

**WESTERN DROUGHT COORDINATION COUNCIL
STATEMENT OF ACCOMPLISHMENTS, 1998-1999**

**May 1999
Austin, Texas**

Executive Summary

Background

Created in 1997 through an interagency Memorandum of Understanding, the Western Drought Coordination Council (Council) was formed to establish a comprehensive, integrated and expeditious response to drought emergencies in the West. U.S. Department of Agriculture Deputy Secretary Richard Rominger and New Mexico Governor Gary Johnson served as the Council Co-chairs during the reporting period. The Council is comprised of the Secretaries of Interior, Commerce and Agriculture; the Administrators of the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the Small Business Administration; Tribal Representatives of the Chickasaw Nation, Apache Tribes and Belknap Community Council; the Governors of New Mexico, Texas and Colorado; and a representative from the National Association of Counties.

The work of the Council is carried out by a Steering Group and four Working Groups. The Steering Group is comprised of representatives of the Council members and the Co-Chairs of the Working Groups. The Working Groups are: Preparedness and Mitigation; Response; Monitoring, Assessment and Prediction; and Communications. Each group is staffed by volunteers representing federal, state, local and tribal associations. Federal and non-federal representatives co-chair each group. The National Drought Mitigation Center (NDMC) has provided technical support and the Western Governors' Association has provided administrative support to the Council and its Working Groups.

Coincidental with the work of the Council, Congress passed the Drought Policy Management Act of 1998, introduced by Senator Pete Domenici (NM), and signed into law by the President in June 1998. That law creates a Federal Commission of 16 members representing various federal agencies and water user interest groups. The law specifically refers to the work of the Western Drought Coordination Council, as a resource of information and experience. The Commission is to perform several investigations and issue a report in January 2000.

The 1998-1999 Work Plan outlined the activities of the Working Groups, agreed to by the Council at their annual meeting in June 1998. The status of those assigned work activities are reported in this 1998-1999 Statement of Accomplishments. Some activities were completed, other products and projects are ongoing activities and are anticipated to continue next year. Other activities may be placed on hold by the Council, pending the findings and outcome of the National Drought Policy Commission's work.

Major Accomplishments for 1998/1999

This completes the second year of the Council. The Steering Group and four Working Groups performed a number of tasks involving continued collection, analysis, evaluation and dissemination of information useful to others involved in drought management efforts. Through a series of publications, workshops and communication strategies, this information includes:

- Quarterly Western Climate and Water Status reports on climate conditions
- Manual of techniques on How to Reduce Drought Risk
- Checklist of programs and activities of existing drought plans
- Internet applications for data sharing on climate research, drought resources management, and response programs (www.ens0.unl/wdcc/council)
- Workshops featuring essentials of drought planning and mitigation
- Communications tailored to various public and technical audiences on drought issues
- Up-to-date catalog of federal assistance programs, who to call and what they provide

The work of the Council in the first year resulted in a foundation of data gathering, analytical, organizational and communication activities upon which the second year's work was based. The second year of specific accomplishments of the Steering Group and Working Groups, contained in the following chapters, covers a range of coordinated activities that have been used by individuals and groups through out the Western region. People using the Council's information, products and processes have provided positive feedback, referring others to the Council web sites, publications, workshops and resource base of professionals. The past two years of work is expected to be useful to the National Drought Policy Commission as they expand the scope of work, study and considerations to the national scale.

Recognition of the Working Group Members and Support

The 1997/1998 Statement of Accomplishments highlighted the importance of the volunteer professionals on the Steering Group and four Working Groups, the leadership and guidance provided by the Council members, the technical support of the NDMC and the administrative support of the Western Governors' Association. These contributions have continued during this second year, culminating with the successful passage of the Act establishing the National Drought Policy Commission.

In the first year the groups concentrated on locating, gathering, analyzing and evaluating existing information on drought events, contingency plans, monitoring and prediction, and response activities. In the second year, this information was organized, refined, used in workshops, communicated in reports and made available on the Internet. The feedback received from users of this information has been positive and further supports the benefits of coordinated, service-oriented drought management.

The following five chapters features achievements of the four Working Groups and the Steering Group, noting activities planned in the 1998/1999 Work Plans and ongoing work established in the first year.

Chapter One: Preparedness and Mitigation Working Group --1998/1999 Accomplishments

Goal: Develop recommendations to the Council for federal, state, tribes, local governments and water agencies to mitigate short- and long-term drought impacts before, during and after drought emergencies occur.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS: Developed a checklist of existing drought plans and management techniques, which was approved by the Steering Group and distributed in workshops, and on the National Drought Mitigation Center (NDMC) web site.

Goal: Continue and enhance the exchange of information on drought monitoring, prediction, planning, response and mitigation for users throughout the region.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS: Collaborated with the NDMC to provide linkages to various drought information resources in the country.

Goal: Develop educational materials to help promote the concepts of drought planning and mitigation to a diverse audience.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS: Developed a host of resource and educational materials and used them in Drought Mitigation and Planning workshops held in 1998 and 1999.

Goal: Interact with local, state, federal and tribal officials in the West and in other regions to share experiences on drought planning and mitigation.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS: Conducted six comprehensive workshops in 1998 and 1999 in Albuquerque, New Mexico, Salt Lake City, Utah, Columbia, South Carolina, Ft. Mitchell, Kentucky, Cuernavaca, Mexico and Hilo, Hawaii. All targeted audiences were represented in the workshops. Total number of participants in 1998 and 1999 is 450.

