

A Not-So-Watery World

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newwave@tulane.edu

An international researcher in climate change law issued a grim prediction in a recent Tulane lecture – parts of the United States and Brazil will undergo major droughts in the future because of the countries' poor water resource management.



Water is often a wasted asset, says climate change researcher R  mulo S.R. Sampaio, and that may send it from abundance to scarcity in the future. (Photo from Getty Images)

R  mulo S.R. Sampaio, professor at the Getulio Vargas Foundation School of Law in Rio de Janeiro, lectured on “Water Law in the U.S. & Brazil: Climate Change and Two Approaches to Water Poverty.”

The talk on Friday (Jan. 21), presented by the [Center for Inter-American Policy and Research](#) and the [Payson Center for International Development](#), highlighted why Brazil and the United States are “very poorly suited to manage water resources” in the face of climate change.

In Brazil, “water is a limited natural resource endowed with economic value,” said Sampaio, but it is often wasted.

The United States has extensively diverted the Colorado River in order to provide the arid West with water. The river runs eight to 10 feet below normal, and by the time it reaches Mexico, it is unsuitable to drink, he said.

Despite these negative consequences, Brazil has used the Colorado River as a model for a plan to bring water to its dry northeastern area. Sampaio asked, “Should we divert water to the desert?”

Both countries have huge groundwater aquifers and diverse climates, but they exploit water resources by wasting or diverting water to places where it does not belong, he said. As the world undergoes climate change, he added, the western United States and the eastern and northeastern parts of Brazil will undergo major droughts. Brazil's overdependence on hydroelectric power and plans in the United States to push water across even further distances will lead to water shortages.

When asked by skeptics about climate change, Sampaio replied, “You should not be worried about climate change. We will die thirsty before we die from extreme heat.”

Michaela Gibboni is a sophomore student at Tulane majoring in communication and Spanish.