

June 14, 2002

The Honorable Don Young
Chair, Transportation and Infrastructure
Committee
US House of Representatives
Washington D.C. 20515

The Honorable James Oberstar
Ranking Member, Transportation and
Infrastructure Committee
US House of Representatives
Washington D.C. 20515

Dear Representatives Young and Oberstar:

On behalf of the nation's 3,000 conservation districts, I urge you to support the National Drought Preparedness Act, H.R. 4754, when this legislation is considered by your committee.

The United States often suffers serious economic and environmental losses from severe regional droughts but has no national policy to ensure an integrated and coordinated federal strategy to respond to drought emergencies. Even though historically there have been frequent, significant droughts of national consequence, drought has been addressed primarily through special legislation and makeshift action rather than through a systematic and permanent process. State, tribal and local governments have to deal individually and separately with each federal agency involved in drought monitoring, planning, mitigation and response. Crop and pasture losses, fire and dust storms cause significant environmental and economic disruption in many areas of the nation that currently are experiencing substantial drought conditions.

Conservation districts support the approaches to address this void proposed in H.R. 4754, which would establish a comprehensive national drought policy. The bipartisan legislation would encourage drought preparedness planning at all levels—federal, state and local. The bill also would allow us to better focus federal funding on implementing plans to mitigate drought impacts.

It is crucial for our nation to have a coordinated national policy on drought that will result from this legislation's enactment. The National Association of Conservation Districts urges the Congress to pass and the President to sign this bill into law this year.

Sincerely,

J. Read Smith