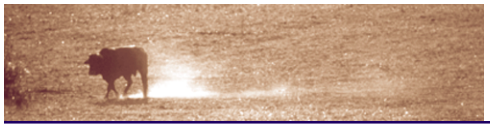

purpose, requires working through a complicated web of laws, regulations, and constituencies." The report cited the CALFED program in the San Francisco Bay-Delta region of California as a model for resolving complex water disputes, noting that the program brought together representatives of agricultural, business, environmental, and urban concerns "to guarantee more reliable water supplies and improved water quality for the environment, cities, and farms."

The Western Governors' Association, the National Governors' Association, and the National Association of Counties have adopted a set of principles to guide their environmental management efforts. Called "Enlibra," the principles form the basis of a shared doctrine that "speaks to greater participation and collaboration in decision making, focuses on outcomes rather than just programs, and recognizes the need for a variety of tools beyond regulation that will improve environmental and natural resource management" (www.westgov.org).

We are encouraged by these and other examples that incorporate a broad array of environmental impacts and concerns into their processes to give interested parties a chance to reduce conflicts. We caution that in relation to drought, some preparedness and proactive mitigation measures may in and of themselves create unacceptable impacts on the environment. For this reason, it is doubly important that environmental resource issues be included in drought preparedness efforts.

Need to Address Drought-related Wildfires

We heard that drought events often give rise to increased risk of widespread wildfires. In turn, wildfires can exacerbate the environmental impacts of drought by consuming vegetation already stressed from drought, by burning protective streamside vegetation, and in severe-intensity fires by changing soil composition and properties. We were told, too, that in areas where drought occurrences are rare, people are often unprepared for wildfire. Even areas where drought is more common may lack sufficient resources for combating wildfire. Witnesses from Oklahoma and Texas told us during our hearing in Austin that they rely primarily on volunteer fire fighters to control drought-related wildfire and that they are in need of equipment and training to do a better job and help ensure the safety of the fire fighters. In written comments, New Mexico's state forestry division noted that accurate weather predictions are important to fire managers for safety reasons. The comments also said that the Palmer Drought Index, with its emphasis on soil moisture, is not sufficient to give fire managers the information they need about fuel moisture, a statement that was echoed in other comments we received.

A 1996 report of the Western Governors' Association identified three major obstacles in suppression of drought-related wildfires:

- the financial burdens to prepare for and fight the fires,
- a lack of proper training and resources, and
- restoring forest and grassland health.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service is authorized by the Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act of 1978 to cooperate with states in developing systems and methods for prevention, control, suppression, and prescribed use of fires in rural areas. The goal is to protect human lives, agricultural crops and livestock, property and other improvements, and natural resources. The Forest Service's Fire Sciences Laboratory has developed many tools to address fire danger and fire behavior potential at national and local levels. One tool to display broad-scale elements of fire danger is the Wildland Fire Assessment System, which is available on the Internet.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency emphasized that wildfire is part of the wildland/urban interface—no longer a phenomenon concentrated primarily in large national forests