



WESTERN GOVERNORS' ASSOCIATION

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September 5, 2006

The Honorable Dennis Hastert
Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives
H-232 Capitol Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
House Minority Leader
H-204 Capitol Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Hastert and Leader Pelosi:

On June 15, the House Science Committee passed H.R. 5136, "The National Integrated Drought Information System Act of 2006," referring it for consideration by the full House. On behalf of the Western Governors' Association, we urge the House to take expeditious action on the bill so that it may be enacted yet this Congress.

The Western Governors believe that improved drought monitoring and forecasting is fundamental to a proactive approach toward drought and water shortages. NIDIS, the program authorized by H.R. 5136, will allow policy-makers and water managers at all levels of the private and public sectors to make more informed and timely decisions about their water resources in order to mitigate or avoid the impacts from droughts.

Over the last decade, several severe and long-term droughts have occurred in the United States. Recent severe drought conditions across the nation and particularly in the West have created life-threatening situations, as well as financial burdens for governments and individuals. The fiscal impacts of drought are significant. According to the National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the federal government spends on average \$6 to 8 billion per year on drought. Additionally, since 2000 the federal government has averaged over \$1 billion annually for wildfire suppression.

In June 2004, the Western Governors adopted the report—developed in partnership with NOAA—entitled, *Creating a Drought Early Warning System for the 21st Century: The National Integrated Drought Information System*. The report finds that recognition of droughts in a timely manner is dependent on our ability to monitor and forecast the diverse physical indicators of drought, as well as relevant economic, social and environmental impacts. The report lays out a vision for improved drought monitoring and forecasting through development of a "National Integrated Drought Information System (NIDIS)", and calls on Congress to authorize NIDIS.

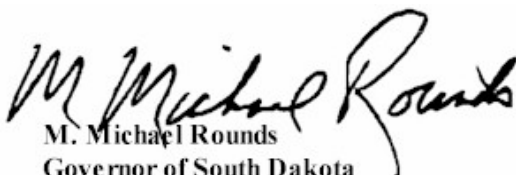
There is a broad base of support for NIDIS beyond the WGA report:


- The President's FY '07 budget request includes \$7.8 billion for NIDIS implementation and support.


- In its May 2000 report to Congress, the National Drought Policy Commission recommended improved “collaboration among scientists and managers to enhance the effectiveness of observation networks, monitoring, prediction, information delivery, and applied research and to foster public understanding of and preparedness for drought.”
- The Department of the Interior’s report, *Water 2025: Preventing Crises and Conflict in the West*, states “As part of the effort to establish the National Drought Monitoring Network, Interior believes that one-stop shopping for Western water users on a single government website will aid in problem solving, particularly in critical areas. Such a site can provide information on snow pack, runoff, river operations, forecasting, and drought prediction.”
- The U.S. Group on Earth Observations has drafted a strategic plan for the U.S. Integrated Earth Observation System (IEOS), the U.S. contribution to the Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS). The IEOS Strategic Plan identifies the NIDIS as one of six “near-term opportunities.”
- In June 2005, the Subcommittee on Disaster Reduction—an element of the President’s National Science and Technology Council—issued its report *Grand Challenges for Disaster Reduction*. The report finds “Compared to all natural hazards, droughts are, on average, the leading cause of economic losses.” The SDR report states: “The slow onset of drought over space and time can only be identified through the continuous collection of climate and hydrologic data. To enhance decisions and minimize costs, drought warning systems must provide credible and timely drought risk information including drought monitoring and prediction products.” The report includes a recommendation to “build and deploy a national instrument system capable of collecting climate and hydrologic data to ensure drought can be identified spatially and temporally, and develop an integrated modeling framework to quantify predictions of drought and drought impacts useful in decision-making.”

WGA strongly supports H.R. 5136 (and the companion Senate bill, S. 2751). We believe it is still possible for Congress to formally authorize NIDIS during this session. We urge the Congress to enact “The National Integrated Drought Information System Act of 2006.”

Sincerely,


M. Michael Rounds
 Governor of South Dakota
 Chairman


Bill Richardson
 Governor of New Mexico
 Lead Governor for Drought


Brian Schweitzer
 Governor of Montana
 Lead Governor for Drought

cc: The Honorable Ralph Hall
 The Honorable Mark Udall
 The Honorable Mike Pence, Chairman, Republican Study Committee
 VADM Conrad Lautenbacher, NOAA Administrator