

October 27, 2015

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski  
Chairwoman  
Senate Energy & Natural Resources  
Committee  
304 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Maria Cantwell  
Ranking Member  
Senate Energy & Natural Resources  
Committee  
304 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairwoman Murkowski, Ranking Member Cantwell, and Members of the Committee:

We appreciate your leadership in conducting the Oct. 8, 2015, hearing on Western drought legislation. On behalf of the thousands of Western farmers, ranchers and businesses we represent, as well as the millions of urban, suburban and rural residents that our organizations collectively provide water to, we urge that Westerners in the Senate put aside partisan differences and work together to produce compromise legislation that can be passed by both the Senate and the House, and signed into law by the president this year.

Your committee can draw upon a strong foundation to create this legislation. Over the course of this year your committee has heard a multitude of bills that would address short, medium and long-term aspects of the drought both on a West-wide as well as state specific scale. Your October drought hearing looked at legislation that would impact New Mexico as well as two bills – H.R. 2898 (introduced by California Rep. David Valadao) and S. 1894 (introduced by California Sen. Dianne Feinstein) – that could have positive impacts in California and other Western states. Further strong leadership will be required in order to find consensus on this legislation intended to address the drought in California and across the West.

Water challenges in the West are significant and daunting. The Colorado River Basin has experienced the driest 15- year period since the 1960s with above-average flows in only three of the last 15 years.<sup>1</sup> According to research evaluating tree rings the ongoing drought in California is the worst to hit the region since the 13th century.<sup>2</sup> Drought conditions in the Pacific Northwest are the worst seen in decades with no end in sight. Drought also exacerbates already declining forest health, increases the risk and severity of devastating mega-fire and threatens the origin of water supplies for millions in the West.

In order to respond to current and future water shortages, Congress must provide federal agencies with more flexibility under existing environmental laws and regulations to encourage a more

---

<sup>1</sup> US Bureau of Reclamation, "US Bureau of Reclamation Upper Colorado Region," 11 July 2014. [Online]. Available: <http://www.usbr.gov/uc/water/crsp/cs/gcd.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Evidence Suggests California's Drought is the Worst in 1,200 Year, Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, News Release, Dec. 14, 2014 found at <http://www.whoi.edu/news-release/California-drought>.

cooperative approach toward achieving multiple goals. And, where such flexibility currently exists in laws, Congress should demand that agencies use those flexibilities to act with the urgency and promptness that this drought crisis demands.

Western drought legislation should shift the regulation of water resources away from the current adversarial structure that regards agriculture as a harmful activity that must be minimized in order to maximize environmental benefits. We must move toward an approach that encourages cooperation and innovation to produce better results for both agriculture and the environment. This includes promoting the use of new technology in water management. Real-time monitoring and data collection can be used to more closely align water supply operations to actual fishery and environmental needs.

As a nation we must invest (and reinvest) in the Western water infrastructure necessary to meet current and future demands. Our existing water infrastructure in the West is aging and in need of rehabilitation. We need new water storage in order to adapt to a changing hydrology and develop usable and sustainable supplies to meet growing demands for water. Failing to improve infrastructure and expand useable supplies will inevitably result in more conflict as pressure grows to ‘solve’ urban and environmental water problems by taking water from agriculture.

Streamlining permitting processes and alignment of regulatory agencies will help increase water storage and improve water management. The federal government can continue to be a partner in solving these water problems in the West by using financing mechanisms that have a very low cost to the Treasury and make water resources investment more attractive and affordable for non-federal interests.

Both H.R. 2898 and S. 1894 are intended to address counter-productive regulatory practices and expedite new water storage projects, and both measures would facilitate the use of water management tools such as voluntary transfers. While the House and Senate bills take sometimes starkly different approaches to achieving their common goals, these differences should not be irreconcilable for members of Congress working together to bring effective relief to the West as quickly as possible.

While many of the above ideas are found in the separate bills your committee has heard, multiple competing bills are of no help to the drought-stricken West. We need the committee to bring these ideas together in a single, effective compromise bill that can be signed into law before the end of the year. We’re counting on you to work together to make that happen. We’re counting on you to ensure that Western water users have every tool available to survive and recover from the current drought and to prepare for the hard, dry years that the future may hold.

We stand ready to assist you in any way that leads to a unified legislative response to the critical drought crisis our communities are facing.

