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Western Governors Say New Law Will Minimize Impacts, Costs of Drought

DENVER - Western governors said a drought measure signed into law by President Bush will provide a much needed tool for communities, states and federal agencies to minimize the often devastating impacts and costs of drought.

The House measure was sponsored by Reps. Ralph Hall (Texas) and Mark Udall (Colo.). Sponsors of a similar Senate bill were Sens. Ben Nelson (Neb.) and Pete Domenici (N.M.). The Western Governors' Association worked closely with the sponsors and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration in crafting the bill, which authorizes the creation of the National Integrated Drought Information System.

WGA leads for drought issues are Govs. Mike Rounds (S.D.), WGA Chairman; Janet Napolitano (Ariz.); Bill Richardson (N.M.); and Brian Schweitzer (Mont.). The Council of State Governments-WEST, (CSG-WEST) an organization comprised of western state legislators, worked in close partnership with WGA in advocating passage of NIDIS legislation."

"We know from past experience, the costs of responding to drought have been staggering," Gov. Rounds said. "On average, the federal government spends \$6-8 billion on drought response. NIDIS will improve drought monitoring and forecasting, which is fundamental to a proactive approach to addressing targeted drought relief as well as longer term water shortages."

Gov. Napolitano said it also would "allow policy-makers and water managers at all levels of the private and public sectors to make more informed and timely decisions about water resources in order to mitigate or avoid the impacts from droughts."

NIDIS will provide water users across the board—farmers, ranchers, utilities, tribes, land managers, business owners, recreationalists, wildlife managers, and decision-makers at all levels of government—with the ability to assess their drought risk in real time and before the onset of drought. All of these affected interests will be able to make more informed decisions to mitigate a drought's impacts.

"This is a winner for Montana, the West and every state in this country," Schweitzer said. "Enactment of NIDIS will help move us toward a proactive approach that will avoid conflicts and minimize the damage caused by future droughts. And important to a lot of our constituents, it will save taxpayers money."

"Nothing is more essential to our economies, to our citizens and to our environment than water," Richardson said. "Nothing is more essential to our economies, to our citizens and to our environment than water," Richardson said. "NIDIS will give us a better understanding of existing and projected water supplies, and that will lead to better management of this vital resource by all water users."

A copy of the testimony and other information related to WGA's drought policy can be found on the Web at <http://www.westgov.org/wga/initiatives/drought/index.htm>.

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About the Western Governors' Association

The Western Governors' Association is an independent, nonprofit organization representing the Governors of 19 states and three U.S.-Flag islands in the Pacific. Through their Association, the Western governors identify and address key policy and governance issues in natural resources, the environment, human services, economic development, international relations and public management

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