**United States Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources**
**Testimony of James D. Ogsbury, Executive Director**
**Western Governors' Association**
**June 2, 2015**

Madame Chairman and members of the Committee, I appreciate your invitation to testify today on behalf of the Western Governors' Association (WGA). My name is James D. Ogsbury and I am the Association's Executive Director. WGA is an independent, non-partisan organization representing the Governors of 19 western states and 3 U.S.-flag islands. I am honored to share with the Committee the perspective of the Western Governors regarding drought.

*Drought Impacts in the Western States*

I am here today because the members of my board—the Western Governors—are deeply concerned about drought in their states. Water availability is a perennial concern in the West, with drought visiting the region on a semi-regular basis. Currently, drought is most severe in California, where dire conditions earn daily headlines. When Gov. Jerry Brown announced mandatory water restrictions for his state on April 1, the snowpack was at 5 percent of normal. On May 21, snow levels were just 2 percent of average.

California is not the only state experiencing drought. Ninety-nine percent of Nevada is currently affected by some level of drought. Early May snowpack levels in the Boise River Basin of Idaho were the fourth-lowest on record since measurements began in 1940.[1] Washington's Governor Jay Inslee declared a statewide drought emergency on May 15, citing the fact that on the Olympic Peninsula, where there should have been 80 inches of snow, glacier lilies were in bloom. As of May 22, Governor Kate Brown of Oregon had declared drought emergencies in 15 counties. In making recent emergency declarations, the Governor said, "it may look green now, but we are going to experience one of the worst droughts in the history of our state."[2]

Even in states without gubernatorial drought declarations, specific regions are suffering. In Colorado, for example, much of the state has been lifted out of drought by a round of springtime storms. But while rain on the Front Range has filled some reservoirs to the point of flooding, the most recent scientific assessment still shows southwestern Colorado in moderate drought.

Drought has real and consequential impacts at both the landscape and the local level. Take, for example, the $1.2 billion in crop losses that the Washington State Department of Agriculture has

[1] Natural Resources Conservation Service. "Idaho Water Supply Outlook Report." May 1, 2015. ftp://ftp.wcc.nrcs.usda.gov/states/id/webftp/wsor/2015/borid515.pdf

[2] Governor Kate Brown, Oregon. "Governor Brown on Oregon's drought." Video posted on May 22, 2015. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UyDQEBEJm7I

predicted for its farmers this year. Or Outingdale, California, where water curtailments have forced residents to reduce their daily water use to just 50 gallons of water per person.[3]

Western Governors are deeply concerned about drought's devastating impacts on local communities and economies. As the Governors state in their policy resolution, *Water Resource Management in the West*, "the scarce nature of water in the West makes it a crucial resource for the communities, industries, habitats, and farms it supports. Clean, reliable water supplies are essential to maintain and improve quality of life."[4]

Governors have been responding to drought by taking action in their own states and acting together through the Western Governors' Drought Forum.

*Governors Working to Manage Drought in their States*

Governors are directing their top state officials to work with stakeholders and citizens on drought and water management. Gov. Brian Sandoval of Nevada created the Nevada Drought Forum in April to convene water managers and stakeholders to identify Nevada's specific drought policy needs—and the conservation practices that can help improve drought response.

In Colorado, Gov. John Hickenlooper has released a draft of the first-ever Colorado state water plan for public review. State water leaders have solicited input from water users, local governments, and stakeholders to design a strategic plan for meeting Colorado's future water needs.

Sixteen other states in the west have implemented water plans, strategies or visions. For instance, Gov. Matt Mead of Wyoming released his *Wyoming Water Strategy* earlier this year.[5] In that document, the Governor emphasized initiatives that will be useful in both wet and dry years, including a needs analysis for enhanced water monitoring climate, weather, snowpack, snowmelt, and stream flow data. The Strategy also includes infrastructure investments to make better use of existing water storage projects.

Governors are tapping into the resourcefulness of local communities to respond to drought. In Washington, the Yakima Basin Integrated Water Resource Management plan will enable water users in a rich agricultural area to collaboratively address the risk of drought to farming, fish and communities. In the Dungeness Basin on the Olympic peninsula, the state is leasing water from irrigators to increase water supplies later in the season for threatened Chinook salmon.

