

Written Testimony of the Western Governors' Association
United States Senate · Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
Hearing: Exploring the Effects of Drought on Energy and Water Management
April 25, 2013

This testimony is respectfully submitted to the Chairman and members of the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources by James D. Ogsbury, Executive Director of the Western Governors' Association (WGA), on behalf of the organization.

The WGA is an independent, non-partisan organization of Governors from 19 Western states, three US-Flag Pacific Islands. The Western Governors recognize that many vital issues and opportunities – including water management, forest health, energy development, and wildlife conservation – cross state lines and are shared priorities throughout the West. Western Governors work through WGA to address the key policy and governance issues that arise out of the shared western landscape.

Western Governors have a legacy of leadership in drought planning, energy management, and the complex issues associated with water allocation and use in the West. These issues are critically important to the West and the Governors ask the Committee to consider the perspective of western states in its deliberations on related issues.

Drought Preparedness and Monitoring

Droughts and extreme weather events cause significant impacts to economies, communities and the natural environment of the western states. The 2011 drought in the Southern Plains and Southwest cost more than \$12 billion;¹ the widespread drought of 2012 will almost certainly cost as much if not more, as the most extensive drought the U.S. has experienced since the Dust Bowl era in the 1930s.

The Governors have tasked WGA to support states in monitoring, forecasting, preparing for and responding to extreme weather events. In June 2011, the Governors signed an MOU with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to improve the development, coordination and dissemination of climate information and early warning systems in order to reduce disaster risk from extreme weather events. WGA and NOAA have co-sponsored regional meetings since that time, in both the Pacific Northwest and the Upper Missouri Basin, to connect NOAA monitoring and forecasting with on-the-ground decision makers.

¹ <http://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/billions/events>

WGA also joins NOAA once every three months to publish the *Quarterly Climate Impacts and Outlook*,² a document which shows drought maps, projections, and effects across the region.

National Integrated Drought Information System (NIDIS)

In the mid-2000s, then-Governors Johanns (NE), Richardson (NM) and Martz (MT) spearheaded regional support for the creation of the National Integrated Drought Information System (NIDIS). Since its establishment, state agencies and WGA have provided additional suggestions and guidance to ensure that NIDIS delivers relevant and timely information on drought to western states.

The Western Governors have policy in place that specifically supports the continuation of NIDIS:

“Western Governors believe a comprehensive, integrated response to drought emergencies, including mitigation planning, is critical to the social, environmental and economic well-being of the West...Governors recommend the continued development of the NIDIS program, particularly with respect to implementation of regional drought early warning systems.”

- WGA Policy Resolution 11-7

NIDIS provides a single, authoritative venue for drought information at its website, drought.gov. It coordinates observations and research from various federal, state, and academic experts, and it provides a ‘one-stop shop’ for state water resource managers, the agricultural community, the private sector, the media, and others who are affected by drought. From the perspective of western states, where water is often already a scarce resource, the information available through the NIDIS website is an immensely useful planning tool.

Drought’s Effects on Energy and Water Management

Water is a critical component of energy development in the West. Water for resource extraction or cooling in thermoelectric plants is essential to operations. Studies have shown that proposed traditional and renewable power plants will be a major driver of new water demand over the next decade. A preliminary analysis by WGA and Sandia National Labs predicts that thermoelectric demands will account for 50 million gallons per day of new consumptive

² Read past issues of the *Quarterly Climate Impacts and Outlook* at www.westgov.org/initiatives/climate.

demands. That new demand will be particularly high in the water-stressed Southwestern US, causing even more competition for water in a drought-prone region.³

For water management, the effects of drought are even more direct. Water storage in reservoirs allowed westerners to weather last year's severe drought, but tapping into reservoirs means less water in reserve for future drought. In Colorado, where reservoir storage is 16 percent below average,⁴ cities in the metropolitan Front Range area are already enacting water restrictions for their residents.⁵ New Mexico's reservoirs are even lower, at 24 percent below average.⁶

A dependable water supply is extremely important for both energy and water management. When drought makes that water less-than-dependable, the reliable information on weather and climate provided by NOAA and NIDIS allows decision makers to make better informed plans for both energy and water management.

The Importance of Enhanced Drought Preparedness through Reauthorization of NIDIS

Western Governors strongly support the reauthorization of NIDIS and believe the "*Drought Information Act of 2013*" (S. 376) is a good vehicle to achieve that goal. Without the resources in NIDIS, the entire nation would take a step back in terms of the access to fast, reliable information for a coordinated and timely response to drought.

In addition, the regional drought early warning information systems that proved successful in the Colorado Basin, the Southeast, and California will extend to other regions through NIDIS reauthorization. NOAA intends to accelerate efforts to build a fully nation-wide integrated drought information system by expanding to critical, drought-sensitive areas such as the Midwest, the Pacific Northwest, the Missouri Basin, and the Northeast.

In the West, where a lack of precipitation during winter snowpack accumulation can mean reduced water supplies throughout the year, monitoring and preparing for drought is particularly important. The effects of drought echo through the water and energy management systems and into the everyday facets of life, from household chores to the ability of a city to accommodate new citizens and build its economy. With NIDIS, states can plan for drought and mitigate these and other impacts to water and energy management.

³ Western Electricity Coordinating Council, *10-yr Regional Transmission Plan: Plan Summary*, Sept 2011, pp 88- 94. http://www.wecc.biz/library/StudyReport/Documents/Plan_Summary.pdf .

⁴ As of April 1, 2013. Information from NRCS at www.wcc.nrcs.usda.gov. Graph titled: "Reservoir Storage as Percent of Capacity for April 1st, Water Year 2013."

⁵ Denver Water, the city's water utility, enacted drought water rules as of April 1, 2013. <http://www.denverwater.org/Drought/WateringTimes/>. Other utilities in the Denver metro area have enacted similar restrictions.

⁶ Ibid at 4.

Conclusion

Thank you to the Committee for this opportunity to provide input. Western Governors and WGA stand ready to work with you. Please consider WGA a resource as you grapple with drought planning and energy management issues.

We look forward to working with Congress to advance NIDIS reauthorization through the legislative process.