

**Statement of Robert Quint, Senior Advisor  
Bureau of Reclamation  
U.S. Department of the Interior**

**Before the  
Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources  
Subcommittee on Water & Power**

**S. 659 - Emergency Drought Relief Act Reauthorization  
April 16, 2013**

Chairman Schatz and Members of the Subcommittee, I am Bob Quint, Senior Advisor at the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation). I am pleased to provide the views of the Department of the Interior on S. 659 which reauthorizes Title I of the Reclamation States Emergency Drought Relief Act of 1991 until the year 2018, and increases the amount of authorized federal appropriations from the current ceiling of \$90 million up to \$110 million. The Department supports extending the authorization of this program through 2018; however, as explained below, we do not believe an increase to the authorization of appropriations is necessary at this time. An April 3<sup>rd</sup> update to the U.S. Drought Monitor shows that 83% of the Western United States, where Reclamation operates, is abnormally dry, with 63% being in moderate to exceptional drought status.

Title I of the Reclamation States Emergency Drought Relief Act of 1991 provides Reclamation the authority for construction, management, and conservation measures to alleviate the adverse impacts of drought, including mitigation of fish and wildlife impacts. This authority is most often implemented through drilling new private wells. Wells are the only permanent construction authorized under the Act. All other Title I work must be of a temporary nature. No new Reclamation projects are authorized under Title I; Reclamation does not own, operate, or maintain projects funded under it. S. 659 would extend the expiration date as well as increase the authorization for appropriations from \$90 million to \$110 million to allow for greater capacity in Reclamation's assistance to States, tribes, and local governments in addressing the impacts of drought.

Title I also provides Reclamation with the flexibility to meet contractual water deliveries by allowing acquisition of water to meet requirements under the Endangered Species Act, benefiting contractors at a time when they are financially challenged. We believe that our existing WaterSMART Program provides some lessons applicable to the communities where Drought Act authorities are used.

Additionally, Title I authorizes Reclamation to participate in water banks established under state law; facilitate water acquisitions between willing buyers and willing sellers; acquire conserved water for use under temporary contracts; make facilities available for storage and conveyance of project and nonproject water; make project and nonproject water available for nonproject uses; and, acquire water for fish and wildlife purposes on a nonreimbursable basis.

Reclamation's primary approach to drought is to continue working with our stakeholders on a proactive basis to assess the implications of water shortages, develop flexible operational plans that account for expected periods of drought, and support projects that conserve water and improve the efficiency of water delivery infrastructure. Federal Drought relief is a "last resort" to be employed only in the most extreme of cases. Given the extreme weather conditions currently facing the nation, we will continue to consider ideas to make drought relief even more effective through improved interagency cooperation and other changes.

Title II of the Reclamation States Emergency Drought Relief Act of 1991 provides Reclamation with permanent authority to assist States, Tribes, and local governments with planning and technical assistance related to drought planning, preparation, and adaptation strategies. This authority allows Reclamation to assist non-Federal entities to prepare for drought so that they are less vulnerable when drought inevitably happens. This authority for drought-related Federal coordination and technical assistance does not automatically expire and will remain in effect without the authorities that S. 659 would extend.

Given that there remains a capacity for over \$15 million in authorized appropriations for this program, the Department does not believe an increase in the authorized appropriations ceiling is necessary at this time. If the authorized appropriations ceiling should become a more urgent constraint, we will evaluate the need for an increase to the appropriations ceiling at that time.

This concludes my written statement. I am pleased to answer questions at the appropriate time.