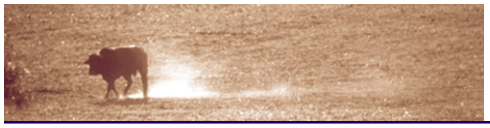

National Drought Mitigation Center

The National Drought Mitigation Center, established in 1995 at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln, helps people and institutions develop and implement measures to reduce society's vulnerability to drought. The Center's director, Dr. Don Wilhite, has estimated that on average 12% of the country is in severe drought each year. The Center emphasizes prevention and risk management rather than crisis management. This approach promotes self-reliance to achieve greater resilience to drought. The Center maintains a continually growing archive of drought-monitoring and planning information on its web site (http://enso.unl.edu/ndmc). That web site also contains products that have been developed with various federal and nonfederal partners and provides links to other drought-related materials. Center staff have developed several drought workshops, both in the United States and internationally, in partnership with the Bureau of Reclamation and other co-sponsors. Federal and nonfederal drought professionals serve as workshop leaders.

We heard from people at our public hearings and in written comments that the Center has been helpful in providing assistance with drought planning, devising proactive mitigation measures, and forming links with other drought professionals. The activities of the Center are funded by an annual grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service as well as with supplemental funding through cooperative agreements with other federal entities or through consulting agreements with nonfederal entities.

Mitigation. Mitigation is often associated with actions taken after the fact to remedy damage caused by human or natural disturbances. In the context of this report, we use the term "mitigation" to describe actions taken prior to and during drought events to reduce potential impacts and thus reduce the costs of responding to drought. As such, mitigation is an essential, proactive element of drought preparedness.

Proactive drought mitigation comprises a broad range of measures—from the installation of livestock watering ponds on ranches and technologies and methods for capturing storm water in rural and urban settings to state-of-the-art wastewater treatment that allows reuse of water. We learned during our hearings about many mitigation measures aimed at water conservation during our hearings, including testimony about the "drought-proofing" value of installing ultra-low flow toilets in residences in southern California. We note that attempts to repeal plumbing fixture standards, which are important to the success of ultra-low flow toilet programs, or other long-term conservation standards in the 1992 Energy Policy Act should be considered in the larger context of the need for drought preparedness.

We observed an example of state-of-the-art technology at the Scottsdale Water Campus in Arizona and heard about other wastewater treatment and reuse programs from witnesses during our Los Angeles hearing. These types of measures may be aimed specifically at reducing the potential impacts of drought. Or, they may be used to expand water supplies for growing populations, in which case the larger population may still need to plan proactive mitigation of drought impacts.

Within federal government programs, we found that water supply and droughts are considered together. As one example, the Bureau of Reclamation's 2001 budget includes significant amounts for water delivery projects that can help reduce the impacts of drought. These include $65.3 million for the Central Valley Project in California, $33.7 million for the Central Arizona Project, $29.7 million for the Mni Wiconi Project in South Dakota, and $21.3 million for the Garrison Diversion Unit in North Dakota. The budget also contains requests of $22 million for water reclamation and reuse and $2.2 million for the Bureau's small projects loan program. In addition, the Bureau's water conservation program and guidance in the Bureau's tiered pricing