



Drought Programs

States

We learned that as of June 1999, 30 states had drought plans, with most of those oriented to relief rather than preparedness (Appendix B, File C). Two states had delegated drought planning to local authorities, and three states were developing drought plans. In general, the states with larger numbers of people and resources at risk of drought tend to have more detailed state programs.

Five states reported that they have some drought funding mechanisms not tied to a federal administrative or presidential declaration of drought emergency. For example, Texas has a Community Development Program Disaster Relief Fund that can provide up to \$350,000 in grant money for small communities (less than 50,000 residents) to support their permanent water supply infrastructure.

Our assessments pointed out that in most states, drought responsibilities are normally located in the agencies that house the functions of agriculture, natural resources, water management, environment, or emergency management. Fewer than five states reported that they have independent, designated drought coordinators, while more than 20 have drought task forces. Wisconsin, for example, lacks a specific drought plan but does use an ad hoc drought task force. In Maine, representatives from the U.S. Geological Survey and the University of Maine Water Research Program issued a report in January 2000 that recommended the Maine Drought Task Force develop a master plan or vision. New Mexico has completed a drought plan in conjunction with the Bureau of Reclamation, which provided assistance in developing the plan. Arizona and Hawaii are currently involved in a similar process with the Bureau.

California has a well-developed process for general water management planning through the Central Valley Improvement Act and the

state's Urban Water Management Planning Act. These acts create a key link for water shortage planning and coordination. The urban water legislation, for example, requires water purveyors serving more than 3,000 acre-feet annually or more than 3,000 connections to prepare plans to demonstrate how they would respond to cut-backs of up to 50% in their supplies in the event of drought or natural disasters. The plans must be updated every five years and are submitted to the California Department of Water Resources.

Utah is one example of a state that approaches drought from several angles. The state recently completed a state drought plan that also included several counties and was funded by the Bureau of Reclamation. In comments submitted to the Commission, state officials noted that state law related to flood control and drought emergencies grants Utah counties the authority to levy taxes and generate funds to aid in programs to increase precipitation. Utah's Department of Agriculture and Food has a low-interest loan program available to assist drought-stricken farmers and ranchers. The loans help fund measures such as installation of pipelines, tanks, and troughs; construction and deepening of wells; development of springs or seeps; construction of tail water recovery pits for irrigation systems; and correction of conservation problems on farmland caused by severe drought. Utah Department of Agriculture and Food officials suggested that federal assistance should be available to transport resources from areas not experiencing drought to areas that are in a drought.

In written comments and through testimony during the Commission's public hearings, state officials often noted that federal assistance could go far to help localities and states prepare for drought, including assistance for planning and proactive mitigation measures. In their comments to the Commission, the governors of Iowa and Missouri stated that "coordination among the various existing federal programs is necessary, as is coordination between federal agencies