Goal: Continue to inventory, summarize and distribute information about newly developed drought management plans, and incorporate the information into other assistance products and documents.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS: New information was incorporated into the educational and resource materials used in the Drought Planning and Mitigation workshops.

Goal: Continue development, dissemination and implementation of *How to Reduce Drought Risk*.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS: The report was used extensively in the Drought Planning and Mitigation workshops.

Goal: Create a document to complement *How to Reduce Drought Risk* that provides additional guidance, details and experience-based results.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS: Work was begun, and will be continued by the Working Group, even in the event of a hiatus period for the WDCC.

Goal: Establish a procedure for the identification of needs for and the process of providing Drought Planning Workshops and the appropriate role for the WDCC.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS: Worked with the WDCC Steering Group and other working groups and selected the two conferences for 1999 - one in Mexico, the other in Hawaii.

Goal: Develop a checklist of activities, programs and projects that can be used by those with existing drought plans to determine whether their plan needs to be updated or modified.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS: Developed the checklist, which was approved by the Steering Group, used in the workshops and posted on the Internet.

Chapter Two: Monitoring, Assessment, and Prediction Working Group 1998/1999 Accomplishments

Goal: Continue to produce the Western Climate and Water Status, a quarterly drought assessment. This includes a two-page summary version suitable for policy makers and a more detailed, technical version posted on the Council's web site.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS: Quarterly reports were issued in July and October 1998, and January and April 1999 in both forms. The two-page version was mailed to Congress members and other involved policy makers. Two supplemental reports were produced to highlight severe drought conditions in the southern High Plains, and were issued in August and September 1998.

Goal: Conduct local, regional, national evaluation of climate and other data useful for drought prediction and continue to find appropriate data, including derived variables, indices, and other forecasting techniques for use in the quarterly reports and the extended communications through the Internet.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS: Additional data was found, evaluated, used and linked to the WDCC home page and the electronic version of the quarterly reports.

Goal: Continue to monitor the effectiveness of forecasting and drought prediction techniques.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS: The group continued to incorporate recent developments in climate

research to better assist users in preparing for the consequences of La Nina. Various prediction tools were examined and used in the quarterly reports.

Goal: Continue to integrate and make available climate related information to a broad audience.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS: Significant progress has been made in integrating water and climate information within the region. The information has been made available on the Internet and may serve as a model for national expansion. Numerous new links were added to the Council's home page to support the analytical processes, collection of information and uses in predicting, monitoring and assessing drought events and impacts.

Goal: Aggregate data on species habitat requirements, especially threatened and endangered species, regarding in stream consumption needs and minimum thresholds.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS: This information is part of the integrated climate related information being performed and noted in the previous accomplishment.

Goal: Make a determination of operational definitions and triggers of when a drought is occurring, the degree of severity, and the types of impacts.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS: On hold, pending the National Drought Policy Commission results.

Chapter Three: Response Working Group -- 1998/1999 Accomplishments

Goal: Continue surveying and collecting historical information on drought impacts from states, and prepare a report identifying typical short-term drought impacts and potential strategies for addressing these impacts.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS: A standardized survey was sent to 21 states, including all within the Western Governors' Association. Fifteen surveys were returned, data was compiled and made available on the Western Governors' Association web site.

Goal: Develop a situation report by which states can report unmet needs when a drought occurs, and make recommendations for shared regional responses and actions.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS: A draft situation report has been completed and will be made available to the National Drought Policy Commission.

Goal: Update the Catalog of Federal Assistance Programs, and make the information available on the Internet.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS: The Catalog was updated in March 1999 and it is available on the Council (WDCC) web site.

Chapter Four: Communications Working Group -- 1998/1999 Accomplishments

Goal: Continue to provide assistance to the other groups in the development, production, dissemination of information and communications.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS: Editing, production, graphics and Internet linkage services were provided during the year to the Working and Steering Groups, including the Western Climate and Water Status report, and the updated Catalog of Federal Assistance Programs.

Goal: Develop media briefing package, including information about the WDCC, sample press and informational materials about drought issues.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS: The package is located on the Council web site and in hard copy form at the Western Governors' Association headquarters in Denver.

Goal: Continue to update and improve the web site information and usefulness.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS: Improvements have been made to the Council web site, additional resources have been added and linkages to other sites have been provided.

Goal: Implement a training program on communications functions.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS: Training has been conducted as part of the Drought Planning and Contingency workshops.

Goal: Communicate with the Western U.S. Extension Directors, to publicize the benefits and services of the Council.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS: Communications Working Group members provided this coordination and communication.

Goal: Increase the public visibility of the Council.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS: On hold, pending outcome of NDPC.

Chapter Five: Steering Group -- 1998/1999 Accomplishments

Goal: Monitor S 222/HR 3035, the National Drought Policy Commission (NDPC) Act, and adjust Council activities accordingly. Regardless of the outcome of the NDPC continue to assess effectiveness of Council activities, adjust priorities as necessary.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS: The National Drought Policy Act was signed into law almost

immediately after the Council's annual meeting. As a result, the Steering Group adjusted the work of the Council in anticipation of a hiatus period while the NDPC conducts its work.

Goal: Continue working with western states to encourage and promote implementation of the assistance programs and working group tools developed by the working groups.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS: Through targeted and tailored periodic communications with western states representatives and meetings of the Steering Group members, the work of the Council and results were shared with other interest groups.

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