



**POSITION
of the
WESTERN STATES WATER COUNCIL
regarding
BUREAU OF RECLAMATION DROUGHT RESPONSE PROGRAM
Deadwood, South Dakota
September 16, 2021**

WHEREAS, the Western States Water Council is a policy advisory body representing eighteen states and since its inception the Council has been actively involved in national drought preparedness, planning and response, as well as related policy and program development and implementation; and

WHEREAS, in the West, water is often scarce and drought is a recurring threat; and

WHEREAS, according to the National Centers for Environmental Information (NCEI), from 1980-2020, there have been 28 drought events costing over \$1B/event with total economic losses of \$258.9B due to drought, or an average of \$9.2B/event, also leading to an average of 95 deaths/year, with drought contributing to another \$102.3B in wildfire losses, and 10 deaths/year, and NCEI noting a rise in vulnerability to drought and wildfire in the western statesⁱ; and

WHEREAS, the Reclamation States Emergency Drought Relief Act of 1991 (43 U.S.C. 2214(c)) and subsequent reauthorizations, under Title I, provide only temporary authority for some critical Reclamation actions; and

WHEREAS, Reclamation's current Drought Response Program supports a proactive approach to drought and provides financial assistance to water managers and users via its WaterSMART program to: (1) develop drought contingency plans; (2) implement drought resiliency projects to build the capacity of communities to mitigate and respond to drought – increasing the reliability of water supplies, improving water management and operational flexibility, facilitating voluntary sales, transfers or exchanges of water, and providing benefits for fish and wildlife and the environment; and (3) undertake emergency actions to minimize losses due to drought through temporary construction activities and other activities, including water purchases and the use of Reclamation facilities to convey and store water; and

WHEREAS, there is a continuing need for making permanent the temporary authority allowing Reclamation the flexibility to continue delivering water to meet authorized project purposes, meet environmental requirements, respect state water rights, work with all stakeholders, and provide leadership, innovation, and assistance.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the Western States Water Council strongly supports legislation to permanently authorize Title I activities under the Reclamation States Emergency Drought Relief Act, and provide for adequate appropriations to meet priority needs and continue the Reclamation Drought Response Program.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Council urges and encourages the Administration and the Congress to assess and consider the need for a comprehensive national drought preparedness and response program on par with federal efforts to address other natural disasters such as hurricanes, tornadoes and similar extreme events.

ⁱ [2020 U.S. billion-dollar weather and climate disasters in historical context | NOAA Climate.gov](https://www.noaa.gov/news/2020-u-s-billion-dollar-weather-and-climate-disasters-in-historical-context)