



Memorandum

**TO:** Nick Chiulos, Annette D'Adamo  
**FROM:** Brent R. Heberlee  
**DATE:** April 8, 2014  
**RE:** Update on Federal Drought Relief Efforts

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Obama Administration

On February 14, 2014, President Obama travelled to California to tour drought-affected areas and to announce the Administration's drought response plan.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) declared 54 counties in California, including Monterey County, as primary natural disaster areas due to drought, making farmers and ranchers in those counties eligible for assistance through emergency loans. The USDA also announced \$15 million in funding to help farmers and ranchers in the most extreme and exceptional drought areas implement conservation practices that conserve scarce water resources, reduce wind erosion on drought-impacted fields and improve livestock access to water.

To assist drought affected communities, USDA is making \$3 million in grants available to help rural communities that are experiencing a significant decline in the quality or quantity of drinking water due to the drought obtain or maintain water sources of sufficient quantity and quality. These funds will be provided to eligible, qualified communities by application through USDA-Rural Development's Emergency Community Water Assistance Grants. California state health officials have already identified 17 small community water districts in 10 counties that are at risk of running out of water in 60-120 days. USDA has also made \$60 million available to food banks in the State of California through The Emergency Food Assistance Program and \$5 million available through the Emergency Watershed Protection program to help communities and private landowners address watershed impairments, such as stabilizing stream banks.

Congress

Congress is currently considering several pieces of California drought relief legislation.

The House last month passed a bill (H.R. 3964) sponsored by Rep. David Valadao (R-CA) that would repeal programs to conserve the species and habitat of the San Joaquin Valley, Bay Delta and Central Valley and resupply that water to communities affected by the drought. The bill passed the House on a largely party-line vote with the support of every California House

Republican. The bill has virtually no chance of advancing in the Senate, and the President has indicated that he would veto it if it reaches his desk.

Rep. Jared Huffman (D-CA) introduced legislation on March 14<sup>th</sup> with other California Democrats, including Rep. Sam Farr, that provides emergency relief to affected agricultural producers and fishing communities and funds emergency drought relief projects. The bill contains \$473 million for a wide array of programs, including water conservation, water quality, drinking water, fire risk reduction and assistance to migrant farmworkers.

Senator Feinstein recently introduced a revised version of the California Emergency Drought Relief Act (S. 2016) that she and Senator Boxer had introduced on February 11<sup>th</sup>. The new legislation (S. 2198) is similar in many respects to the original bill; it would direct federal agencies to manage water flows in the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta to benefit the Central Valley Project. However, S. 2198 does not include emergency funding for water conservation projects and community assistance programs that is included in S. 2016. S. 2198 also includes a provision designed to increase Colorado River system water in Lake Mead, which has the support of Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid of Nevada.