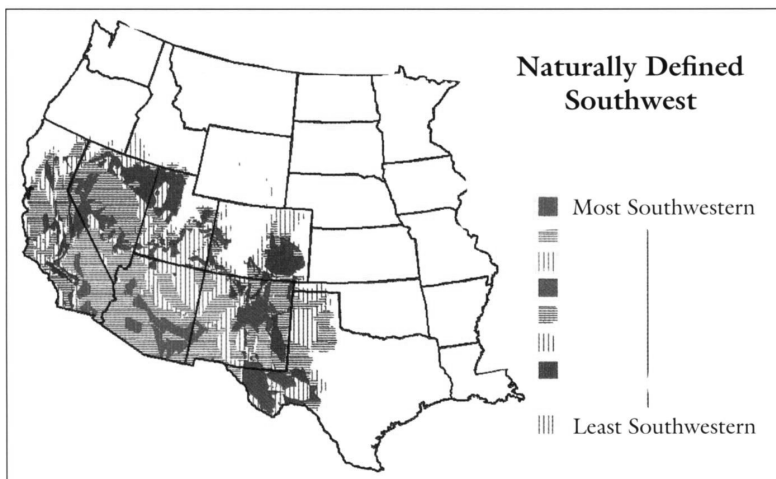
The National Park Service posts a series: “Defining the Southwest.” It explains that . . . the Southwest is a place without boundaries—a land with its own style and its own pace—a land that ultimately defies a single definition.

The geographical boundaries of the Southwest are so difficult to pin down, in part, because of the variability of both ancient and modern cultures in the region. Also, as the modern population of the American Southwest continues to grow, so do archeological discoveries. With each new discovery, the boundaries of ancient southwestern cultures shift, and our definitions are once again reevaluated.

The Southwest is also definable, to an extent, by environmental conditions—primarily aridity. Aridity is the environmental condition in which the net loss of moisture—through transpiration and evaporation—exceeds the net gain through precipitation.

Source: National Park Service, “Series: Defining the Southwest.” 14 August 2015, <https://www.nps.gov/articles/series.htm?id=C98B3C2A-0779-F0D4-9531EC2CD76D8132>.

The *Journal of the Southwest* was founded in 1959 as *Arizona and the West*. It began publishing in its current format in 1987. Published by the Southwest Center at the University of Arizona, it invites scholarly articles on any aspect of the Greater Southwest, including northern Mexico. In a 1992 article, a group of scholars used geographical information systems to define the region.

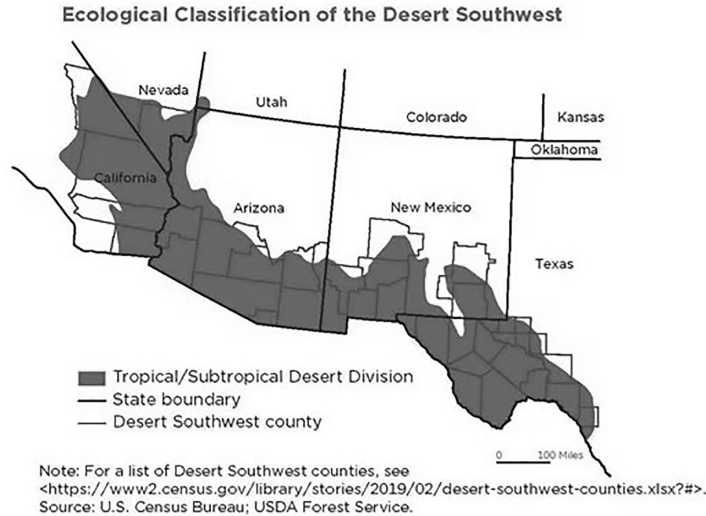


Source: Larkin, Robert P., Carole J. Huber, and Thomas P. Huber. “Defining the Southwest: The Use of Geographic Information Systems for Regional Description.” *Journal of the Southwest*, vol. 40, no. 2, 1998, pp. 243–60. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40170019>.

The World Population Review defines the Southwest as Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas, and Utah.

Source: "Southwest States." *World Population Review*, <https://worldpopulationreview.com/state-rankings/southwest-states>

The U.S. Census defines the Desert Southwest as:



Source: United States Census Bureau. "The Desert Southwest." 25 Mar. 2019, <https://www.census.gov/library/visualizations/2019/demo/desert-southwest.html>.