Since the 1990s, Arizona has stored water in groundwater basins through artificial aquifer recharge. This strategy has allowed Arizona to utilize its full entitlement of Colorado River

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[3] Marquis, Dave. "Foothill community of Outingdale in Stage 4 water emergency." ABC News 10. http://www.news10.net/story/news/local/california/2015/05/01/outingdale-water-emergency-river-consumnes/26686933/

[4] Western Governors' Association. "Water Resource Management in the West." Governors' policy resolution passed in 2014. http://www.westgov.org/policies/301-water/597-water-resource-management-in-the-west-resolution-wga

[5] Governor Matthew H. Mead. "Leading the Charge: Wyoming Water Strategy." 2015. http://waterplan.state.wy.us/plan/statewide/govstrategy/20150115-GovWaterStrategy.pdf

water and mitigate the effects of future shortages.[6] Even with this safeguard in place, the Arizona Department of Water Resources prepares an annual drought preparedness report to assess water availability and describe preparedness activities for the coming year.[7]

In Oklahoma, Gov. Mary Fallin has supported the work of business, agricultural, and community leaders in developing the Panhandle Regional Water Plan. Separately, the Governor has enacted the "Oklahoma Water for 2060 Act," which would limit her state's water consumption 45 years from now to current levels. Both initiatives are designed to develop strategies for water conservation, water re-use and augmentation.

All of the western states are taking pains to make the most of the water they have. In New Mexico, Gov. Susana Martinez and her state tourism department have made efforts to highlight the water recreational opportunities available to visitors, even during drought. For example, low reservoir levels may lead to a decrease in the popularity of motorized boating, but visitors can be directed to the option of paddle-crafts instead.

In Oregon, Gov. Brown is emphasizing public awareness of drought conditions with a social media campaign. Her agencies will use the hashtag #ORdrought across social media to keep Oregonians informed and prepared to adapt to drought conditions.[8] The Oregon Department of Forestry recently emphasized the connection between drought and wildfire on its website to increase awareness about the importance of fire prevention, particularly in the midst of drought.[9]

Governors are also taking unprecedented policy actions. Gov. Jerry Brown of California called for a 25 percent reduction in municipal water use across the state in an executive order issued on April 1. The EO included additional steps, such as streamlining state decision-making on water infrastructure projects and requirements for decreased irrigation of public spaces. The Governor has also strengthened existing partnerships with federal agencies, including the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Fisheries branch, to take a united approach to managing water and wildlife.[10]

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[6] "Water Banking through Artificial Aquifer Recharge: Arizona Water Banking Authority, Central Arizona Project, Arizona Department of Water Resources." Western Governors' Drought Forum online resource library. http://www.westgov.org/drought-forum/case-studies/327-water-supply/955-water-banking-through-artificial-aquifer-recharge

[7] "Arizona Drought Preparedness Plan and Annual Preparedness Reports." Arizona Department of Water Resources. http://www.azwater.gov/AzDWR/StatewidePlanning/Drought/ADPPlan.htm

[8] "Governor Brown Declares Drought Emergencies in 8 Counties." Newsroom of Gov. Kate Brown, Oregon. http://www.oregon.gov/newsroom/Pages/NewsDetail.aspx?newsid=730.

[9] "Getting burned . . . The cost of wildfire." Oregon Department of Forestry. http://www.oregon.gov/odf/Pages/newsroom/newsreleases/2015/NR1524.aspx.

[10] WGA has developed a case study about this collaborative effort titled "Cross-Agency Collaboration in Addressing Record Drought in California." Please find it and other case studies online at http://www.westgov.org/drought-forum/case-studies.

*Governors Sharing Management Strategies through the Western Governors' Drought Forum*

Drought is clearly a regional problem, which is one reason that Governors across the West have been sharing management strategies and policy options for drought response through the Western Governors' Drought Forum.

When Gov. Brian Sandoval created the Western Governors' Drought Forum a year ago, he charged WGA with developing a framework for state, industry, community and environmental leaders to share best practices on drought. We have accomplished that by reaching out to state water managers, industry leaders, scientific experts, and stakeholders for input through webinars, workshops and individual conversations.

For the first workshop last fall, WGA went to Oklahoma, when drought in the western part of the state had just entered its fourth year. While we were there, we learned about how the energy industry manages drought conditions.

Next, WGA went to Tempe, Arizona, where we heard about drought management in the mining, manufacturing and industrial sectors. We also heard the state's water resources director discuss desalination as a very real water supply option for his land-locked state. The session left no doubt that, while in the past, businesses may not have regarded water as a major constraint on siting a new operation, it is now a front-and-center consideration.

Then the Drought Forum traveled to the epicenter of drought: the Central Valley of California. We visited not just the central location, but – in many ways – the central topic regarding drought management: agriculture. California's agricultural industry is valued at $46.4 billion dollars.[11] We learned how farmers are conserving water through both precision irrigation technologies and basic soil stewardship. We also heard that regular communication between states, stakeholders and federal agencies is critical to navigating the multiple challenges posed by drought.