Sincerely,

#### National and Regional Organizations

American Farm Bureau Federation  
Family Farm Alliance  
Klamath Water Users Association (CALIFORNIA / OREGON)  
National Cattlemen's Beef Association  
National Onion Association  
National Potato Council  
National Water Resources Association  
Northwest Horticultural Council  
Pacific Northwest Vegetable Association  
Public Lands Council  
Rocky Mountain Farmers Union  
Rural & Agriculture Council of America  
United Fresh Produce Association  
Western Alfalfa Seed Growers Association  
Western Agricultural Processors Association  
Western Growers Association  
Western Plant Health Association

#### Arizona

Agribusiness & Water Council of Arizona  
Arizona Cotton Growers Association  
Arizona Farm Bureau  
Arizona Nursery Association  
Salt River Project  
United Dairymen of Arizona  
Wellton-Mohawk Irrigation and Drainage District

#### California

African American Farmers of California  
Agricultural Council of California  
American Pistachio Growers  
Almond Hullers and Processors Association  
Association of California Egg Farmers  
Association of California Water Agencies  
California Agricultural Irrigation Association  
California Alfalfa & Forage Association  
California Association of Wheat Growers  
California Bean Shippers Association  
California Cattlemen's Association  
California Chamber of Commerce  
California Citrus Mutual  
California Cotton Ginners Association  
California Cotton Growers Association

## California (Continued)

California Farm Bureau Federation  
California Forestry Association  
California Fresh Fruit Association  
California Grain and Feed Association  
California League of Food Processors  
California Milk Producers Council  
California Pear Growers Association  
California Seed Association  
California State Floral Association  
California Warehouse Association  
California Women for Agriculture  
Central Valley Project Water Association  
Friant North Authority  
Friant Water Authority  
Glenn-Colusa Irrigation District  
Nisei Farmers League  
North Bay Water Reuse Authority  
Northern California Water Association  
Pacific Egg & Poultry Association  
San Joaquin River Exchange Contractors Water Authority  
San Luis & Delta-Mendota Water Authority  
Santa Ynez River Water Conservation District, ID No.1  
Sonoma County Water Agency  
South Valley Water Association  
Tehama-Colusa Canal Authority  
United Ag  
Valley Ag Water Coalition

## Colorado

Colorado Association of Conservation Districts  
Colorado Association of Wheat Growers  
Colorado Cattlemen's Association  
Colorado Corn Growers Association  
Colorado Dairy Farmers  
Colorado Farm Bureau  
Colorado Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association  
Colorado Onion Growers Association  
Colorado Pork Producers Council  
Colorado Potato Administrative Committee  
Colorado State Grange  
Dolores Water Conservancy District  
Fulton Irrigation Ditch  
Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District  
Southwestern Water Conservation District

## Idaho

Idaho Farm Bureau  
Idaho Oregon Fruit and Vegetable Association  
Idaho Potato Commission  
Idaho Water Users Association

## Kansas

Kansas Water Congress

## Montana

Montana Farm Bureau

## Nebraska

Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District  
Nebraska State Irrigation Association

## Nevada

Nevada Cattlemen's Association  
Nevada Farm Bureau  
Truckee-Carson Irrigation District

## New Mexico

Elephant Butte Irrigation District  
Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District  
New Mexico Farm Bureau

## Oregon

Deschutes Basin Board of Control  
Oregon Association of Nurseries  
Oregon Cattlemen's Association  
Oregon Dairy Farmers Association  
Oregon Farm Bureau  
Oregon Potato Commission  
Oregon Seed Council  
Oregon Water Resources Congress  
Oregonians for Food and Shelter

## Utah

Davis and Weber Counties Canal Company  
North Ogden Irrigation Company  
Ogden River Water Rights Committee  
Ogden River Water Users' Association  
South Ogden Conservation District

Utah Farm Bureau  
Utah Water Conservancy District  
Utah Water Users Association  
Weber-Box Elder Conservation District  
Weber River Water Users Association

## Washington

Columbia Basin Development League  
Hop Growers of Washington  
Washington Asparagus Commission  
Washington Association of Wheat Growers  
Washington Blueberry Commission  
Washington Cattle Feeders Association  
Washington Farm Bureau  
Washington Friends of Farms & Forests  
Washington Mint Growers Association  
Washington Red Raspberry Commission  
Washington State Council of Farmer Cooperatives  
Washington State Grape Society  
Washington State Hay Growers Association  
Washington State Potato Commission  
Yakima Basin Joint Board

## Wyoming

Wyoming Association of Conservation Districts  
Wyoming Farm Bureau  
Wyoming Stock Growers Association

cc:

Senator John McCain  
Senator Barbara Boxer  
Senator Dianne Feinstein  
Senator Michael Bennett  
Senator Michael Crapo  
Senator Jon Tester  
Senator Dean Heller  
Senator Harry Reid  
Senator Tom Udall  
Senator Jeff Merkley  
Senator Orrin Hatch  
Senator Patty Murray  
Senator Michael Enzi