The *What States* website defines the states that make up the Southwest as Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas, and Utah. However, others define the Southwest more narrowly to only include the core of the region: Arizona, western New Mexico, western Texas, southern Colorado, and southern Utah.

Source: O'Connor, Meg. "What Are The Southwest States? (Info, History & Fun Facts)." *What States*, 8 Sept. 2022, <https://whatstates.com/southwest/>.

SOUTHWEST HISTORY FOR KIDS

The Children's Hour, Inc. is a New Mexico based non-profit producing kids' public radio programs. It recently created a six-part podcast and curriculum series on the history of the American Southwest. As they explain:

Typically a region of the U.S. that is overlooked in textbooks, the Southwestern United States history begins 23,000 years ago in what is now known as White Sands National Park. Students will learn how the area was settled, from its Indigenous beginnings through the brutal era of colonization by Spain, and then the United States, and finally emerging into statehood. This series highlights the moments that changed the history of this region and this nation forever.

Source: "A Brief History of the American Southwest for Kids." *The Children's Hour, Inc.*, <https://www.childrenshour.org/history/>.

THE VIRTUAL SOUTHWEST

The American Southwest Virtual Museum is a project of the Arizona State Museum and Northern Arizona University. Updated periodically, the site offers a digital repository of photographs, maps, and virtual tours of national parks and museums across the Southwest.

This growing collection provides access to high-resolution images of archaeological materials and sites, natural resources, and historic photographs, as well as virtual visitor center and trail tours, interactive artifact displays, and fact sheets and overviews that enhance visitor experience in the Southwest's National Parks and Monuments and provide researchers a rich database for exploration.

Source: *The American Southwest Virtual Museum*. <https://swvirtualmuseum.nau.edu/wp/>. Accessed 26 June 2023.

IT'S HOT AND DRY

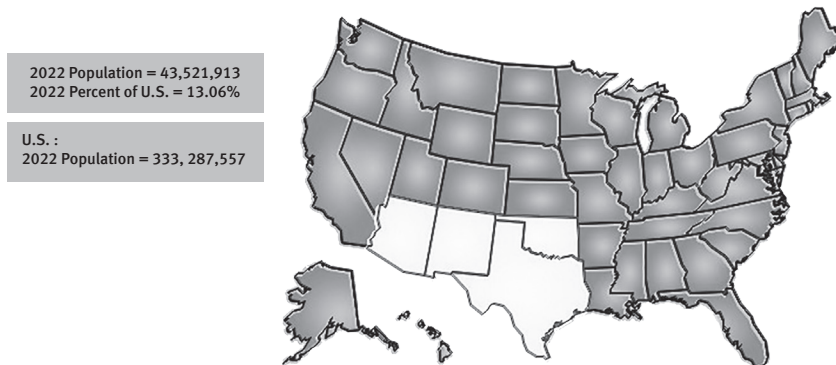
The Environmental Protection Agency recently issued a report, "A Closer Look: Temperature and Drought in the Southwest." It focused on six states that are commonly thought of as "southwestern:" Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, and Utah. The report defines the area as characterized at least in part by arid landscapes and scarce water supplies. Key points include:

- Every part of the Southwest experienced higher average temperatures between 2000 and 2020 than the long-term average (1895–2020). Some areas were more than 2°F warmer than average. . .
- Large portions of the Southwest have experienced drought conditions since weekly Drought Monitor records began in 2000. For extended periods from 2002 to 2005 and from 2012 to 2020, nearly the entire region was abnormally dry. . .
- Based on the long-term Palmer Index, drought conditions in the Southwest have varied since 1895. Since the early 1900s, the Southwest has experienced wetter conditions during three main periods: the 1900s, 1940s, and 1980s. Drier conditions occurred through the 1920s/1930s, again in the 1950s, and since 1990, when the Southwest has seen some of the most persistent droughts on record.

