

March 14, 2016

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:

During October 2015, we the undersigned wrote to you to express our collective thanks for the work that your Committee had undertaken to explore the underlying issues and the legislative solutions that could help remedy a prolonged Western drought. We wrote 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 benefit from water supplies collectively delivered to them by our organizations, urging you to work toward bipartisan legislation that can be passed by both the Senate and the House, and signed into law by the President this year to help in the short, medium and long-term drought we all have experienced and currently face in the Western United States.

We write to you today to urge you to finish the good work that the Committee has started and ask that you move forward bipartisan Western water and drought relief legislation during 2016. The Committee can draw upon a strong foundation to create this legislation. Over the course of last year, your Committee considered 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. We believe that now is the time to act!

While several Western states are currently experiencing decent moisture due to El Nino rains or heavy snowpack, none of us have forgotten the daunting water challenges that we recently faced. Since 2000, the Colorado River Basin has experienced the driest 16-year period in over 100 years of historical natural flows and one of the most severe droughts in the last 1,200 years. California also experienced their worst drought since the 13th century and drought conditions in Washington State were, according to the state, “unlike any we’ve ever experienced.” Additionally, Western drought has exacerbated already declining forest health, further increasing the risk and severity of devastating mega fire that can threaten the origin of water supplies for millions in the West.

In fact, a study published in early February 2016 in the journal *Geophysical Research Letters* argues that the storms that routinely bring rain to all the Southwestern United States are becoming rarer and rarer with drier conditions the new normal. Whether this one study is true or

not, we all know that one year of heavy rain in California or dense snowpack in the Rockies may catch the attention of the news media, but does not solve the drought so simply. As we indicated in October, we want Congress to pass federal legislation and we must see Congress act this year in order to begin the process of modernizing our Western water systems to help us meet future hydrologic challenges.

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 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.

Western water legislation must also 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 and species 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. As part of this effort, legislation streamlining federal permitting processes and regulatory agency alignment will help increase new 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 new federally backed financing mechanisms that have a very low cost to the Treasury and make water resource investments more attractive and affordable for non-federal interests.

We believe the Committee can bring these ideas together and pass Western drought legislation this Congress. We ask that all Western Senators work collaboratively to move these ideas through the Senate floor. While election years bring political challenges, our collective objective is for a bicameral product to be signed into law before the end of the year. We ask for your help 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 continue to stand ready to assist you in this effort to pass bipartisan legislation that can bring the tools needed to help us find solutions that work for the water supply future of all of our communities in the arid West.

Sincerely,

National and Regional Organizations

- American Farm Bureau Federation
- Family Farm Alliance
- Klamath Water Users Association
- National Cattlemen's Beef Association
- National Onion Association
- National Potato Council
- Public Lands Council
- United Fresh Produce 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 Westside Districts
- Salt River Project
- San Carlos Irrigation and Drainage District
- United Dairymen of Arizona
- Wellton-Mohawk Irrigation and Drainage District
- Yuma-Mesa Irrigation and Drainage District

California

- Agricultural Council of California
- Almond Hullers and Processors Association
- Association of California Egg Farmers
- Association of California Water Agencies
- California Agricultural Irrigation Association
- California Alfalfa & Forage Association
- California Cotton Alliance
- California Association of Wheat Growers
- California Association of Winegrape Growers
- California Bean Shippers Association
- California Cattlemen
- California Chamber of Commerce
- California Citrus Mutual
- California Cotton Ginners Association
- California Cotton Growers Association
- California Farm Bureau Federation
- California Forestry Association
- California Fresh Fruit Association
- California Grain and Feed Association
- California League of Food Processors
- 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
Imperial Irrigation District
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
South Valley Water Association
Tehama-Colusa Canal Authority
Valley Ag Water Coalition
Westlands Water District

Colorado

Colorado Farm Bureau
Colorado Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association
Colorado Onion Growers Association
Dolores Water Conservancy District

Idaho

Idaho Council on Industry and the Environment
Idaho Farm Bureau
Idaho Grain Producers Association
Idaho Water Users Association

Montana

Montana Farm Bureau

Nebraska

Nebraska Water Users Association

Nevada

Nevada Farm Bureau

New Mexico

Elephant Butte Irrigation District
New Mexico Farm Bureau

Oregon

Deschutes Basin Board of Control
Oregon Association of Nurseries
Oregon Cattlemen's Association
Oregon Farm Bureau
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 Association
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
Kittitas Reclamation District
Roza Irrigation District
Washington Asparagus Commission
Washington Blueberry Commission
Washington Farm Bureau
Washington Red Raspberry Commission
Washington State Potato Commission
Washington State Water Resources Association
Yakima Basin Joint Board

Wyoming

Wyoming Farm Bureau
Wyoming Stock Growers Association
Little Snake River Conservation District
Savery-Little Snake Water Conservancy District

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