Next we went to Nevada, where the Drought Forum focused on water supply management for cities and states. The water managers in those meetings emphasized the importance of collaboration between water users and water managers, as well as flexible legal structures for moving water to where it is needed most.

We concluded the Drought Forum workshop series with a stop in Santa Fe, New Mexico, to talk about drought's impacts on tourism and recreation. The connection between drought and water quality is especially important in the context of tourism; people value clean water to swim in, fish from and raft through.

WGA staff gathered information during the workshop series, a webinar series, and resources shared by western states, utilities, and citizens.[12] The findings from the first year of the Drought

[11] United States Department of Agriculture, National Agricultural Statistics Service. "California Agricultural Statistics 2013 Annual Bulletin." April 13, 2015.
http://www.nass.usda.gov/Statistics_by_State/California/Publications/California_Ag_Statistics/index.asp

[12] Meeting summaries, webinar recordings, case studies and informational resources are available at http://www.westgov.org/drought-forum/.

Forum will be included in a final report to be released at the June 2015 WGA Annual Meeting in Tahoe, Nevada.

In that report, WGA will emphasize the importance of basic snow and water monitoring in order to better understand drought conditions. We will talk about water reuse from a municipal, agricultural, and industrial and energy-production perspective. We will discuss the ways that westerners are making the most of the water they have through soil stewardship and forest management. And we will show how communication and collaboration with water users is an essential drought response tool for water managers.

*The Western Governors' Association's Continuing Work on Drought*

Though the Western Governors' Drought Forum is wrapping up its first year with a report on key findings, the Drought Forum is by no means ending. WGA has worked on drought for well over a decade, and we will continue that work as long as the issue remains a gubernatorial priority.

Drought intersects with many of the other policy issues in WGA's portfolio. Western Governors are managers of states with expansive forests, vast deserts and broad sagebrush and grassland landscapes, all of which provide habitat for wildlife. These lands are rich in both conventional and renewable energy resources. The scarcity of water in the West makes the management of both water supply and water quality crucial. Western Governors are well aware of the interrelatedness of forest health, wildlife, energy and water policy, and they recognize that drought has serious implications for each of these issues.

Water is used in oil and gas extraction and in cooling processes for power generation. Adequate water flows are essential to hydropower production.

Drought has implications for wildlife—not just for fish that rely on cool and steady streamflow, but also for large wildlife such as deer, elk, and bears that sometimes seek water and food in human communities when those resources are scarce in their own habitat.

Wildfire is exacerbated by drought. Dry conditions increase the likelihood of fire; low lake levels make it harder for firefighters to access water to combat wildfire.

Drought necessitates difficult decision-making for municipal water providers, reservoir operators, and state officials.

Western Governors applaud and encourage congressional attention to drought for a variety of reasons. Even though drought is concentrated in the West, the economic and policy implications extend to the rest of the nation. Drought puts federal lands at risk of wildfire. Federal reservoirs and water infrastructure are crucial mechanisms for making the most of available water. Data collection and drought science analysis performed by federal agencies—including the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the U.S. Geological Survey, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration—are all essential to understanding and managing drought. Moreover, the crisis brought on by drought is acting as a catalyst for innovation in states, communities and businesses. Congressional support of the steps

westerners are taking to conserve water and manage drought conditions will help the West—and the nation—through current and future drought conditions.

The Committee can support improved drought response by addressing imperatives the Western Governors set forth in their policy resolution titled *Water Resource Management in the West*.[13] The Governors emphasize the importance of infrastructure investments for the continuing conservation, development, and wise use of resources. The Governors also cite the value of streamlined permitting for infrastructure.

The Governors encourage adoption of conservation and efficiency strategies such as water reuse and recycling, desalination and reclamation of brackish waters, and reductions in household water use. They also call for Congressional support of state and local watershed groups to help them deal with water quality, growth and land management. The Governors highlight the value of basic water data for reliable information on water resources. And in a separate resolution on *Wildland Fire Management*, the Governors draw attention to the use of active forest and rangeland management as a means to prevent wildfire and promote healthy landscapes. Healthy forests and landscapes help maintain clean, reliable water.[14]

Madame Chairman Murkowski and Ranking Member Cantwell, Western Governors appreciate your interest in the impact drought is having on their states, and they applaud you for bringing attention to this significant and serious matter. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of WGA.

[13] Western Governors' Association. "Water Resource Management in the West." Governors' policy resolution passed in 2014. http://www.westgov.org/policies/301-water/597-water-resource-management-in-the-west-resolution-wga

[14] Western Governors' Association. "Wildland Fire Management." Governors' policy resolution passed in 2013. http://www.westgov.org/policies/304-wildfires/613-wildland-fire-management-wga-resolution-2