



## WESTERN GOVERNORS' ASSOCIATION

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September 5, 2006

The Honorable Ted Stevens  
Chairman  
Committee on Commerce, Science and  
Transportation  
SD-508 DSOB  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jim DeMint  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Disaster Prevention &  
Prediction  
SR-340 RSOB  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Daniel Inouye  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Commerce, Science and  
Transportation  
SD-508 DSOB  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Ben Nelson  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Disaster Prevention &  
Prediction  
SH-720 HSOB  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Stevens Inouye, DeMint and Nelson:

On behalf of the Western Governors' Association, we urge the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation to expeditiously pass S. 2751, "The National Integrated Drought Information System Act of 2006."

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 S. 275, 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 21<sup>st</sup> 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 House Science Committee passed the NIDIS companion bill, H.R. 5136, on June 15 and sent it to the floor for final action by the House.
- The President's FY '07 budget request includes \$7.8 billion for NIDIS implementation and support.

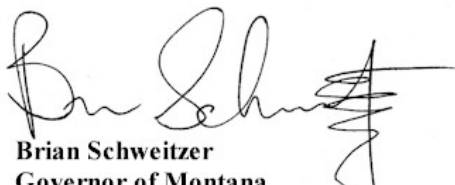
- In its May 2000 report to Congress, the National Drought Policy Commission recommended improved “collaboration among scientists and managers to enhance the effectiveness of observation networks, monitoring, prediction, information delivery, and applied research and to foster public understanding of 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 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 S. 2751 and the companion House bill. We believe it is still possible for Congress to formally authorize NIDIS during this session. We urge the Senate Commerce Committee to pass S. 2751, “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 Pete Domenici  
 Members of the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation  
 VADM Conrad Lautenbacher, NOAA Administrator