



FINDINGS

Our assessments of federal, regional, tribal, state, and local drought-related programs indicate that there is broad-based understanding of the value and benefits of drought preparedness. The assessments also revealed that, overall, federal drought assistance to states, local governments, tribes, and individuals is primarily relief oriented. Few federal programs are designed to provide drought preparedness assistance. Furthermore, public testimony strongly indicated varying degrees of satisfaction with the federal programs.

Our deliberations have convinced us that this country can and must do better to prepare for drought in the future. At our public hearings, more than one hundred people testified on behalf of urban and rural water associations, tribes, federal agencies, state and county governments, municipalities, livestock production and farmer associations, and conservation groups (Appendix B, File A). With respect to U.S. Department of Agriculture programs, we heard similar criticisms from farmers, ranchers, and tribal representatives in Austin and El Paso, Texas, Atlanta, Georgia, Washington, D.C., and Billings, Montana. These people expressed concern that the application process for agricultural drought assistance programs is too cumbersome, that it takes too long to make decisions, and that placing federal decision-making outside the local level often results in disconnection among the applicants and the programs. Livestock producers consistently pointed out that their operations are excluded from agricultural assistance programs. Representatives from state, county, and local agricultural agencies noted communication and coordination challenges within the Department of Agriculture. On balance, we also heard about successful programs in the Department of Agriculture, the Bureau of Reclamation, and other federal agencies.

This testimony, combined with written comments submitted independently, helped identify gaps among federal, state, local, regional, and

tribal programs and the people those programs are designed to serve. We also reviewed information and analyses prepared by the five Working Groups—agriculture; environment; municipal and industrial water; local government, community, and business; and monitoring and prediction—that we established to assist us in assessing state, regional, local, tribal, and federal drought programs and related laws (Appendix B, File B). Nonfederal and federal experts in various aspects of drought, including staff of the National Drought Mitigation Center, formed the Working Groups. The Interagency Contacts Group coordinated the Working Groups and worked with the Commission's staff to prepare this report. This work also identified gaps in service delivery.

The discussion below summarizes our findings. We emphasize that current programs may cover gaps in service delivery partially in some cases and more fully in some locations than in others. Yet in many critical areas of drought preparedness, we heard that current federal programs do not provide any measurable assistance. Collectively, the gaps are significant and merit attention and remedies.

The Commission met in Los Angeles, California, Scottsdale, Arizona, and Washington, D.C., and several times through teleconference technology. Public hearings were held in Los Angeles, California, El Paso and Austin Texas, Atlanta, Georgia, Billings, Montana, and Washington, D.C. All meetings of the Commission and all public hearings were announced in advance, according to federal procedures, and were open to the public. More information on the Commission's findings is available as described in Appendix B.
