



WESTERN STATES WATER COUNCIL

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Web Page: www.westgov.org/wswc

March 13, 2008

Position No. 297

The Honorable Jeff Bingaman, Chairman
United States Senate
Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
364 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Pete Domenici, Ranking Member
United States Senate
Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
364 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Bingaman and Ranking Member Domenici:

The Western States Water Council has strongly supported legislation in the past to establish a National Drought Council to improve national drought preparedness, mitigation, and response efforts. We supported S. 802, the National Drought Preparedness Act of 2005, and H.R. 1386, which Rep. Alcee Hastings (D-FL) introduced in the House on March 17, 2005. We would like to reiterate our support for such legislation.

Extended drought conditions continue to afflict many parts of the West, as well as the Southeast and other areas. Federal legislation is needed to promote coordination of proactive measures at all levels of government to plan, prepare and mitigate the serious impacts of drought in the United States. Western governors have had a hand in drafting past legislation and have also called on the Congress and the President to support its enactment.

In the past, we also supported enactment of S. 648, by Senator Gordon Smith (R-OR), to extend the authority for drought assistance under the Reclamation States Drought Assistance Act of 1991. While renewed temporarily, we support making this authority permanent. It directs the Secretary of the Interior, and U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, to provide specific drought preparedness and planning assistance, as well as mitigation and response services, and will expire on September 30, 2010.

Moreover, we support the appropriation of \$20 million for such assistance. The President's FY2009 budget request for the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation includes only \$500,000 for the approved Drought Emergency Assistance Program.

The Western States Water Council is an organization representing eighteen states. Its members are appointed by their respective governors to address a broad range of water policy issues affecting the West. The West is characterized by its aridity, and the current, continuing drought has highlighted the fact that water availability circumscribes our economic and environmental well being and quality of life. Drought is a continuous threat. We need standing federal authority to address drought preparedness and response needs, in cooperation with the states, and sufficient funding to mitigate drought impacts.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Duane A. Smith". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Duane A. Smith, Chairman
Western States Water Council

cc: Bob Johnson, Commissioner, Bureau of Reclamation