

Drought demands Congressional action

Farmers, farmworkers, communities and fish hang in the balance

California's ongoing drought, now stretching into a fourth punishing year, is having a huge impact on the state and has become the number one issue facing policymakers according to statewide voters. A recent Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC) statewide poll shows that 39% of all Californians identify water as the number one issue facing the state.

The drought has consequences for everyone. Urban water users, for the first time in history are facing mandates to cut water use by 25%. Farmers are expected to fallow 500,000-600,000 acres this year due to reduced water supplies, a 33% increase over last year, and 17,000 farmworkers will remain unemployed. Already endangered fish in the Delta are struggling with the effects of drought and populations are plunging to new lows.

California's extended drought is appropriately getting the attention of state and federal policymakers. State legislators and the Governor have twice passed emergency drought funding packages to lessen the impacts of the drought and provide drinking water and other basic services to those most in need. Federal policymakers are also weighing in. A bipartisan group of western lawmakers recently introduced comprehensive legislation to help address the drought and ongoing water issues. HR 2898, the Western Water and American Food Security Act of 2015 aims to make more water available to families, farmers and communities in the state. The measure also seeks to expedite additional water storage in the state and provide additional flexibility to capture water during periods of high precipitation.

Farmers, farmworkers, communities, residents, and fish are all suffering from the ongoing drought. California policymakers have stepped up and provided some relief. Now it is time for federal policymakers to do the same. California's economic well-being and quality of life are far too important to have Congress continue to sit on the sidelines.

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