



AMERICAN METEOROLOGICAL SOCIETY

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The Honorable Vernon Ehlers
Chairman
Subcommittee on Environment, Technology, and Standards
Committee on Science
U.S. House of Representatives
2320 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Ehlers,

On behalf of the 12,000 members of the American Meteorological Society (AMS), I am writing in support of H.R. 5136, the "National Integrated Drought Information System Act of 2006."

As you may know, drought is a common feature of the American landscape and a phenomenon that quietly wreaks havoc in many portions of the globe. It is the unavoidable result of our climate's variability – variability that sometimes leaves areas far short of their average water supplies for months or years at a time. Unlike most natural disasters, drought is not a singular event, but is a cumulative effect over time of deficient precipitation and water supply that is followed by a trail of impacts that occur on varying time and space scales. Impacts range from loss of agricultural capital to wildfire and its associated impacts, from wind erosion and desertification to drinking water shortages. In the U.S., these impacts add up to an estimated annual cost and loss of \$6 to \$8 billion. (Economic Impacts of Drought and the Benefits of NOAA's Drought Forecasting Services, NOAA Magazine, September 17, 2002. Website: <http://www.magazine.noaa.gov/stories/mag51.htm>)

In light of drought impacts, the AMS recommends that appropriate institutions at the local, state, regional, federal, and international levels initiate or increase drought planning, preparedness, warning, and mitigation efforts. Efforts must be made to increase knowledge and information about climate variability, drought impacts, mitigation technologies, and societal response such as conservation and preparedness strategies. The proposed "National Integrated Drought Information System (NIDIS)" is an important step in implementing this recommendation.

First, the legislation states that the "NIDIS" is "a comprehensive system that collects and integrates information on the key indicators of drought." This system will increase the information available to decision makers to improve drought planning efforts. Second, the system includes a communication component to decision makers, and to the private and public sectors. Timely communication will allow them to better prepare their communities and customers, as well as warn their stakeholders of any current impacts.

Lastly, this system reflects the integration of data and input from local, regional, state and federal institutions, as well as from the academic and private sectors. Policies that promote the development and implementation of regionally appropriate drought mitigation today will help to reduce the costs of drought in the future.

For additional information, please refer to the American Meteorological Society policy statement on "Meteorological Drought," which can be found at: <http://www.ametsoc.org/policy/droughstatementfinal0304.html>.

In summary, we support H.R. 5136, the "National Integrated Drought Information System Act of 2006." We believe this is a positive step in a continuing process to minimize the impacts of drought. We thank you for introducing this bill, and we hope that Congress will continue to improve the safety of our nation from other weather and climate risks. If you have any questions or need further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,

Keith L. Seitter
Executive Director
American Meteorological Society