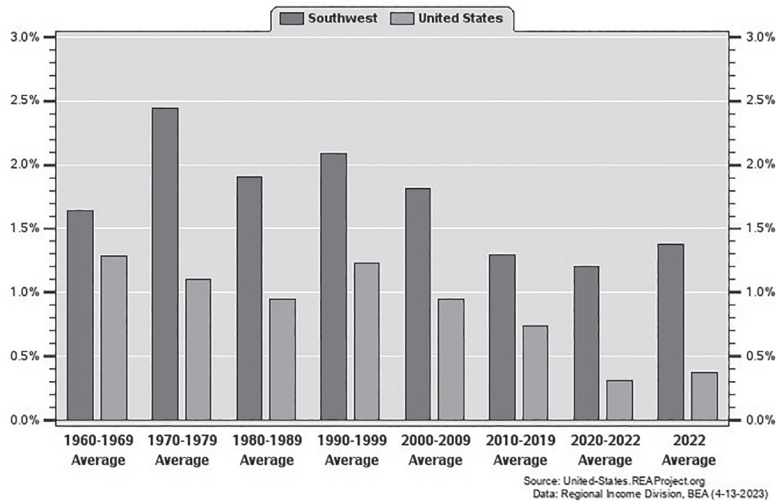
United States Environmental Protection Agency. "A Closer Look: Temperature and Drought in the Southwest." *United States Environmental Protection Agency*, April 2021, <https://www.epa.gov/climate-indicators/southwest>.

POPULATION GROWTH IN THE SOUTHWEST

The Pacific Northwest Regional Economic Analysis Project (PNREAP) is a not-for-profit corporation organized to foster and further regional economic research, analysis, education, outreach, and decision-making. It defines the American Southwest very narrowly. However, the population growth of the region outperformed the nation in every decade since the 1960s.



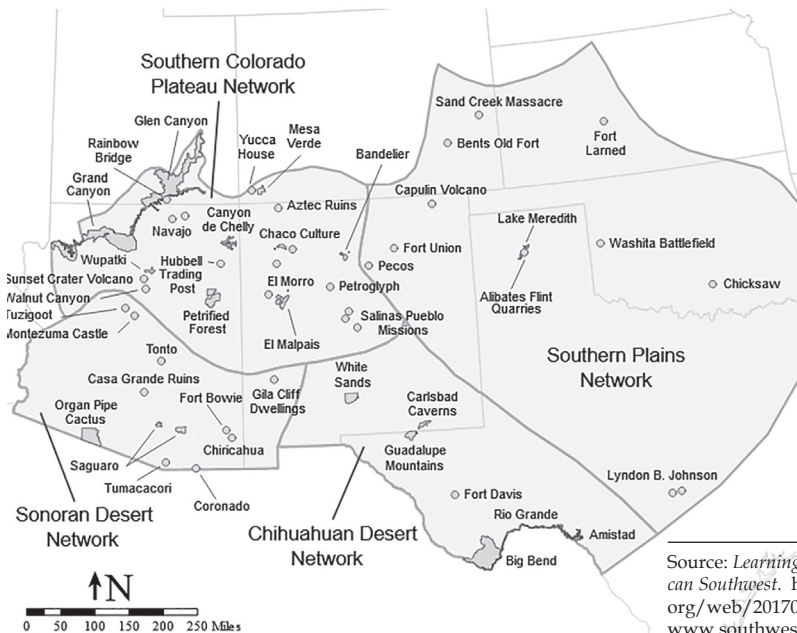
**Population Growth:
Average Annual Percent Change by Decade**



Source: PNREAP. "Southwest vs. United States Comparative Trends Report: Population, 1958-2022." *United States Regional Economic Analysis Project*, <https://united-states.reaproject.org/analysis/comparative-trends-analysis/population/reports/960000/0/>.

THE NATIONAL PARKS IN THE SOUTHWEST

The Learning Center of the American Southwest was a collaboration among 48 national park units in four NPS Inventory and Monitoring Networks, three Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Units (CESUs), and several nonprofit partners. Although no longer maintained, the website has useful information about the area including fact sheets, resource briefs, and project summaries. It has essentially been replaced by the Desert Research Learning Center.



Source: Learning Center of the American Southwest. <https://web.archive.org/web/20170630230547/http://www.southwestlearning.org/>. Accessed 29 June 2023.

COLLABORATIVES

The Southwest Collaboratives Support Network links place-based collaboratives across the Southwest, which they define as Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, and Utah. One such collaborative in Utah is the Escalante River Watershed Partnership (<http://escalanteriverwatershedpartnership.org/>). The mission of the Network is:

“ . . .to transform how partners work collaboratively to conserve, restore, and sustain large landscapes and their natural and human communities through building capacity and peer-to-peer support among the facilitators and leaders that work with these collaboratives.”

Source: *Southwest Collaboratives Support Network*. <https://www.swcollaboratives.org/>. Accessed 29 June 2023.

EDITORIAL MATTER

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