

March 25, 2019

The Honorable Peter DeFazio
Chairman
House Transportation and Infrastructure
Committee
2164 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Sam Graves
Ranking Member
House Transportation and Infrastructure
Committee
2164 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman DeFazio and Ranking Member Graves:

As the new Congress begins, we look forward to working with you and the committee on an infrastructure package that will benefit all Americans. On behalf of the thousands of Western farmers, ranchers and businesses we represent who provide the food our nation relies upon on millions of acres of productive land, as well as agencies who supply water to Western urban, suburban and rural residents, we urge you to use any infrastructure package to help address severe hydrological conditions in the West.

Water challenges in the West are significant and daunting. Despite wet conditions this winter, the Colorado River Basin has experienced the longest dry spell in recorded history and one of the driest in the past 1,200 years.¹ According to research evaluating tree rings, hydrological conditions in California in the mid-2010s were the worst to hit the region since the 13th century.² Drought conditions in the Pacific Northwest over the last half-decade have been severe. As such, we are encouraged by statements that Chairman DeFazio has made that any infrastructure package include water projects.

As a nation we must continually invest 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 and improvement. Water conservation, water recycling, watershed management, conveyance, desalination, water transfers, groundwater storage, and surface storage are all needed in a diversified management portfolio.

- Water conservation, one of the most cost-effective actions, needs to continue to be aggressively pursued in conjunction with new storage and other actions.

¹ "Lingering Colorado River Drought Could Lead to Water Shortages," John Fialka, E&E News, 6 Sept 2018. Available: <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/lingering-colorado-river-drought-could-lead-to-water-shortages/>

² 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>.

- We need new water storage – both above or below ground – in order to adapt to a changing hydrology and develop usable and sustainable supplies to meet growing demands for water. Surface storage, in particular, provides a degree of operational flexibility and significant water supply volumes that cannot be provided by other management actions. However, we also need new tools to assist in achieving groundwater use sustainability across the West.
- Failing to improve water infrastructure and expand useable supplies will inevitably result in more conflict as pressure grows to ‘solve’ urban and environmental water shortages by moving water away from Western irrigated agriculture. The federal government must become a more active partner in solving these water problems in the West either through direct funding to help meet these needs or develop and expand federal financing mechanisms that have a very low cost to the Treasury and to taxpayers. In short, water resource infrastructure investments should be made more attractive and affordable for non-federal interests.
- Beyond monetary assistance, the federal government should also bring forward policy changes that help ensure that water projects are built in a timely fashion. Making funding available for projects is useless if projects take decades to be approved. In the past, Congress has, on a bipartisan basis, put forward significant efforts to streamline environmental regulations and permitting processes. Any infrastructure package should address this concern by streamlining the regulations and permitting processes for water projects.
- Today, on average, seven to eight million acres of forests and grasslands burn annually, about double the figure from three decades ago. Today’s wildfires are often larger, more catastrophic, and deadlier. Wildfires in several western states are being impacted by decades of fire suppression, longer fire seasons, pest/insect infestations, reduced snowpack in high elevation forests and increasingly severe droughts. Modernized watershed and active forest management tools are just as important as traditional water infrastructure projects to Western water supply reliability. We urge Congress to seek bipartisan measures that streamline projects to thin forests and reduce the fire threat across our National Forest watersheds, which are so important to all Western water users.
- Finally, in order to respond to current and future water shortages, Congress must also provide federal agencies with more flexibility under existing environmental laws and regulations to encourage a more cooperative approach toward achieving multiple goals. And, where such flexibility currently exists in law, Congress should demand that agencies use those flexibilities to act with the urgency and promptness that this drought crisis demands.

We need you to ensure that Western water users have every tool available to survive and recover from years of drought and to prepare for the hard, dry years the future may hold. Congress must use any infrastructure package to not only address our nation’s chronic needs surrounding roads and bridges, but to also include water infrastructure needs for storage and conveyance.

Sincerely,

National and Regional Organizations

American Agri-Women

Family Farm Alliance

Irrigation Association

Klamath Water Users Association (CA/OR)

National Onion Association

National Water Resources Association

Northwest Horticultural Council

Rocky Mountain Farmers Union

Rural & Agriculture Council of America

United Fresh Produce Association

United States Cattlemen's Association

Western Agricultural Processors Association

Western Growers

Arizona

Agribusiness & Water Council of Arizona

Arizona Cotton Growers

Arizona Farm Bureau

Arizona Farm & Ranch Group

Arizona Nursery Association

Central Arizona Water Conservation District

Electrical District No.8 of Maricopa County

Electrical District No. 3 of Pinal County

Maricopa Stanfield Irrigation and Drainage District

New Magma Irrigation and Drainage District

Salt River Project

United Dairymen of Arizona

Wellton-Mohawk Irrigation & Drainage District

Yuma Fresh Vegetable Association

California

Association of California Water Agencies

Byron-Bethany Irrigation District

California Agricultural Irrigation Association

California Alfalfa & Forage Association

California Bean Shippers Association

California Cattlemen's Association

California Citrus Mutual

California Cotton Ginners and Growers Association

California Farm Bureau Federation

California Fresh Fruit Association

CA Milk Producers Council

California Rangeland Trust

California Tomato Growers Association

California Warehouse Association

California Wool Growers Association

California Women for Agriculture

Central California Irrigation District

Central Valley Project Water Association

Family Water Alliance, Inc.

Friant Water Authority

Grower-Shipper Association of Central California

Grower-Shipper Association of Santa Barbara and San Luis Obispo Counties

James Irrigation District

Lava Beds-Butte Valley Resource Conservation District
Northern California Water Association
Pacific Egg and Poultry Association
San Joaquin River Exchange Contractors Water Authority
San Luis Canal Company
San Luis & Delta-Mendota Water Authority
Solano Irrigation District
Tehama-Colusa Canal Authority
Tulelake Irrigation District
United Water Conservation District
Western United Dairymen
Westlands Water District

Colorado

Colorado Dairy Farmers
Colorado Farm Bureau
Colorado Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association
Colorado Grange
Colorado Nursery & Greenhouse Association
Colorado Pork Producers Council
Colorado Sugarbeet Growers
Colorado Wool Growers Association
Dolores Water Conservancy District
Pothook Water Conservancy District
Rocky Mountain Agribusiness Association

Idaho

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

Idaho Water Users Association

Nampa & Meridian Irrigation District

Kansas

Kansas Bostwick Irrigation District

Montana

Montana Farm Bureau Federation

Nebraska

Farwell Irrigation District

Sargent Irrigation District

New Mexico

Elephant Butte Irrigation District

Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District

New Mexico Chile Pepper Association

New Mexico Farm & Livestock Bureau

New Mexico Water Resources Association

Nevada

Nevada Farm Bureau

Truckee-Carson Irrigation District

Oregon

Oregon Association of Nurseries

Oregon Dairy Farmers Association

Oregon Farm Bureau

Oregon Water Resources Congress

Utah

Utah Farm Bureau

Strawberry Water Users Association of Utah

Washington

City of Yakima

Columbia Basin Development League

Greater Wenatchee Irrigation District

Kittitas Reclamation District

Quincy Columbia Basin Irrigation District

Roza Irrigation District

Sunnyside Valley Irrigation District

Washington Farm Bureau

Washington State Potato Commission

Washington State Tree Fruit Association

Washington State Water Resources Association

Yakima Basin Joint Board

Yakima Tieton Irrigation District

Wyoming

Little Snake River Conservation District

Savery-Little Snake Water Conservancy District

Wyoming Farm Bureau

Wyoming Stock Growers Association