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**U.S. House of Representatives**  
**Committee on Natural Resources**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

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February 03, 2014

The Honorable Doc Hastings  
Chairman, Committee on Natural Resources  
1324 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Hastings:

Over half of the contiguous United States is experiencing moderate to severe drought. The drought impacts all aspects of our jurisdiction, including water and power deliveries, wildlife and fisheries, and forest health and wildland fire management. As part of our oversight responsibilities, we are writing to request a bipartisan hearing on the drought impacts across the nation.

***Impacts to Water and Power Deliveries.*** The Bureau of Reclamation's core mission involves drought management, and many of its projects are already feeling the impacts of drought. One of the largest Reclamation projects is the Central Valley Project in California. The latest Department of Water Resources snowpack survey showed that the snowpack is 20% of normal. Shasta Dam, the largest federal reservoir in the system is currently at 36% of capacity. California also experienced the driest year on record in 2013. With limited carryover storage and projected dry year, the drought will significantly impact the management of the State Water Project and the federal Central Valley Project in 2014.

The Colorado River is also facing its 14<sup>th</sup> consecutive year of drought. Based on the 2007 Colorado River Interim Guidelines for Lower Basin Shortages and Coordinated Operations for Lake Powell and Lake Mead, Reclamation has announced that it will release 7.48 million acre-feet of water from Lake Powell. This is the lowest release since the filling of Lake Powell in the 1960's. Lower lake levels will impact hydropower production in the region, recreation, and local tourism-dependent businesses. These water and power challenges are not isolated to the Colorado River basin or to California. These impacts are being seen all throughout the west.

***Public Lands and Wildfire Management.*** Every year, wildfires rage across the western United States causing massive losses to public and private property, critical habitat, and watersheds that provide water resources to communities throughout the west. However, due to persistent drought conditions, wildfire frequency and intensity has grown substantially over recent years. According to the National

Interagency Fire Center, more acres burned in 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2011, and 2012 than in any other years since 1960. Public land managers are faced with thinning budgets to prevent fires and increased drought-induced strains on natural resources such as changing snowpack trends and invasive species, among other things. Prolonged drought and the ensuing increase in the frequency and severity of wildfires also threatens the livelihood of the growing number of Americans living in the wildland-urban interface and creates challenges for businesses that rely on public lands for revenue.

***Impacts to Wildlife and Fisheries.*** Many fish species managed by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), especially those that depend on rivers and estuaries for part or all of their life cycle, face significant challenges during drought conditions. Less water in rivers makes migration to and from the sea difficult for salmon, steelhead, and sturgeon, many stocks of which are already listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act. California water managers in particular are running out of options to protect salmon and steelhead runs after several dry water years. Drought and its associated higher temperatures also make what water is left much warmer, increasing stress on commercially, recreationally, and ecologically important fish species. Drought can hit estuarine species particularly hard, as evidenced by the collapse of the oyster industry in Apalachicola Bay, Florida two summers ago, after persistent drought dramatically altered water chemistry and made oysters more susceptible to disease. Most importantly, drought increases conflict between competing potential uses of limited water supplies, including fisheries, agriculture, and municipalities. When elected officials fail to address these conflicts in a balanced way, the courts usually end up deciding.

Drought has severe repercussions for terrestrial wildlife as well. Arid environments become more susceptible to intense and sustained wildfires, which can cause massive wildlife habitat loss in ecosystems that are not fire-dependent. Wetlands also shrink during periods of drought, reducing the habitat available for migratory birds. Not only do these conditions increase the probability of extinction of threatened and endangered species, they also take a toll on more abundant game species, limiting opportunities for hunters and hurting rural economies.

Thank you in advance for considering our request for a hearing. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact my staff at 5-6065.

Sincerely,

  
Peter A. DeFazio  
Member of Congress

  
Grace F. Napolitano  
Member of Congress

  
Steven Horsford  
Member of Congress



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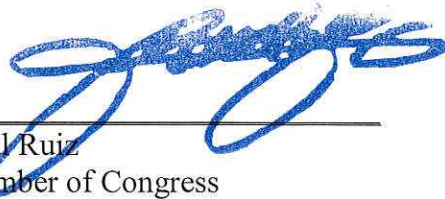
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