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August 30, 2004

The Honorable George W. Bush  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

The ongoing drought in the West has significantly impacted the economy and vitality of our region. We have been working with a number of state and federal agencies as well as other stakeholders to develop ways to mitigate the impact of the drought on our constituents. On behalf of our Western colleagues, we urge you to include funding in your FY 2006 budget request for one such drought program within NOAA that we believe is vital to the Western states and nation.

On June 21, 2004, we unanimously adopted a report entitled, *Creating a Drought Early Warning System for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: The National Integrated Drought Information System (NIDIS)*. The system envisioned in this report will provide water users across the board – farmers, ranchers, utilities, tribes, land managers, business owners, recreationalists, wildlife managers, and decision-makers at all levels of government – with the ability to assess their drought risk in real time and before the onset of drought, in order to make informed decisions that may mitigate a drought's impacts. The report was developed over an 18-month period through a broad-based, collaborative process that brought together scientists with natural resources managers from across the country, representing various federal and state agencies and non-governmental organizations. It is available online at [www.westgov.org](http://www.westgov.org).

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. NIDIS will coordinate and integrate a variety of observations, analysis techniques and forecasting methods in a system that will support drought assessment and decision-making at the lowest geopolitical level possible. The tools will allow users to access, transform and display basic data and forecasts across a range of spatial and temporal scales most suited to their individual needs.


Recommendations 1b and 1c in the report advocate that NOAA be made the lead federal agency, and that NOAA immediately establish a broad-based Implementation Team to begin implementation of NIDIS. Additionally, recommendation 2(a)(1) states: "NOAA's multi-use National Mesonet, made up of a modernized Cooperative Observer Network at its core, should be created and integrated with other federal and nonfederal networks."


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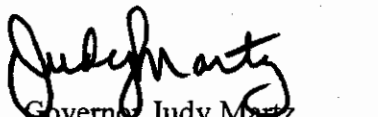
An investment in a National Mesonet and NIDIS – to improve both monitoring and forecasting of drought as well as the dissemination of that information to water users – will result in better informed management decisions that will reduce the economic impacts of future droughts, possibly saving the Federal Government from the need to pass expensive emergency supplemental appropriations for drought response. We therefore urge you to include funding for NOAA in your FY '06 budget request which will allow NOAA to establish a NIDIS Implementation Team, and to begin developing key aspects of NIDIS.


In closing, we would like to suggest that support for NIDIS would be consistent with the August 12, 2004, joint memorandum from John Marburger, Director of the Office of Science and Technology Policy, and Joshua Bolten, Director of the Office of Management and Budget regarding "Updated Administration Research and Development Budget Priorities." Specifically, NIDIS would support and enhance both the Global Earth Observation System, as well as the ability to measure, monitor, and forecast U.S. supplies of fresh water – two priorities listed under "Climate, Water, and Hydrogen R&D" in the memorandum.

Sincerely,

  
Governor Mike Johanns  
Nebraska  
WGA Co-Lead for Drought

  
Governor Bill Richardson  
New Mexico  
WGA Co-Lead for Drought

  
Governor Judy Martz  
Montana  
WGA Co-Lead for Drought

  
Governor Mike Rounds  
South Dakota  
WGA Co-Lead for Drought

cc: The Honorable Donald Evans, Department of Commerce  
The Honorable Josh Bolten, OMB  
The Honorable John Marburger, OSTP  
The Honorable Conrad Lautenbacher, NOAA