
Policy Statement

The Commission developed the following statement as the basis of national drought policy.

National drought policy should use the resources of the federal government to support but not supplant nor interfere with state, regional, local, tribal, and personal efforts to reduce drought impacts. The guiding principles of national drought policy should be:

- 1. Favor preparedness over insurance, insurance over relief, and incentives over regulation.**
- 2. Set research priorities based on the potential of the research results to reduce drought impacts.**
- 3. Coordinate the delivery of federal services through cooperation and collaboration with nonfederal entities.**

This policy requires a shift from the current emphasis on drought relief. It means we must adopt a forward-looking stance to reduce this nation's vulnerability to the impacts of drought. Preparedness—including drought planning, plan implementation, proactive mitigation, risk management, resource stewardship, consideration of environmental concerns, and public education—must become the cornerstone of national drought policy.

Our recommendations are based on our findings about the gaps among what is needed and what is provided by state, regional, local, tribal, and federal drought programs and laws. The findings stem from information presented by witnesses at our public hearings across the country and in written comments submitted independently, as well as from our own experience. Page 12 contains a list of appendices that summarize this information.

In keeping with the law that established the Commission, our recommendations relate primarily to the federal government's role in national drought policy. We view the federal

government as one of many partners needed to reduce the impacts of drought. Throughout our deliberations, we heard often and forcefully from nonfederal governments, citizen groups, and individuals that much of the work appropriately lies outside the federal government. As our recommendations attest, federal resources should be used to augment the vital drought-related programs of nonfederal entities.

Summary of Findings

Preparedness Is Key. The importance of preparedness was a central finding of the Senate Task Force on Funding Disaster Relief in 1995, among other studies. This basic concept was universally supported within this Commission and by the overwhelming majority of people who commented on the draft version of our report. It has been documented for years in drought studies, which point out that preparedness—including drought planning, plan implementation, proactive mitigation measures, and public education—may well reduce the social, economic, and environmental impacts of drought and the need for federal emergency relief expenditures in drought-stricken areas. Many studies also emphasize that preparedness may lessen conflicts over competition for water during drought.

Across the country, we learned that individuals, citizen organizations, local and state governments, tribes, and regional bodies are actively engaged in drought preparedness. In many cases, these activities take place within the broader framework of comprehensive water management planning. Such planning is usually conducted by entities that range from water districts and large multi-county urban areas to state water resources agencies and regional river basin compacts and commissions.

In response to individual challenges over the years, Congress has created federal programs to lessen the impacts of drought. Our assessment indicates that more than 80 federal programs—