

***Testimony of Mr. Charles Nylander, Chairman of the Legislative/Budget
Committee for WESTCAS***
**on Amendments to the Reclamation States Emergency Drought Relief Act
of 1991**
to extend the authority for drought assistance

**Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Water and Power**

July 12, 2005

The Western Coalition of Arid States (WESTCAS) is submitting this testimony to the United States Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, Subcommittee on Water and Power regarding S.648; introduced by Mr. Smith of Oregon to amend the Reclamation States Emergency Drought Relief Act of 1991, to extend the authority for drought assistance. My name is Charlie Nylander and I represent the interests of WESTCAS and serve as Chairman of the Legislative/Budget Committee.

Drought assistance is of particular concern for our member's states, 6 out of 7 of which are currently experiencing drought conditions, spanning 'abnormally dry' to 'extreme drought' on the US Drought Monitor scale maintained by the University of Nebraska. Direct affects of such conditions include above average fire risks, water restrictions resulting from widespread water shortages, crop losses and pasture damage.

WESTCAS is a coalition of approximately 125 water and wastewater districts, cities and towns, and professional associations focused on water quality and water quantity issues in the States of Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon and Texas. Our mission is to work with Federal, State and Regional water quality and quantity agencies to promote scientifically-sound laws, regulations, appropriations, and policies that protect public health and the environment in the arid West.

The Bureau, of course, is a major architect for water storage and research related to new water technologies that provide enormous benefit to the economies and livelihoods of a water-dependent West. WESTCAS urges granting an extension to Federal agencies, namely the Bureau of Reclamation, which has existing authority to respond to drought conditions. Authorized by the 'Reclamation States Emergency Drought Relief Act of 1991', the Bureau of Reclamation is well suited to, and has been effectively providing vital services to drought afflicted communities for the past 14 years. Some of the benefits include drought and water quality research and mitigation measures. Our organization supports granting this extension to the Bureau of Reclamation while Congress works on a National Drought Policy.

Extending the authority of the Bureau is of importance to all 17 of the Reclamation States which, despite having a wet winter, are now facing a sixth year of widespread drought conditions. However, Reclamation States are not by any means the only ones in the United States currently afflicted by drought. Drought monitoring maps currently show 19 additional states in various stages of drought conditions. Along with passing this

amendment to the Reclamation States Emergency Drought Relief Act of 1991, Congress must also recognize that there

currently exists no permanent overarching federally-coordinated plan for drought preparedness and response. As drought is an ongoing problem affecting more people in the United States than any other natural hazard, Congress must also take the next step in drought policy and implement the recommendations of the National Drought Policy Council. By following these recommendations and taking a proactive approach the country will be poised to reduce the amount of damage caused by future droughts.

We thank you for the opportunity to provide this statement for the hearing record.