



**POSITION  
of the  
WESTERN STATES WATER COUNCIL  
regarding  
BUREAU OF RECLAMATION DROUGHT RESPONSE PROGRAM  
Lawrence, Kansas  
October 23, 2024**

**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 Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) National Centers for Environmental Information (NCEI), from 1980-2023, there have been 31 drought events costing over \$1B/event with total economic losses of \$352.9B due to drought, or an average of \$11.4B/event, also leading to an average of 103 deaths/year, with drought contributing to another \$142.4B in wildfire losses, and 12 deaths/year, and NCEI noting a rise in vulnerability to drought and wildfire in the western states<sup>1</sup>; 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.

Revised and Readopted  
(See Position No. 475, September 16, 2021,  
No. 430, October 26, 2018, No. 387, October 9, 2015, and No. 347, October 12, 2012)

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.climate.gov/news-features/blogs/beyond-data/2023-historic-year-us-billion-dollar-weather-and-climate-disasters>